

LIFE IMPARTING PUBLIC POLICIES AS PANACEA TO SOCIETAL CONFLICTS AND CLASS STRUGGLE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study is about life imparting public policy as a panacea to societal conflicts and class struggle, because human needs and wants are interminable within limited social resources, therefore society becomes a battle ground or contending place for survival of the fittest, war of all against all. This research employed archival/ historical method in carrying out the work, meaning, justification for public policy formulation, factors responsible for public policy summons/failures were thoroughly discussed after which recommendations were made some of which are need for change of societal value of putting pressure on public office holders in making request for what their office can not legally taken care of, promotion of positive values like integrity, transparency, accountability, justice, equity, promotion of synergy between and among government agencies to avoid conflict of interest etc. Finally, some terms explained.

Introduction

In public administration, formulation and implementation of right policies are prerequisite to development and antidote for underdevelopment and stagnancy. But what has been the major experience in these part of the world, Africa in general but Nigeria in particular, is policy summons which can simply be seen as getting it wrong or policy failure. Policy failure can significantly affect the public's trust in the political system, damage individual's careers and, in extreme cases, may even lead to injury or loss of life. While failure may be justified as being inevitable, it is important to prevent it or learn from mistakes. Yet, in the public policy realm, a lot of examples abound of cases where

important lessons remain unlearned, mistakes are swept under the carpet, responsibility is deflected and the causes of the original failure continue unchallenged. Often, the same or at least similar mistakes are repeated severally. Examples of these are different poverty alleviation programmes (PAPs), such as NAPEP (National Poverty Eradication Programme), SURE-P (Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme), SEAP (Self-Reliance Economic Advancement Programme), O-Yes (Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme, YES-O (Youth Empowerment Scheme of Oyo State) etc. which has all failed for lack of achieving their targets or expected objectives and purposes for which they were formed or established.

McConnell (2010) defines failure as the “lack of success”, or alternatively, as a “lack or deficiency of a desirable quality”. By this definition, 'failure' is a negative concept, defined largely by the absence of concepts with more positive associations like 'success' or 'quality'. As with general definitions of 'failure', definitions of 'policy failure' varies, and there have been considerable conceptual difficulties in providing a commonly accepted definition of 'policy failure'. In its simplest form, failure has been defined as the 'mirror image of success'. The difference between success and failure is, however, not always clear-cut. In many cases policies are not an outright success or outright failure, and may succeed in some respects while failing in others. There are many reasons why a policy may fail. A policy may be poorly designed and fail to tackle the problem it was intended to solve or largely be symbolic (Newig, 2007). Alternatively, a well-designed policy may unexpectedly fail due to unforeseen circumstances or simply not have the effect intended.

In an attempt to overcome some of the conceptual difficulties, McConnell (2010) develops a working definition of 'failure', arguing that a policy fails, even if it is successful in some minimal respects, if it does not fundamentally achieve the goals that proponents set out to achieve, and opposition is great and/or support is virtually non-existent. Despite the volume of literature on policy success and failure, much of it has so far focused on conceptualizations of different types of failure, with considerably less attention for the sources of the problems leading to recurrent failures. In addition, it is argued

that a great deal of the research only examines the causes and characteristics of failed policies in individual cases, rather than looking at the broader political or socio-economic environment in which these policies are embedded, thus limiting our ability to learn from past mistakes. Therefore, the goal of this special issue is to open our eyes to the importance of formulating and implementing right policies that will impart life of the masses as a panacea to societal conflicts and class struggle. (Howlett, Ramesh & Wu, 2015).

Conceptual Frame Work

Public policy is used to describe a unit of study in broad field of the social sciences and, at the same time, an important aspect of governance. As an area of study in political science, for instance, public policy is newer than such traditional sub-units as political theory, political economy, international relations and public administration. As a practice, on the other hand, public policy is a vital instrument of governance. Policy, like several others in the humanities and social sciences, do not have a universally acceptable definition. The term according to Jillian, *Eileen, Ruth & Cheryl* (2014) is ambiguous. Based on this premise they argued that it would be misleading to specify one definition of policy {at any particular time}. But, the context in which the term is used should indicate the intended meaning. They however refer to public policy as a proposal, an on-going programme, the goals of a programme, major decisions, or refusal to make certain decisions. In a similar vein, Bardach, (2011) argued that public policies are shaped {or made} when government or comparable

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authorities decide whether or not to alter aspects of community life.

Fischer, Frank, Miller, Gerald, Sidney and Mara (2006) define public policies as the tools with which the state elite, more conventionally referred to as policy makers, seek to mould or shape the lives of their people or society towards a desired end. It is also useful to borrow from the perspective explanation by Spicker, (2006) on the relationships between politics and policy. The concern of politics, according to Easton is the authoritative allocation of values. This explanation is quite apt and explicit. Values are the things that people desire and pursue with a fair amount of fervor. They are as many as there are different individuals and interests. Incidentally, the resources needed for these human wants and values are often scarce. Allocation of resources, therefore, becomes an imperative functions of politics. In order to prevent a free for all or a situation where might is right, the function of allocations is reserved for what is called authority, which in most cases, is the government or state. As authorities seek to allocate values, they make judgmental decisions which are favourable to some and unfavourable to others (Sambo, 2005). The cumulative decisions of these authorities are what is generally referred to as public policies. In other words, public policy is partly the output of the political process of value allocation.

For a better understanding of the concept of public policy, some key elements which, according to Morestin and Castonguay (2013) distinguish public policy from other types of policies are as follows:

- Public policy is purposive or goal-

oriented action rather than random or chance behaviour.

- Public policy consists of courses or patterns of action by government officials.
- Public policy is what governments actually do, not what they intend to do or say they are going to do
- Public policy involves some form of overt government action to affect a particular problem; it also involves a decision by government officials not to take action, to do nothing, on some matter on which governmental involvement is sought.

Public policy is based on law and is authoritative. In other words, public policy has an authoritative, potentially legal coercive quality that the policies of private organizations do not have.

Reasons for Public Policies

Fundamentally, according to Kirst-Ashman and Karen (2016), government formulates public policy for the following major reasons.

Governments formulate policy in order to accelerate economic development. In line with its focus on the sustenance and continuation of public administration, the public policy process address such issues as education, health, transportation, communication and others that catalyze economic development.

Government formulates policies in other to make for the continuity of public administration. In fact, the essential administrative functions such as planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting can only continue to be relevant if government formulates

public policies. The policy process ensures that as a government goes, and another comes, there are policy instruments for the continuity of public administration.

In view of the above, government's policies could be said to be formulated in order to make administration easy.

Government formulates policies in order to ensure the continuity of human existence. In a way, once human problems and challenges are addressed, the perpetuity of human existence seems guaranteed.

Policy making is a problem-solving exercise. This means that the government formulate policies in order to provide solutions to problems and challenges that confront the society. Although there is a difference between public interest and what is of government interest, any action taken to address either or both is deemed to be public policy making.

Factors for Policy Failure/Summersault

According to Acheson (2006), the following factors are responsible for policy summersault in an institution or country.

Personalization of public offices and their functions: Rather than allowing public offices and institutions to function on the rules and regulations that establish them, public officials who are in charge of the policy process often rely on their own whims that are largely particularistic.

Another factor is that of clientele politics, cronyism and nepotism. Certainly, an efficient and effective public policy process cannot operate in a system that is overwhelmed by such characteristics of political corruption.

Colonial legacy and artificial beginning of countries. What we mean here

is that most of the countries that were ruled by colonial powers, for example Nigeria and several others did not voluntarily approve the exercises that led to their birth. In the case of Nigeria for instance, the 1914 amalgamation of diverse ethnic nationalities was regarded as a mistake by many people. This was because such a creation like Nigeria was quite unthinkable but for the superior fire power and diplomacy of the colonial authorities. It was therefore, not surprising that the Nigerian state was seen and treated like an alien structure, which also lacked any form of legitimate ideal. Thus, the offices, institutions and policies of the colonially contrived Nigerian state and its post-independence successor are exploited by its own officials who see themselves first as members of some ethnic or other interest groups. (Dye & Thomas, 2007). Thus, it is not surprising that majority of the citizens in the former colonies and other parts of the less developed world still appear to be concerned with the successful formulation and implementation of public policies in their countries.

The dearth of skilled personnel is another obstacle to the public policy process especially in the less developed states. The process of identifying socio-economic and political problems in their proper perspectives require skill and expertise in various aspects of human endeavors, which include medicine, form education, engineering, transportation, communication and other areas of specialization. Most of these are not usually available in the required numbers in many parts of the less developed world. The net effect of this is that policies in these places, are often predicated on poor planning and faulty implementation.

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Another indispensable factor always being encountered in the policy process is political instability. Frequent change of government in many parts of the third world countries, especially military rule in Africa, Latin America, Asia and others contributed to discontinuity of public policies as every new regime came up with its own plan and agenda.

Public institutions or ministries that are weakened by the personal rule of their senior officials cannot implement policies that should manifest in the provision of social services like qualitative education, health shelter and other essential services. The impact of such services, especially in the developed world where they are adequately provided, is an essential part of the feedback and inputs for new policies.

Conflicts of interest between policy makers and those in charge of its implementation. This so called interest of conflicts are often called intra-governmental conflicts, can be found both in civilian administrations and military regimes in Nigeria. However, it is more profound under the former.

Conclusion

This paper submits that some formulated policies in Nigeria have failed due to inability to achieve their targets or expected objectives and purposes for which they were formed or established because most of the policies are not directed at solving people's and societal problems practically and sincerely but an avenue of enriching people at the helms of affairs. Therefore, at the implementation stage, policies are not sincerely implemented to achieve the stated objectives, thereby

creating wide gap between the rich and the poor resulting in societal conflicts /class struggle between and among the masses.

Recommendations

With a view to making life more meaningful for the citizenry and to end the societal conflicts among people of various or different strata (rich, poor, vulnerable) most especially in Nigeria through formulation of policies, the following recommendations are made:

Public office holders should desist from personalizing the power and functions of the office they are holding against the people and, remember that the offices are held in trust for the masses to use the paraphernalia of those offices to better the life of the masses and close the gap between the few rich and numerous poor masses in order to promote peaceful co-existence between and among people.

Campaign of discrimination against anybody or citizens should be jettisoned. This can only be achieved when leaders lead by example, accommodate everybody and see themselves as a father of all.

Everybody is believed to be the architect of his/her own destiny, therefore, being colonized should not be an attributing factor for policy failure and poor living condition of the masses because considering the age of Nigeria since independence a business minded nation under a responsible leaders and stake holders suppose to have use what she has to get what she wanted, but reverse is the case in Nigeria because of the fact leaders and stake holders lack initiative, myopic in reasoning and like to cast blame on past happenings. Therefore leaders are advised to be focused, initiative

and find a means of detaching the country's development from dependency the so called developed countries that are capitalist and exploitative in nature and go back to our forefathers ideology that are communitarian in nature.

In-service training should be continuous and regular in order to overcome the problem of paucity of qualified personnel in formulation and implementation of public policies in order to achieve the desired goal of improving and bettering the live of the people.

Spirited efforts should be made in promoting political stability because it is an indisputable fact that no development can take place in an atmosphere of chaos and crises and no policy however good can achieve its stated goals and objectives in an atmosphere full political upheavals.

It is imperative to strengthen the Public institutions or ministries that are weakened by the personal rule of their senior

officials in order to be able to implement policies that should manifest in the provision of social services like qualitative education, health shelter and other essential services which do serve as feedback and inputs for new policies most especially in the developed democracies.

Various agencies as well as arms of government need to work together so as to avoid conflicts of interest or working at cross purposes between and among policy makers and those in charge of its implementation, so that stated/expected goals and objectives will be fully achieved.

Finally, all these life imparting policies such as NAPEP, SURE-P, SEAP, O-Yes, YES-O etc. has to be implemented with sincerity of purpose of poverty eradication by making life better for the masses most especially the poor majority, in order to avoid and avert societal conflicts and class struggle between the rich and the poor ones.

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