

OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICIES IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines obstacles to effective implementation of policies in the local government system of Nigeria, using the secondary method of data collection, which is based on the use of textbooks, academic journals, government documents, internet sources, conferences papers, and so on. Findings from the study reveal several obstacles bedeviling the effective implementation of policies in the local government system of Nigeria, which include ambiguous goals; poor ambitious nature of some local government policies; undue political interference; paucity of data and reliable statistics; culture and values of most policies; change in government; lack of mass commitment; corruption, among others. In addition, several recommendations were advanced in order to address the identified obstacles to effective policy implementation at the local government level. These are ensuring that the policies formulated at the local government levels are based on statistical fact, realistic and are characterized with clarity of goals; creating opportunity for citizens' participation in order to ensure that the local government policies are people-oriented and are peculiar to resolving the actual problems of the people; the completion of all relevant and pragmatic ongoing programmes and projects of successive administrations before the commencement of new projects; and the replacement of the various state independent electoral commissions with Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the agency to be responsible for the conduct and management of local governments elections.

Keywords: obstacles, policies, effective implementation, local government System, Nigeria.

Introduction

Local government is the level of government established to provide basic needs of life to the grass root dwellers in Nigeria. Its functions are of vital necessity to the achievement of the nation's sustainable development. However, much have not been achieved by this level of government owing to the lack of capacity to effectively implement the various policies that have been formulated by government at all levels towards alleviating the plight of the inhabitants at this level of government. It is in this regard that Obodoechi (2009), cited in Obona, (2016) observed that public policies are effectively formulated in Nigeria, but the problems of their optimal performance lies with poor policies implementation. In a similar vein, Ozor (2004) noted that the ineffective implementation of public policies translate to failure to achieve the societal goals which those public policies were designed to achieve. Agbazuere (2020) opined that the success of any organization, whether public, private or not-for-profit making organizations is dependent on the effective policy formulation and implementation capacity of such organizations geared towards the betterment of the citizenry. Furthermore, Osawe (2015), cited in Odeh & Sodje, (2023, p. 94) observed that "the state of a nation (local government) whether economically, politically or socially is reflected in its public service, and nations cannot advance beyond the developmental state of their public service. Studies have shown that sustainable development cannot be achieved by nations that do not have a well-organized public service to execute public policies".

Ikelegbe (2006) viewed public policy as "a course of action and a programme of actions which is chosen from among several alternatives by certain actors in response to certain problems." Similarly, Ikelegbe (1994, cited in Agbazuere, 2020, p. 133) observed that public policy "is a course setting action which provides the direction, the guide and the way to the achievement of certain goals. It provides the frame within which present and future actions are taken". Policy execution has been perceived by Erinue (2009, cited in Agbazuere, 2020, p. 133) as "the most important stage in public policy making process. It is at this point that policy either fails or succeeds. It is the process of converting human and material inputs, including informational, technical, human, demand and supports into outputs in the form of goods and services." In other words, "the implementation process consists of a series of governmental decisions and actions that attempt to turn already determined mandates into reality (Agbazuere, 2020, p. 133).

Public policies are designed to address social problems that emanate from the social environment. It is centered on both the present and future problems, and it relies on the achievement of stated goals of public sector organizations through legitimate means and laid down procedures, such goals include the provision of social services to the citizenry by public agencies. In Third World countries like Nigeria, public policies play paramount roles in the achievement of developmental strides. However, the Nigerian case reflects an effective policy formulation, but a defective policy implementation, a trend that has bedeviled effective and efficient governance and development of the country (Arowolo&Egugbo, 2010). Nigeria has witnessed the politicization of policy formulation and implementation which cut across several governmental levels which deteriorated in effectiveness even with the enthronement of democratic governance (Agbazuere, 2020).In addition to the roles of political parties in policy formulation, the citizenry, also, play tremendous roles in policy formulation, a process that usually bestows legitimacy on public policy. It has been observed in recent times that a gap exists between policy formulators in the local government of Nigeria and the people

whom the policy was designed to meet their demands and interests. This has often been attributed to some of the reasons for failure of local governments' policies (Agbazuere, 2020). This trend has adversely affected the socio-economic wellbeing of the citizens residing in various local governments in the country.

The objective of this study is to examine the various obstacles to effective implementation of policies in the Nigerian Local Government systems through adoption of the secondary methods of data collection, which is based on the use of textbooks, academic journals, government documents, internet sources, conferences papers, and so on. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, the work is divided into various parts in order to facilitate in depth analysis and examination of the issue under investigation. The various sections of the work are the introduction which previews the entire work. This was followed by the theoretical framework of the study, which is centered on the systems theory, and a section titled public policy making and execution in Nigeria. Others include factors militating against effective implementation of public policies in the local government system of Nigeria, conclusion section and recommendations.

Theoretical Frame Work

The Systems Theory

The systems theory was adopted in this study. David Easton introduced the systems theory into the field of political science. The theory views organization as a complex system with subunits that interact with one another. These subunits in the context of the local government system are the various departments that make up a local government. The subunit interrelates in a systematic and orderly manner to achieve the goals of the organizational entity. The theory further argues that organizations apart from interacting among its component units also interact with their external environment in order to ensure a balanced interaction between it and the environment, alongside its components. Examples of the external environment of organizations are the social, political, geographical, economic, cultural, and so on. The inability of an organization to harmonize interactions within and without could jeopardize the attainment of its set goals (Mustapha & Odeh, 2019). Therefore, the effective functioning of organizations is dependent on the internal stability and harmonious interactions and interrelationships of its component units, as well as the consideration of its external environments with regards to ensuring the achievement of what seems like a homeostatic balance between them.

The application of the systems theory to this study is based on the fact that the local government system in Nigeria exist to achieve the realization of the socio-economic and infrastructural development of the grass root dwellers in the country, through the effective and efficient formulation and implementation of public policies in the context of collaborative interactions and interrelationships among the various local government departments and between it and its external environment, such as the state and federal levels of governments, as well as other cultural, economic, and socio-political variables in its environments in line with the Easton systems' theory.

Public Policy Making and Execution in Nigeria

Several actors in the policy making process have been identified by Ikelegbe (1996) into governmental and non-governmental actors. He identified the governmental actors as the

legislature, executive, judiciary, and the bureaucracy. While the non-governmental actors refer to the political parties, pressure/interest groups, mass media, the citizenry, and other related entities. Since the attainment of Nigeria's independence in 1960, the country has never been bereft of the capacity to formulate public policy. What she lacks in the policy process is the requisite political will to implement the various formulated policies. This could partly be attributed to the discontinuity in policy framework by every successive regime that would not want to implement the public policies of his predecessor, but would rather prefer a new policy of his own which would earn him praise and prestige at the moment (Agbazuere, 2020). The failure of public policy has also been attributed to the lack of participation of the citizenry in policy process; a trend which has translated to several policy summersaults at all levels of governments and overall truncation of effective public service deliver to the people (Ezeani, 2006).

In the light of the above, Eleagu (2019) stated that between 1976 and 2001, the Federal Government of Nigeria formulated no less than seven different policies to address virtually the same developmental problem. These policies were identified by Okoye and Onyeukwu (2007, cited in Eleagu, 2019) as: Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) launched in 1976; Free and Compulsory Primary Education (PCPE) in 1977; Green Revolution in 1980; the People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN); Community Development Bank (CDB). Others include the Nigeria Agricultural Co-operative and Rural Development Bank; Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP); They attributed the failure of these programmes to all forms of corruption, lack of continuity, lack of effective implementation, inadequate monitoring and evaluation.

Public policy process involves several stages, such as problem identification and agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation (Ikelegbe, 2006; Ogbeide, 2007). Problem identification is the stage at which a public problem is identified for consideration by policy makers. A public problem is that problem with adverse consequences that affects large population of the people, it is a problem with broad consequences, as opposed to a private problem which affect an individual or few individuals, like few families, and so on. A public problem that is brought before the governmental policy makers, and which is receiving their attention is said to be on the agenda stage. While the decisions on which option should be preferred to solve the identified problem is referred to as policy formulation stage. This is followed by policy adoption, which connotes the general acceptance of a preferred policy option for addressing the identified challenges. Policy implementation refers to the execution of the selected policy option in order to bring to fruition the formulated policy. Thereafter, evaluation of the implemented policy is carried out to test the impact and performance of the implemented policy against the earlier stated goals and objectives of the policy. The knowledge of the overall success or failure of the policy is achieved through the process of evaluation.

Factors Militating Against Effective Implementation of Public Policies in The Local Government System Of Nigeria

Several factors militating against effective implementation in the local government system in particular and Nigeria in general has been identified by Agbazuere (2020, p. 137). These are political rascality, ethnicity, and lack of need assessments, corruption, religion, and too many points of agenda, inability to properly identify problems, lack of political will, inadequate

resources, white elephant or unrealistic policy goals. Others are the lack of clarity in policy definition, weak democratic values and institutions, lack of good governance, lack of popular commitment, lack of input from the people, paucity of data, policy instability, and lack of toughness in policy execution. In a similar development, Samson and Stanley (2014) have also identified several challenges of public policy failure in Nigeria. These include underdevelopment; low level of patriotism by the citizens; poor human capital development; wastage of valuable resources, and so on.

Local governments are saddled with the responsibility of efficient and effective formulation and implementation of public policies. However, the case of the Third World countries, like Nigeria is different, where local governments have been characterized by ineffective and inefficient execution of public policies (Obona, 2016), thereby leading to an acute state of underdevelopment and state failure. Some scholars have adjudged the policies implementation of local governments in Nigeria and the Nigerian state in general to be far less than the requisite global best practices due to factors, such as ambiguous goals; poor ambitious nature of some local government policies; undue political interference; paucity of data and reliable statistics; culture and values of most policies; change in government; lack of mass commitment; and corruption (Okoli & Onah, 2002; Makinde, 2005; Nweke, 2006, cited in Obona, 2016; Effiong, 2013). Ambitious goals refer to the inability to clearly and lucidly state policy goals in order to ensure its clarity and identify its specific objective, an attribute that usually facilitate effective implementation. The absence of such specificity of public policy goals poses challenges to effective and efficient execution of policies towards the achievement of sustainable development at the grass root levels. Poor ambitious nature of some local government policies on the other hand, occur where political officials in an attempt to impress the electorates and to boost their ego as best performing political executives; and also, in a bid to increase their chances of re-election would embark on some gigantic projects that are not feasible both economically and politically, and in terms of implementation. Eventually, this would culminate in what have been popularly referred to in Nigeria as “white elephant projects”. Such projects often lead to colossal waste of human and material resources. And this has been the bane of achievement of developmental strides at the grassroots level of the country, a trend that has worsened the poverty level of the rural dwellers and those dwelling in urban slums. This phenomenon is evidenced in the plethora of abandoned local government projects across the nook and crannies of Nigeria.

Another obstacle to effective policy formulation at the local government level is undue political interference. The legislature and other political executives are saddled with the core mandate of policy formulation, while the bureaucracy due to its technical expertise and high level of professionalism of its officials is charged with the responsibility of the execution of the formulated policies. But the reverse is the case in the case of the Nigerian Local Government system, where the political executives meddled in the bureaucratic processes of policy execution for the achievement of their selfish interests. This interference has been a major factor bedeviling effective implementation policies in the local government system, as the bureaucrats who of course are answerable to the political executives are not giving free hands by their political bosses to execute local government policies in line with their expertise and professionalism. Another major obstacle to effective implementation of polices in the local government system of Nigeria is paucity of data and reliable statistics. At the local government levels in Nigeria, structures and departments saddled with the collection of data

and other reliable statistics abound, but they hardly discharge this responsibility optimally, thereby leading to the dearth of data and other statistical instruments required for informed policy formulation. This trend of lack of statistical based and public policy translate to poor and haphazard implementation of such public policy, and the subsequent non-achievement of the developmental goals of the local government. The foregoing has been a major bane of the realization of the noble goals of the local government system in Nigeria as enunciated in the Nigerian Local Government Guidelines of 1976, and other extant documents bordering on the functions of the local governments in the country.

In addition, culture and values of most policies refer to the symbolic and abstract nature of some public policies formulated at the local government levels. These policies have no direct impacts on the substantial needs of the people. Such policies are ceremonial in nature which are devoid of substantive elements that could alleviate the plight of the masses, such involved the polices of the government geared towards funding pilgrims to visits various Holy Lands across the globe , and government sponsorships of events like Beauty Pageant, others are the sponsorship of activates associated with New Yam festivals and other related symbolic events, which are at variance with the enhancement of socio-economic development of the rural populace.

Changes in government have been recognized as a real obstacle to effective implementation of policies at the local government levels. The occurrence of this situation is based on the fact that most head of local governments at the commencement of their administration do not like the idea of building on the previous achievements of their predecessors in the spirit of continuity, but would rather due to matter of prestige and drive for personal achievement , as well as the tendencies to impress the electorates would embark on new projects that carries their names as the initiator of the projects, and abandoning the ongoing projects started by previous administrations without any consideration of the sunk cost of those abandoned projects. This competitive spirit of achievement measured by public projects initiated rather than projects effectively completed have marred the effective policy implementation in the local government system of Nigeria. Other obstacles to effective policy implementation at the local government levels include lack of mass commitment. This involves the initiation, formulation and implementation without any meaningful involvement of the beneficiaries of the policies and projects, this occurrence has often led to public policy failure in Nigeria (Ajakaiye, 2003; Onokerhoaye, 2007). This phenomenon has undermined the achievement of development at the local government areas through effective policy implementation. This occurrence is due to the peculiarities of various local environments which have defiled holistic and nationalistic approaches to public policy formulation and implementation at this level of government. So, these peculiarities in local environment cannot be understood unless there is the involvement of local inhabitants at every stage of the policy process.

Furthermore, corruption is also a major bane of effective policy implementation at the local government levels of Nigeria. Corruption, according to Edoh (2003) is the abuse of official privilege for personal aggrandizement. Corruption has in no small measure adversely eroded the capacity of public policy implementation of the local governments in Nigeria. As the funds that would have been available for policy implementation and projects execution would be embezzled by corrupt local government officials, thereby leading to paucity of funds for projects establishment and construction. Some polices where implemented have their cost of

implantation inflated beyond the actual costs simply for the pecuniary gains of the concerned officials. There have been cases where huge amount of public fund was disbursed for implementation of non-existing projects. It is in this regard that Chimobi (2010) lamented that corruption has eaten too deep into the fabrics of the economy and politics of Nigeria to the extent of its acceptance by the majority of the people, a situation which has almost assumed a cultural dimension in the country.

“Corruption has diminished public revenues and only a tiny percentage of internally generated revenues can be recovered for expenditure on public goods and services...Corruption and breach of accountability have wasted public resources that would have been available for socio-economic development” (Ikelegbe, 2016, cited in Odeh & Odigie, p. 19). In a nutshell, corruption has adversely affected the socio-economic development of rural dwellers and frustrates the drive towards the achievement of sustainable development of Nigeria. It also contributes to the worsened developmental indices of Nigeria revealed by various national and global developmental agencies, which have been consistently ranking Nigeria very low in virtually all developmental indices, such as education, measured by level of literacy, healthcare, longevity, ease of doing business, environment and sanitation, rate of unemployment, adherence to rule of law, good governance, and so on.

Obona (2016, p. 137), while attributing the failure of public policy implementation in Nigeria to the holistic imitation of imported policies and programmes from abroad and multilateral organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) irrespective of their adaptability and compatibility with the local environment observed that “public policies in Nigeria are interfered by external influence; making it difficult to realize their goals, as policies are formulated based on external directives which may not work in the Nigerian environment. These forces ignore the socio-cultural background of development in introducing policy reforms that run contrary to the people’s bases of existence”.

Several measures have been advocated by Agbazure (2020, Pp. 138-139) aimed at enhancing public policy implementation at the local government system of Nigeria. These among others include targeting the project beneficiaries; interaction and communication between government and other organizations; embarking on frequent project monitoring and evaluation; supply and making provision of adequate resources; ensuring effective communication between beneficiaries and policy officials; encouraging the culture of programmes and projects continuity and sustenance; and substantial effort and continuity of efforts.

Conclusion

The local government system of Nigeria is an important level of government due to its nearness to the rural populace who comprises over 70 percent of the entire residents of Nigeria. So, the enhancement of its service delivery capacity becomes necessary sequel to the large numbers of people it is established to cater for. However, the local government system in the country have been founded to be incapable of discharging its statutory functions effectively thereby leading to the misery and poor socio-economic wellbeing of the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of its social services. Its lack of effective service delivery and optimal performance has further been traced to inadequate and ineffective execution of its formulated policies owing to several obstacles that have been identified in this

study. These obstacles have been adumbrated as ambiguous goals; poor ambitious nature of some local government policies; undue political interference; paucity of data and reliable statistics; culture and values of most policies; change in government; lack of mass commitment; and corruption.

In the light of the foregoing, several recommendations were advanced in the study in a bid to proffer solution to the various challenges of effective implementation of local government policies in Nigeria. These are ensuring that the policies formulated at the local government levels are based on statistical fact, realistic and are characterized with clarity of goals; creating opportunity for citizens' participation in order to ensure that the local government policies are people-oriented and are peculiar to resolving the actual problems of the people; the completion of all relevant and pragmatic ongoing programmes and projects of successive administrations before the commencement of new projects; and the replacement of the various state independent electoral commissions with Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) as the agency to be responsible for the conduct and management of local governments elections.

Recommendations

Several recommendations have been advanced in this study as panacea to the identified obstacles to effective implementation of polices in the local government system of Nigeria. These have been presented below:

- The planning, research and statistics unit of the local government system of Nigeria should be well equipped with the requisite manpower and state-of –the-art facilities, and should be adequately funded in order to ensure that policies formulated at the local government levels are based on statistical fact, realistic and are characterized with clarity of goals, as well as ensuring specificity of objectives.
- The policy process of the local government should create room for citizens' participation in order to ensure that the local government policies are people-oriented and are peculiar to resolving the actual problems of the people.
- The political executives at the local government levels should be sensitized through agencies, such as the National Orientation Agency (NOA), and the Committees of the Local Government in the respective state legislatures on the need to eschew the culture of not continuing the projects and programmes of their predecessors owing to prestige and desire for praise and popularity that usually accompany self-initiated programmes and projects, and they should be educated on the fact that government is hinged on continuity. So, they should be advised to take it as a point of duty to first complete all relevant and pragmatic ongoing programmes and projects of their predecessors before embarking on their own in line with need assessment of the local government area. This would address the plethora of abandoned projects that abound in local government areas occasioned by the lack of continuity of projects of successive administrations.
- There should be the design of adequate electoral machinery in order to ensure that only credible persons are elected as local officials. It is in this regard that we advocate the proscription of State Independent Electoral Commissions, and transfer the conduct

and management of local government elections to the Independent National Electoral Commission. This would ensure that the idea of state governors using the former as instruments of appointing their cronies and stooges to top position of local governance is put to an end. And this measure would guarantee and enduring democratic governance at the local government level, which would subsequently translate to socio-economic and infrastructural development of the areas.

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