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AN ANALYTICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN NIGERIA'S POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

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Abstract

In Nigeria, policy-making process faces numerous challenges that significantly affect its policy outcome, leading to issues such as insecurity, deteriorating infrastructure, multi-dimensional poverty, high unemployment rates, and elevated inflation. Thus, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the policy-making process and critically interrogated those challenges encountered in the policy making process of Nigeria. The theory of political systems served as a foundational framework for comprehending the intricacies of the policy-making process. This study adopted a qualitative methodology, employing content analysis to interpret non-numerical data from literature pertinent to the discussed theme. The analysis posited that the obstacles confronting policy making in Nigeria stem from institutional deficiencies, ineffective governance, self-serving decisions by executives, and inadequate legal frameworks that fail to regulate the misconduct of political actors. To address these challenges in Nigeria's policy-making landscape, the study advocated for the establishment of a comprehensive database, which is essential for effective national planning and development. Furthermore, it emphasised the importance of participatory governance in the policy-making process, ensuring that the beneficiaries of policies are not only consulted but also actively engaged. Additionally, it urged political actors, particularly those in executive positions, to demonstrate the requisite political will necessary to effectively navigate the policy-making process and realise the intended goals and objectives. Finally, there is an urgent need for a robust legal framework to regulate the actions of policy actors.

Keywords: Public policy, policy making, policy actors, input-output analysis

Introduction

Governments worldwide are actively involved in the formulation of policies aimed at addressing societal issues, regulating the behaviors of individuals, groups, and organisations, as well as redistributing wealth from the affluent to those in need. Consequently, public policy is the result of a dynamic interplay among various stakeholders, including businesses, interest groups, and individuals, who both compete and collaborate to influence policymakers' decisions across a range of issues. To pursue their objectives, these entities engage in lobbying, advocate for their positions publicly, and mobilise supporters, among other strategies (Prakash, 2022). Overall, the formulation of public policy is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal influences encompass public opinion, economic conditions, technological advancements, and the activities of interest groups, while external factors include the roles of donor agencies, neighboring countries, socio-cultural contexts, and political dynamics ("Factors that influence public policy," n.d.).

The policy-making process is characterised by its complexity, multifaceted nature and cyclical attributes, distinguishing it from a straightforward, linear sequence of steps. This process encompasses various phases, including identifying the policy problem, establishing the policy agenda, formulating and adopting policies, as well as implementation and evaluation. According to Egonmwan (1991/2014), there are two primary categories of actors involved in this process: primary and secondary actors. Primary actors possess direct constitutional authority to participate in policy formulation; this group typically includes the President as well as members of both the National Assembly and State Assemblies. In contrast, secondary actors do not possess the same level of authority, and their functions are frequently carried out by administrators, judges, special panels, and commissioners. These individuals play a significant role in the policy-making process, even though they do not wield direct constitutional power.

Further, in Nigeria, the policy-making process faces numerous challenges that significantly affect its outcome, leading to issues such as insecurity, deteriorating infrastructure, multi-dimensional poverty, high unemployment rates, and elevated inflation. Therefore, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the policy-making process and critically interrogate those challenges encountered in the policy making process of Nigeria. To accomplish these objectives, the paper was organised into several sections: an exploration of the conceptual foundations of public policy; an examination of the theoretical framework informed by political systems theory; a description of the methodology employed; an analysis of the policy-making process; few illustrations of Nigerian policies utilising input-output analysis in contemporary contexts; an investigation into the challenges encountered in policy making process within the Nigerian landscape; followed by a conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptualisation of Public Polcy

Public policy represents both a domain of study and a foundational concept within the realm of public administration. It encompasses those areas designated as "public," in contrast to the private sector. The notion of public administration implies the existence of a shared domain of life that is not solely private or individualistic, but rather collectively held (Eneanya, 2016). Public policy is the action or proposed action of a government aimed towards achieving goals (Ikelegbe, 2006, as cited in Obona 2016; Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013). Y. Dror defines public policy as a major guideline for action. That is, a general directive for action. (Y. Dror, as cited in Egonmwan 2014). Contrary to Ikelegbe and Dror's definition of public policy is that of Dye, Dye (1972:18), sees "*public policy as whatever government chooses to do or not to do*". The definition is deficient because what government does not do is a mere statement of intent and policy goals or objectives are not achieved at the end of the exercise. Chandler and Plano (1988: 40), define public policy "*as the strategic use of resources to alleviate national problems or governmental concerns*". This definition focuses on the policy implementation. A more acceptable definition is given by Jenkins; he defines "*public policy as a set of interrelated decisions by a policy actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation, where those decisions should in principle be within the power of those actors to achieve*". (Jenkins, as cited in Egonmwan, 1991/2014:3).

Based on the aforementioned definitions, it is clear that public policy is fundamentally focused on addressing specific issues. Consequently, public policy serves as a mechanism for problem-solving. Furthermore, it is inherently forward-looking, anticipating future outcomes. Public policy is also characterised by its action-oriented nature, involving a collaborative effort among various stakeholders to accomplish defined policy objectives. The policy process is a methodical sequence that includes various phases, beginning with problem identification and culminating in policy evaluation. Furthermore, public policy is inherently strategic, especially in terms of resource allocation and the efficient planning of human capital.

Theoretical Framework

Political Systems Theory

Public policy is viewed as the response of a political system to demands from its environment (Eneanya, 2016; Aibieye, 2009). According to David Easton, "*the political system is a system of interactions in any society through which binding or authoritative allocations or decisions are made*" (David Easton, as cited in Onah, 2010: 55-56). The political system can be conceptualised as comprising several interconnected components: inputs, a conversion process (often referred to as a black box), outputs, feedback, and the environment. Consequently, the framework facilitates an analysis of policymaking through the lens of input-output dynamics. Within this system, inputs are characterised by demands and support. Demands represent the appeals for action made by individuals or groups to fulfill their interests and values, while support manifests when citizens or groups adhere to electoral outcomes, pay taxes, comply with laws, and generally accept the decisions and actions taken by the political system in response to these demands (Aibieyi, 2009). Additionally, demands may arise from data analyses that provide insights into issues, thereby facilitating evidence-based approaches to problem-solving (Indeed, 2025). Furthermore, demands can also stem from policy revisions suggested by analysts both within (regulatory agencies and think tanks) and outside (research institutions, academia and civil society organisations) governmental frameworks. Outputs from the political system may include the passage of new legislation, the establishment of government programmes, the maintenance of law and order and the provision of public goods and services. The framework facilitates an analysis of the input-output dynamics within the policymaking process by defining the conversion mechanism, often referred to as the "black box," through which inputs are transformed into outputs. The environment encompasses all external conditions and events that impact the political system (Eneanya, 2016). The actions and results of the output are relayed back into the system and the inputs through a feedback mechanism (Hanumanthappa, 2023).

The theory of the political system can be closely aligned with the policy-making process. Within this framework, the components of the system—namely inputs, the conversion process, outputs, feedback mechanisms, and the surrounding environment—mirror the stages of policy development. For example, issues identified as policy problems and those included in the policy agenda are categorised as inputs. The stages of policy formulation and implementation correspond to the conversion process, often referred to as the "black box." The outputs represent the results of policy implementation, which can manifest as the provision of public goods and services, the issuance of regulations, or the introduction of new government programmes. Throughout these stages, evaluation occurs continuously, generating feedback in the form of suggestions, recommendations, and prescriptions that re-enter the system as inputs. Therefore, this process constitutes a perpetual and iterative cycle.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative methodology, utilising content analysis to assess the policy-making process in Nigeria. It aimed to critically examine the challenges experienced during this process, drawing on relevant literature from journals, books, and online resources.

The Policy Making Process

There are principally five (5) steps or stages in the policy making process. These steps are policy problem; policy agenda; policy formulation; policy Implementation; and policy evaluation.

Policy Problem

This is the first step in the development of public policy entails recognising a policy-related issue. A policy problem is characterised as a social circumstance that many individuals perceive as detrimental or unacceptable due to its impact on a substantial number of people over an extended period. Consequently, these individuals advocate for a constructive transformation of the situation (Egonmwan, 1991/2014). In essence, a collective expression of discontent regarding the situation is essential. It is crucial to distinguish between problems and issues; a problem transitions into an issue when a group calls for governmental intervention, when there is contention surrounding potential solutions, and when the selection among alternatives involves conflicting interests among various groups (Harris, 1980, as cited in Aibieyi, 2009). According to Egonmwan, (1991/2014), for a social situation to become a policy problem, all or some of the following conditions need occur: a large number of people are in unfortunate conditions, suffering deprivation, are dissatisfied with an undesirable situation; these adverse conditions are recognised by many people; those who suffer unsatisfactory situation, the decision makers are aware of the situation as they have responsibilities fir coping with it; people outside the immediate social problem (third parties) must show concern; large number of people think something should be done about the situation apart from merely recognising the undesirable situation and conflicting interests and cognitive agreement on what remote cause of the problem is and how it should be solved.

Policy Agenda

The process through which policymakers either proactively address or feel compelled to tackle specific issues at any given moment is referred to as agenda setting. This concept is fundamentally different from the broader spectrum of political demands. Furthermore, it contrasts with the idea of political or policy priorities, which outlines a hierarchical arrangement of agenda items (Anderson, 2003, as cited in Eneanya, 2016). Certain matters may be classified as crises—such as a "health care crisis"—to enhance their prominence on the agenda and to expedite action. The designation of an issue as a "crisis" carries an inherent implication of urgency and importance (Aibieyi, 2009). For a public concern to attain agenda status, it must represent a problem that necessitates government intervention. Agenda items can be categorised into two types. Cobb and Elder (1983, as cited in Eneanya, 2016) describe the first type as the systematic agenda, which encompasses all issues that are broadly acknowledged by members of the political community as deserving of public attention and as falling within the legitimate scope of existing governmental authority. In contrast, the institutional or governmental agenda consists of problems that legislators or public officials feel compelled to address with serious attention and action (Eneanya, 2016). The policy agenda-setting process is characterised by three largely independent streams of activities: problems, proposals, and politics. Occasionally, these streams converge, creating what is referred to as a "policy window" that allows specific issues to ascend to the governmental agenda (Kingdon, 1995, as cited in Aibieyi, 2009). The problems stream features issue that stakeholders within or outside the government seek to move toward action. The proposals stream includes potential solutions to these identified problems, while the politics stream encompasses elements such as electoral outcomes, shifts in presidential administrations, public sentiment, and campaigns initiated by interest groups (Aibieyi, 2009).

Policy Formulation and Adoption Stage

"Policy formulation stage involves the development of pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with public problems" (Eneanya, 2016: 249). However, the actors involved in policy formulation can be classified into two groups: primary policymakers and secondary policymakers. Primary actors possess direct constitutional authority to participate in policy formulation; this group typically includes the President as well as members of both the National Assembly and State Assemblies while secondary actors lack such authority, and their roles are often fulfilled by administrators, judges, special panels, and commissioners who contribute to the policy-making process without holding direct constitutional power (Egonmwan, 1999/2014). Eneanya (2016) outlines the process of policy formulation as comprising several key stages: the identification of the policy issue or problem, the specification of objectives and targets, the development of various options and strategies, the selection of a preferred option or strategy, policymaking decisions, the design of implementation strategies, and finally, the evaluation and reform of the policy. This formulation phase culminates in policy adoption, whereby the chosen policy alternative is enacted into law or adopted through executive orders by the legislative branch of government. In democratic contexts, policies enacted by legislators are generally regarded as legitimate and binding (Eneanya, 2016).

Policy Implementation

This is the next stage after policy formulation and adoption; it is that stage where policy actors grapple with reality. This involves the translation of goals and objectives of policy into concrete achievements through various programmes. Hence, it is often said that policy implementation is programme implementation. (Egonmwan 1991/2014). "*Policy implementation is the process of translating policy mandates into action, prescriptions and goals in reality*" (Ikelegbe, 2005, as cited in Wilson & Epelle, 2018: 178).

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> *"Policy implementation is the process of assembling resources (including people), allocating resources and utilising resources (operations) in the order to achieve policy objectives"* (Eneanya, 2016: 250).

The primary entities responsible for the execution of established policies are governmental bureaucracies, specifically administrative agencies. Additionally, the judiciary and the legislature play significant roles in this process. Notably, the legislature possesses the authority to override executive decisions with a two-thirds majority. Meanwhile, the courts are tasked with interpreting statutes and administrative rules and regulations (Eneanya, 2016). It is crucial to highlight that the implementation stage of the policy-making process is often the most challenging. Unlike the formulation phase, which involves a variety of stakeholders working behind the scenes to develop the policy, the implementation stage directly engages those tasked with enforcing the legislation or programme, as well as individuals who are affected by the policy's outcomes. Key questions arise during this phase, such as whether the implementing agency will adhere to the policy as outlined and whether the policy itself is practical, given that it is frequently articulated in ambiguous terms (Egonmwan, 1991, as cited in Wilson & Epelle, 2018). Furthermore, the complexity of the issues being addressed, the scale of the anticipated changes, the demographic groups targeted by the policy, and the allocation of human and financial resources for implementation all contribute to the challenges encountered. Additionally, the administrative structures and regulations established to facilitate policy implementation are critical factors in this intricate process (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1995, as cited in Government & Nonprofit, 2016).

Policy Evaluation

This should not be confused as the last stage of the policy making process and also evaluation should be carried out at the policy formulation and policy implementation stages to ensure that the set objectives at each stage are been met and if there is any deficiency, a policy reformation could occur. Evaluation leads to feedback from the environment could enter the problem identification, policy adoption and policy formulation stages. Thus, public policy is a cyclical process. There are two predominant types of evaluation in policy analysis: a) political evaluation, which examines the political feasibility of a given policy; and b) systematic evaluation, which aims to objectively assess the impact of policies and evaluate the extent to which objectives are achieved. This form of evaluation focuses specifically on the effects that a policy has on the issue it aims to address (Anderson, Brady & Bullock, 1978, as cited in Eneanya, 2016). As noted by Eneanya (2016: 251),

> "*Policy evaluation is concerned with results of a policy or programme. It tries to determine the relevance, effectiveness and impact of policy and programme activities in the light of their objectives. It is also concerned with the efficiency with which programmes are implemented*"

The preceding discussion illustrates the complex nature of public policy formulation, characterised by lobbying, deliberations, consultations, and disagreements among various stakeholders, including the public. This process is not strictly linear; rather, it can feature overlapping stages, occurrences that may unfold out of sequence, or retrospective engagements, thereby rendering it more dynamic than a mere straight-forward pathway.

Few Illustrations of Nigerian Policies Utilising Input-Output Analysis in Contemporary Contexts

The government of Edo State has recently reintroduced a monthly environmental sanitation initiative, scheduled to take place on the final Saturday of each month. This policy is designed to promote a clean and disease-free environment (Iyemefokhia, 2025). This reflects the government's commitment to addressing environmental degradation in Edo State. The initiative represents a collaborative effort by the Edo State government to enhance the cleanliness of the region. The execution of this programme falls under the purview of Oredo Local Government officials, with the ultimate goal being the achievement of a healthy and pristine environment. This initiative operates primarily within the confines of Benin City. The exchange rate unification policy of 2023 aimed to consolidate all exchange rates into a singular market framework. This initiative sought to diminish government intervention in the foreign exchange market, enhance price discovery, increase the supply of foreign exchange and bolster investor confidence, among other advantages (Ozili, 2024). The policy was largely influenced by issues of exchange rate arbitrage and existing market distortions. Public input played a crucial role in its formulation, with contributions from various stakeholders, including business leaders, parents, economists, politicians, and certain government officials, all advocating for a unified exchange rate window to facilitate improved access to foreign exchange and mitigate corruption and exploitation within the public sphere. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) serves as the regulatory authority overseeing this process, functioning according to the directives issued by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The CBN's output is the establishment of the exchange rate unification policy, while the operational environment encompasses banks, online trading platforms, Bureau de Change (BDCs), and CBN-operated systems such as the Electronic Foreign Matching System (EFEMS) and the Nigerian Autonomous Foreign Exchange Market (NAFEM).

The Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) of 2021 represents a significant legislative initiative in Nigeria, designed to overhaul the oil and gas sector. This Act aims to foster transparency, enhance information disclosure, and promote accountability within an industry historically characterised by opacity and corruption (Usman, 2011; Donwa, Mgbame & Ogbeide, 2015). The impetus for reform originated from various stakeholders, including the Nigerian Government, a hesitant National Assembly, the oil and gas industry itself, and the public, all of whom advocated for a restructuring that would introduce integrity, transparency, and accountability to the sector's operations. The legislative process involved the Senate and House of Representatives, which ultimately facilitated the passage of the landmark legislation after years of delays. The culmination of this process was the transformation of the Public Industry Bill (PIB) into the Public Industry Act (PIA) of 2021. The geographical focus of this initiative primarily encompasses the Niger Delta region, including both onshore and offshore areas, as well as other oil-producing states such as Ondo and Lagos.

The Federal Government's social safety net initiatives, notably the National Cash Transfer Programme—also known as the Household Upliftment Programme (HUP)—aim to alleviate pressing social challenges faced by Nigerians, such as poverty and unemployment. This programme provides financial assistance to eligible households, among other objectives. Contributions to its development have come from legislators, the general populace, and governmental agencies. The operational framework is managed by the National Cash Transfer Office (NCTO), which operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development. The primary output of this programme is the disbursement of cash transfers to qualifying beneficiaries, all functioning within the context of Nigeria's 36 states plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and 774 local government areas. The aforementioned policies exemplify the input-output analysis within David Easton's systems theory, emphasising the components of input, conversion processes, output, and the environmental context in which these policies function.

Challenges Encountered in the Policy Making Process in Nigeria

Policies often reflect the preferences and values of elites rather than the general populace. Elite theorists argue that a relatively small, organised, and powerful group within society has a significant impact on the decision-making process and the outcomes of policies (Aibieye, 2009). This influence is exerted through various means, such as media, campaign events, press releases, and political financing. For instance, in Nigeria's oil sector, prominent individuals and corporations have historically played a crucial role in shaping energy policies and regulations. Notable entities include International Oil Companies (IOCs), the Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC), and the Nigerian Mid-and Downstream Petroleum Regulatory Authority (NMDPRA), all of which hold considerable sway in the industry. Additionally, elite-driven businesses and contractors often gain from government infrastructure initiatives, examples being Dantata & Sawoe, Julius Berger, and Setraco. Ambitious policies, although well-intentioned, may prove impractical for implementation. Ifediba (2024) noted that the national policy aimed at regulating healthcare workforce migration is designed to mitigate the emigration of health professionals and enhance the healthcare sector—a commendable initiative by the government. However, funding remains a significant challenge. Ifediba (2024) emphasised that Nigeria has yet to fulfill its commitment to allocate 15% of its annual budget to healthcare, as promised in the Abuja Declaration of 2001. In 2024, healthcare funding constituted merely 4.6% of the national budget, which is substantially below the necessary threshold. This discrepancy indicates that the realisation of such a thoughtfully crafted policy may be nearly unattainable.

Certain policies are primarily designed to serve the political interests and self-esteem of politicians rather than effectively addressing societal issues. Initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation, such as Operation Feed the Nation and the Green Revolution, exemplify this phenomenon; despite their intentions, none have successfully mitigated the poverty and suffering experienced by the Nigerian population. Additionally, national development frameworks such as Nigeria's National Development Plan and the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) further illustrate the prevalence of politically motivated policies that fail to deliver tangible benefits to the citizenry. The individuals who are ostensibly intended to benefit from a specific policy often lack participation in the policy-making process (see, Ajaikaye, 2003 & Onokerhoraye, 2007, as cited in Obona, 2016). Ostrom & Ostrom (1977) contended that bureaucratic professionals tend to operate under the assumption that they are more qualified to ascertain the preferences of citizens regarding services, rather, than actively engaging them in the formulation of policies that impact their lives. In essence, this perspective diminishes the view of citizens as co-producers of various public goods and services. This is what Ostrom referred to as "service paradox' which means*" where the better that services are, as defined by professional criteria, the less satisfied that citizens are with those services*" (Ostrom, as cited in Sapru, 2013: 419).

The lack of adequately trained professionals significantly impacts informed decision-making, policy implementation, and ultimately results in poor policy outcomes. Ayiuche (2000) highlighted this concern, noting that the scarcity of trained specialists has resulted in ineffective implementation of development strategies in Nigeria. This problem is exacerbated by issues related to coordination and communication. As Olaniyi (2001) pointed out, insufficient or ineffective communication can impede the proper conveyance of intentions. Poor communication channels between policymakers and implementers may contribute to the failure to execute policies effectively (Olaniyi, 2001, as cited in Dahida & Maidoki, 2013). Many developing countries like Nigeria rely on various forms of assistance, whether financial or material, often provided by international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), sometimes with conditionalities attached. The World Bank, due to its political influence, has the capacity to enforce policy preferences that may not effectively address the specific issues at hand (Government & Nonprofit, 2016). A pertinent example of this is the unsuccessful Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) implemented in 1986, which serves as an important case study in this context.

Corruption is a prevalent issue in Nigerian government institutions, manifesting through various forms including embezzlement, bribery and fraud within the public sector. This pervasive problem significantly hampers effective policy implementation, as evidenced by inadequate public services reflected in deteriorating and insufficient infrastructure, such as crumbling roads, inadequate security, and unstable power supply (see Gafar, 2017; Bukar, 2021). A notable example is the Dasuki Gate scandal, which involved the misappropriation of $2 billion earmarked for the procurement of military equipment (arms and ammunition). The severe repercussions of this scandal included compromised security, which jeopardized the lives and properties of Nigerian citizens, inadequate resources for military personnel and a profound erosion of public trust in government institutions. The public policy making in highly politicised. That is characterised by a multiplicity of government and government agencies involved in potentially over-lapping and conflicting policy making process (Agbazuere, 2020). Also, lack of professionalism and indiscipline could affect the effective implementation of policies in public bureaucracies. Examples of lack professionalism include excessive red tapes, absence of limited discretion and lack of motivation due to slow adaptation of new ideas, practice, administrative techniques and technologies. Indiscipline, on the other hand, involves widespread corruption, laziness, rudeness to the public and lack of responsibility (Osezua, Abeh & Gberevbie, 2009).

Furthermore, inadequate statistical data for planning could pose a major challenge to the effective formulation and implementation of public polices. However, data are unavailable or scare or are even inadequate, there by leading to the inability of the policy actors to identify and tackle specific causes of the public problem. Such data include census, national income among others (Obona 2016; Wilson & Epelle, 2018). An examination of the challenges confronting policymaking in Nigeria reveals that many of these issues can be attributed to institutional weaknesses, poor governance practices, self-interested decisions made by executives, and insufficient legal frameworks that do not effectively address the misconduct of political actors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The policy making is a complex, multifaceted and iterative process that entails policy problem; policy agenda; policy formulation; policy implementation; and policy evaluation. The analysis posited that the obstacles confronting policy making in Nigeria stem from institutional deficiencies, ineffective governance, self-serving decisions by executives, and inadequate legal frameworks that fail to regulate the misconduct of political actors. To address these challenges in Nigeria's policy-making landscape, the study advocated for the establishment of a comprehensive database, which is essential for effective national planning and development. Furthermore, it emphasised the importance of participatory governance in the policy-making process, ensuring that the beneficiaries of policies are not only consulted but also actively engaged. Additionally, it urged political actors, particularly those in executive positions, to demonstrate the requisite political will necessary to effectively navigate the policy-making process and realise the intended goals and objectives. Finally, there is an urgent need for a robust legal framework to regulate the actions of policy actors.

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