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THE ROLE OF POLICY MAKERS IN ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF CITIZENS IN THE PROCESS OF GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

The role of policy makers is very key to proper governance. so also, is the active participation of its citizens in governance. After all, Abraham Lincoln has defined Democracy as the government of the people for the people and by the people. This suggests that governance is the responsibility of the citizens and leaders are only but guides to fulfil the people's wishes. Policy makers have the responsibility of consulting their wards to obtain their views on certain projects before they carry them out. This paper has used secondary sources of data by reviewing literatures related to the field of research. It adopted the Elite theory as the bases for its theoretical framework. It observed that citizens don't fully participate in the process of governance in Nigeria as policy makers don't carry out consultations and in most cases are very far away from the people. Take for instance a member of the National Assembly that comes from Maiduguri, the distance between Abuja to his/her place in the North East will not allow him frequent time with the people of the community. The paper recommends that policy makers should be more conscious of policies that express the wishes of the people through first hand constant and consistent consultations.

Keywords: Policy Makers, Active Participation, Citizens, Process, Governance

Introduction

Public policies are government policies or an embodiment of official pronouncements on what the government would want to do or to be done on behalf of the citizenry in other to address society problems at all levels of government (federal, state and local government). (Birkland, 2015) sees public policy as a statement by government at whatever level of what it intends to do about a public problem. Public policies are therefore used to address social problems in education, health, road, infrastructure and housing. Other social problems which can be addressed by public policy includes; insurgency, insecurity, rural-urban migration, poverty and even unemployment. Such social problems cannot be addressed without an active government policy. Hence, a good government cannot seem to be active in addressing social problems without articulating public policy in dealing with issues affecting the society.

Over the years, Nigerian Governments has invested huge funds, of about an average of N220billion annually translating to an average of N73.3billion per annum (Nwosu and Okafor, 2017) to develop public policies to address public issues, such as, improving the quality of life, provision of affordable credit for medium, small and micro enterprises, reduction of inequality and wide disparities as well as increasing access to education and health services among others. Generally, the expected outcome of the public policies is to, in the long-run, make positive changes on identified public problems. Such changes could either be to eliminate problems, or to manage it or to restructure its appearance to a more desirable one.

Definition and Meaning of Public Policy

The study of public policy, including the methods of policy analysis, has been among the most rapidly developing fields in the social sciences over the past several decades. Policy analysis emerged to both better understand the policymaking process and to supply policy decision makers with reliable policy relevant knowledge about pressing economic and social problems. In order to understand public policy, it is important to review some of its definitions.

> Policies are not limited to government activities, as human conduct is generally governed by what is sometimes loosely referred to as “policy”. Individuals, families, clubs, cultural groups, communities, small as well as large business organizations and governments enunciate policies. (Ikeanyibe, 2013)

The above quotation presupposes the fact that policy is a pervasive term that is both consciously or unconsciously utilized on daily basis. It is on this premises that Kirst-Ashman (2007) defines policy as rules that govern people's lives and dictate expectations for behaviors. Ikelegbe (2005) however, proceeded to define a policy as "simply actions taken or to be taken or not to be taken by government or private organizations". It is according to him, a statement of what an organization wants to do, what it is not doing, what is doing and what would be done. The definition major emphases are: intentions/plans, actions, non-actions and prohibitions. It can also be regarded as general rules, regulations, guiding practices or actions in a particular activity or problem area. It specifies the line of action or proposed line of action in relation to certain activity area. (Ikeanyibe, 2013)

Presthus (1975) defined policy as a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and usually determine present and future actions. It is an integrated programme of actions which an actor (or group of actors) is accustomed to or intends to undertake in response to given problems or situation with which he is confronted. From the above, one cannot but agree that policy is a common term and its making and implementation is equally general. Its utilization and practices is found with individual, private and governmental organization. It can simply be put as framework or guidelines within which actions and inactions are involved towards their accomplishment. Thus, public policy is wider in scope that sets the paradigm, and the guideline within which economic, social, political and administrative decisions important to individuals, groups and corporate organizations within the society are made. Public policy according to Shaw & Eichbaum (2011) is a complex phenomenon and settling on a single definition limits the need to make sense of such complexity and to build a richer understanding of the multi-faceted nature of policy.

Although many scholars have defined public policy, Dlakwa (2008) argue that public policy can be seen in the following ways:

I. **Policy as a Statement of Intention:** Seen from this perspective public policy is regarded as an embodiment of official pronouncements on what governments would want to pursue. It consists of series of guidelines for action by government or its designated agent. Viewed from this angle one can regard public policy as all the documented intentions of a government, such as executive orders, Acts of Parliament, development plans and other official pronouncements that might have legal backing.

II. **Policy as a set of Governmental Activities:** From a descriptive perspective, public policy is defined as a dynamic process that is characterized by a course or pattern of activities aimed at achieving predetermined objectives. Public

policy thus consists of the -constellations of activities carried out by governmental agencies, or their representatives, with the sole purpose of achieving stated objectives. From this perspective, public policy refers to all authorized means devised by government in order to achieve its stated goals and objectives. This can take the form of rendering social services or solving societal problems by the governmental agency or ministerial department.

III. **Policy as Decision-making or Choice:** Goals and objectives are not normally found in cut and dried or ready-made form in any community no matter how small the community might be. They have to be conscientiously identified, defined, re-defined and articulated by the government and its citizenry. Therefore, any government wishing to succeed in its official endeavor has to make a concerted effort at determining the desirable objectives to pursue for its people. This entails the taking of specific actions "to set goals, develop plans, implement and evaluate programmes**"** It is in this light that Dye (1980) considers as public policy as anything that governments choose to do or not to do.

Having seen the different views and perspective of different scholars on public policy, no matter from which perspective one views public policy one would still imply one or more of the following characteristics as stated by Ikeanyibe (2013)

a. Public policy originates from the government.
b. It is meant to resolve social problems requiring collective action such as in the economy, education, health, defense, foreign affairs, social welfare, transportation and housing.
c. It can be positive, that is, it can involve some form of government action to tackle a particular problem or it can be negative, that is, not taking any action or to do nothing concerning an issue on which government intervention is sought.
d. It usually requires government enactment, that is, official pronouncement regarding the intention of government through laws, executive orders, and judicial decision.

Because of the legislative/authoritative status, public policies usually entail the use of state resources including the state coercive agencies to achieve policy goals.

The argument is that, public policy has to do with the fact that, it is a product of government process and activities; it affects a large spectrum of issues and sectors of the society which government have something to do. This includes the economy, housing, defense, transportation, health care, education, etc. and expression of public policy embraces, laws, judicial decisions, executive orders and rules government budgets, organizational directives or any rule of conduct behind which stands the

enforcing power of the principal system. Public policies are in essence designed to resolve social problems particularly those considered to require public or collective action.

Theoretical Framework

While there are several theories in the study and analysis of public policies, this research relies on the **Elite theory** of public policy for its analysis and discussion. Dye (1978), is one of the prominent contributors to the elite theory. The theory was developed as an alternative paradigm to pluralism. In other words, the elite theory rejects the pluralist view concerning the distribution of political powers in the hands of minority groups. "Elitism is therefore, a pattern of decision making characterized by limited mass participation in community issues and their domination by small groups of specialized or general leaders" (Egonmwan 1991). The key tenet of the theory is that the elite who are few in the society share common values, have more resources via power, education, wealth etc, and hold leading and strategic positions in the society while the masses are atomized, not recognized for concert action, lack of resources and are politically incompetent (Ikeanyibe, 2013). It is the elite who are few that dominate the policy process and shape public policy. Ujo (1994) stated that, the elite are not necessarily those in government but are found in all sectors of the society and within the political, military, economic, traditional, and even religious circle acting from the scene, tele-guiding and manipulating political power and policies. The source of the elite powers includes access to formal political office, wealth, technical expertise, knowledge etc. Thus, public policies reflect the values and preferences of the elite rather than the demand of the masses.The theory presumes that the elite consensus is based on class interest but admits some degree of paternalism and altruism to the masses for the purpose of maintaining the status quo (Ikeanyibe, 2013). In other word the elite theory does not entirely disagree with the fact that public policies can be to attenuate to the demands of the mass. Thus Ujo (1994) stated that, public policies in most societies reflect and continue to reflect the values and preferences of the elite. Because the elite have common interest in the preservation of the status quo in the society, policies are bound to be conservative, non-innovative and marginal rather than those with bold and high change potentials. Policies might sometimes be in the masses interests even though at the long term interest may be that of the elites, but this happens as concessions to or reactions to the threats of the status quo by the masses.

The relevance of the theory to this study rests in several positions. First, public policy can be regarded as reflecting the values and preferences of governing elite. Every public policy in Nigeria are determined and pursued by the ruling elites i.e. President,

Vice President, Ministers, Legislatives, Governor, the Deputy-Governor, the Commissioners, Special Advisers, Personal Assistants, Members of the State House of Assembly and Permanent Secretaries in various Ministries. Secondly, the policy decisions represent the preferences of the elites, thus policies flow downward from the elite to the masses. Lastly, policies are made to reflect the elite value and they defend and sustained their status quo so as to protect and preserve their undue advantages over the masses, they perpetually kick people out of power and benefit, and sometimes provide minimal changes to avoid situations that would overheat the masses and cause them to revolt.

The Role of Policy Makers in active Participation of Citizens in Governance

Given the ample limitations to public policy implementation, the question of sustainable national development looks quite not obvious. National development been multi-faceted phenomena, that is concerned with total transformation of the political economic, social and cultural aspects of the society, requires, commitment and structures conducive to implementation of development programmes. The policy makers have a very vital role to play in enhancing development. "The greatest problem hindering development of less developed countries like Nigeria is a lack of implementation and or improper implementation of plans, programmes and projects". (Bernard N. Olewe l995) In recent times, there has been increasing pressures on the Nigerian government to provide basic essential services such as education, health infrastructures, etc which was resulted from growing number of population, coupled with high level of insecurity that engulfed most parts of the country. This is attributed to the high level of poverty and unemployment. And it is evident, that where policy goals are over ambitious, not well articulated and made explicit, implementation becomes more difficult and complicated, and it amounts to overstretching the available resources for maximum impact and at the end nothing concrete is achieved. Secondly, in the absence of Modem technology, managerial skills and administrative capacity in our public agencies responsible for implementing projects and programmes, the resultant effects will be inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the utilization of resources which lead to serious misappropriations and mismanagement. Thirdly, constant change in policies or shifts in priorities that led to abandonment of many projects across the country, largely due to change in government has the potential of making our national developments more difficult and led to compromises in our development plans. At the end, government may likely lose focus and direction, which will invariably affect our national development.

Lastly, national development will never be possible in the face of high level corruption that pervaded all nooks and crannies of the country. The situation was so bad to the

extent that it caught the attentions of International organizations such as the World Bank and Transparency International, and Nigeria was ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world. The issues tabled above if clearly looked into will ensure that policies are citizen conscious and the wishes of the people and then and only then will citizens play a role in governance.

Conclusion

Essentially, success in implementation must-be evaluated within the context of particular problems and critical factors affecting implementation varies, and "success prone" policies are not always obvious. Effective implementation is said to be partially preordained by good leadership that can be the significant political hidden hand that guides disorganized and desperate interest to converge in support of implementing policy. External monitoring of the implementation process was also a crucial variable. Constant and closer monitoring and intervention on continue basis can greatly facilitate action.

Effective and successful policy implementation is the key to national development, it is a building block that facilitate socio-economic and political progress and can only be achieved not only through a continuous political commitment and clear definition of responsibilities and coordination, but also through genuine commitment to eradication of corruption at all levels of government by policy makers.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested for policy makers:

1. Good Theoretical Back-up: It is impossible to implement a policy that is defective in its theoretical conception (Bardach, 1979). EDA is the perfect example as such. Implementation requires appropriate „causal theory" (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989). A good policy should have theoretical validity, and must be formulated based on appropriate theoretical basis. Without proper theoretical validity, a policy will give wrong directions in all ways.
2. Citizens Opinion is key: policy makers must first ensure that there is due and constant consultation with the people to enhance effective participation on decisions taken on things that affect them directly.
3. Policy Legitimisation: In order to make progress with implementation, key decision-makers must view the proposed policy as legitimate (Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002).
4. Goals and Objectives: A policy must have clear, specific, measureable, attainable, rational and time-bound (SMART) goals and objectives. In

addition to that, there must be consensus on the set goals and objectives as it is a critical feature of the policy (Meter & Horn, 1974)

5. Resource Accumulation: Money is critical in policy implementation and it also requires appropriate human and technical resources (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989). In fact, to implement a new policy, human, technical, material and financial resources must be allocated to the effort. There should be steady flow of resources (Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002). At the same time, appropriate technology also leads to implementation success.
6. Mobilising Resources and Actions: If policy has to achieve results, then resources and actions must be mobilised in the appropriate directions. Mobilisation of resources includes preparation of complete plans, clarification of performance standards and conduct appropriate action plans (Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002).
7. Organisation Design and Modification: Appropriate organisational design is a necessary condition for successful implementation of a policy. Delegation of authority, harmonious organisation culture will enhance capability of the organisation in implementing a particular policy. Because of the difficulty in establishing new routines or tasks in organisations, it is politically more feasible to create new structures rather than overhaul older one (Brinkerhoff & Crosby, 2002).
8. Commitment and Skills of Frontline Implementers: Frontline implementers are the focal resources in policy implementation. They need commitment to policy objectives and necessary skills in using available resources to achieve policy objectives since incompetency of frontline implementers lead to implementation failure (Mazmanian & Sabatier, 1989). Frontline implementers must be motivated in their commitment and must be imparted necessary training so that non-compliance from their part does not take place. Competent personnel make implementation easier.
9. Monitoring: Implementation should not be done in isolation. Mechanism for monitoring the implementation process from internal and external authorities will enhance implementation performance.

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