

UNPACKING THE GAP: ANALYZING THE CHALLENGES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study, titled "Unpacking the Gap: Analysing the Challenges of Government Policy Implementation in Nigeria," aims to investigate the obstacles that persistently impede the effective execution of government policies in Nigeria. A prevalent policy issue is the insufficiency and substandard quality of data, which creates issues in planning and inevitably complicates the implementation of projects and programs. Inaccurate data complicates the formulation of appropriate estimates regarding anticipated outcomes, requirements, and equipment. The government's failure to timely develop an action plan hinders the successful implementation of public initiatives. The insufficiency of policy resources often undermines the effective execution of government initiatives. This report advocates for the resolution of issues affecting agencies that implement government policies. Commendable policies devised must not dissipate throughout the implementation phase. Governmental implementing agencies must be efficient and proficient to guarantee the effectiveness of policy implementations. We must meticulously scrutinise the correct utilisation of finances and accountability, as corruption is a significant concern.

Keywords:

Challenges, Government, Policy,
Implementation, Nigeria

Introduction

The efficacy of every political system depends on the characteristics and methods of public policy formulation and implementation utilised. Policy, as a governmental instrument, influences the lives of every individual within a state, playing a crucial role in the efficacy of all administrations, whether public, private, or non-profit (Atakpa & Ayogu, 2023).

Policies are legislated as a thoughtful plan of action put in place to achieve national outcomes (Rasak, 2021). Public policies are initiatives and programs designed to address specific societal issues arising from the political system. Public policy addresses current and prospective societal issues and encompasses all legitimate methods for attaining the government's articulated aims and objectives, providing social services to the community through a governmental agency or ministerial department. In a developing nation such as Nigeria, public policy is essential, as it serves as the foundation for directing development. Public policy is essential for converting governmental objectives into actionable measures (Atakpa & Ayogu, 2023). Such an undertaking typically requires substantial resources, and the necessity for their application to fulfil specific purposes or challenges cannot be overstated. In Nigeria, the issue lies not in policy design but in the meticulous implementation of those policies. Public policies are frequently formulated, although the challenge of effective implementation persists as a significant concern in the country (Agbazuere, 2020).

Policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria have become highly politicised. Consequently, public policy formulation in Nigeria is marked by a plethora of governments and governmental agencies engaged in potentially overlapping and conflicting policymaking endeavours. The intricacy of policy formulation in a federal system like ours is further exacerbated by its operation within a democratic framework. Ujah, Felicia, and Innocent (2020) assert that in such circumstances, various governments within the Federation may be governed by distinct political parties, each possessing unique ideological inclinations and political values that subsequently shape their developmental objectives and priorities, often disregarding the perspectives of the populace.

Consequently, policy initiatives may also arise from the people, provided they receive governmental endorsement to be accurately designated as public policies. Certain authors contend that a disparity exists between policy creators and the intended beneficiaries of those policies. This imbalance frequently results in policy failures.

Conceptualisation of Key Terms Policy

Several different interpretations have been proposed for the concept of policy. Agbazuere (2020) defines a case as a course or principle of action that an organisation or individual adopts or recommends. Within this context, Ujah et al. (2020) and Agbazuere (2020) reached a consensus that certain individuals place an emphasis on policy as an activity. Atakpa and Ayogu (2023) fall into this category. Atakpa and Ayogu (2023) stated that the planned course of

action refers to what the government intends to implement concerning a specific problem or situation it currently faces. Some people consider it to be a choice that exists between several different possibilities from which the decision is made. On the other hand, there are those who view it in terms of the breadth of activity. A policy is defined as "hard patterns of resource allocation represented by projects and programs designed to respond to perceived public problems or challenges requiring government action for their solution," according to Adegboyo et al. (2021). Programs and projects are designed to respond to perceived public problems or difficulties. The question that Umana et al. (2024) are attempting to answer is why governments act in the manner that they do, as well as the distinction between what they do and what they do not do.

Government Policy Characteristics

Government policy possesses numerous qualities that render it distinctive. Luckham (1966), in his astute conceptualisation of policy as a directive for action, delineates the following essential element of a policy: A choice: it is a significant decision made by people, groups, or organisations. This necessitates the existence of multiple policy alternatives.

Policies are suggested courses of action or anticipated decisions. Policies are anticipatory or represent declarations of forthcoming acts. Policies delineate actions that will be or are intended to be undertaken. It delineates a proposed or intended course of action about specific desired objectives or occurrences in the real world.

A policy is purpose-driven: it aims to achieve certain outcomes or, more succinctly, objectives. A policy possesses certain objectives or intents. Policies pertain to certain issues or areas of concern: They are not abstractions; instead, they pertain to and are direct answers to the problems and pressures emanating from an environment. Policies are frequently formulated to address current or prospective issues or to fulfil specific demands.

Action entails adaptability to accommodate the evolving demands of individuals, influenced by their sociocultural context. Opono and Kelikwuma (2021) stated that this action establishes a route, providing direction, guidance, and a pathway to achieve specific goals. This idea was added in response to the previous statement. As a result, it serves as the framework within which both sacurrent and future actions are carried out. Taking into consideration the characteristics of public policy that have been discussed thus far, it is possible to correctly notice that the majority of the time, when the government is attempting to establish particular policies, it engages in the process of guesswork. There is a possibility that this is the case due to the fact that governments frequently make judgements without using scientific techniques or empirical evidence before arriving at particular policy conclusions.

Government Policy Implementation

The process of giving an adopted policy a practical effect by means of proper administrative apparatuses is what is meant by the term "Government policy implementation," which will be discussed more below. In accordance with Agbazure's (2020) definition, it is the process of transforming human and

material inputs, such as informational, technical, human, demand, and support, into outputs in the form of goods and services. There are a variety of executive decisions and activities that are at play in the process of Government policy implementation, which is sometimes referred to as execution (Wilson & Epelle, 2018). These decisions and actions try to turn mandates that have previously been determined into reality.

According to Nwafor-Orizu et al. (2018), the process of implementation involves the outputs of public policy, such as the services that are actually being provided or the financing that is distributed. According to Elem (2016), effective implementation of public policy necessitates the policy's clarity and specificity, the institutional capabilities of the organisation responsible for implementing the policy, the correct identification of the target group, and the context in which the policy is anticipated to be implemented. In the absence of adequate examination of these essential aspects, the implementation of such a strategy will be fraught with significant difficulties. Failure, namely failure in public policy, is the primary manifestation of this difficulty, which brings us to the following idea.

Policy Development in a Federal System

In a Federal System, policies are formulated through consultative, participatory, and transparent processes, particularly those that foster ownership among implementers and intended beneficiaries; such policies are more responsive and have a higher likelihood of effective implementation than those that lack these attributes (Iyanda and Bello, 2016, cited in Ujah et al., 2020). Federalism is a system in which

governmental authority is distributed among local, national, and central or federal entities. Nigeria exemplifies a federal system, wherein authority is distributed among multiple levels of government, including federal (central), state, and local entities. Federalism comprises two dimensions: constitutional and financial. Both play a significant part in the policy-making process. (Awa, 2021)

The constitutional aspect of federalism in the United States delineates certain authorities allocated to the national government while also assigning certain obligations to state governments. The 1789 Constitution of the United States, one of the oldest constitutions globally, delineates the overarching structure and practices of the federal system (Ujah et al., 2020). Policy formulation under federalism is influenced by its financial aspect, wherein expenditure is allocated among the three tiers of government. Federalism is crucial for recognising the diverse perspectives and interests of bureaucrats and policymakers, aiding in the formulation and execution of policies (Abubakar, et al, 2023).

In the Nigerian federal system, exemplary policymaking is seen in the healthcare and education sectors. The healthcare sector entails contributions from main stakeholders via the national government, while the state government assumes a secondary although important role. All three levels of government play key responsibilities in the education sector. The state government undertakes main constitutional and monetary tasks, while the national government assumes a secondary still significant role; the local government is responsible for delivering educational services. (Awa, 2021). Policymaking occurs when a government determines whether

to address a certain issue. When it opts to act, policymaking involves selecting the appropriate course of action (Elem, 2016). Development policy-making involves receiving policy requests, making policy decisions, developing policy statements, implementing them to produce policy outputs, and ultimately achieving policy outcomes (Nwafor-Orizu et al., 2018). Opono and Kelikwuma (2021) have delineated some fundamental features that differentiate public policy from other types of policies as follows:

- I. Purposeful or outcome-orientated behaviour, as opposed to arbitrary behaviour, is the defining characteristic of public policy.
- II. Public policy denotes the systematic actions or decision-making patterns of public administrators on a specific subject over time, rather than their isolated, ad hoc decisions on that matter.
- III. Policy encompasses the actions undertaken by the government and the ensuing outcomes, rather than only its intentions or statements.
- IV. Public policy may manifest in either a positive or negative form. Positively, it may entail governmental intervention concerning a specific issue or problem; negatively, it may represent a determination by government authorities to refrain from acting on a situation for which governmental opinion, stance, or action is solicited.
- V. Public policy is grounded in the law and authoritative. It possesses legal authority, which may be forceful and is obligatory for all citizens.

Government policy involves series of activities that are carried out sequentially across distinct stages, as outlined below:

- a.** The formulation of goals involves multiple groups, each with unique and often conflicting objectives.
- b.** Identification and characterisation of the problem stemming from incomplete knowledge or situational context.
- c.** Agenda setting entails efforts by people and groups to sway policy choices.
- d.** The pursuit of policy alternatives and the evaluation of these options, encompassing the study of policy choices.
- e.** Policy execution by administrators after formal adoption, i.e., policy implementation.
- f.** Policy evaluation involves estimating, assessing, or appraising the effectiveness of a policy.

Challenges of Policy Implementation in Nigeria

Despite having access to tremendous resources, the government of Nigeria has been unable to properly execute policies, which has been a major setback for the country's national development. Numerous policies have failed miserably during implementation and have not achieved their intended goals. While some of the issues with policy implementation in Nigeria are structural, others are environmental or attitude-based, and numerous researchers have voiced their opinions on the matter (DANTATA & Ahmed, 2016; Ajulor, 2018). Here are a few of the most pressing issues:

- I. Lack of Clear Goal Definition:** Numerous Nigerian governments exhibit a propensity to pursue multiple, often convoluted objectives. Policy objectives frequently exhibit ambiguity and inconsistency with the populace's desires. Policymakers in Nigeria presume an understanding of the demands of the target groups whose

social conditions they want to improve; hence, there is no necessity for purposeful clarification. It is evident that unclear policy objectives complicate implementation.

- II. **Overly Ambitious Policy Objectives:** Numerous government policies are characterised by excessive ambition, significantly influencing the determination of programs and policy objectives. Atakpa and Ayogu (2023) assert that the aspiration to legitimise the political regime through demonstrable enhancements to living conditions engenders a scenario where political leaders are inclined to advocate for policies aimed at improving life circumstances, albeit potentially unattainable due to their overly ambitious nature. Consequently, the breadth and thoroughness of the formulated policies resulted in significant obstacles during implementation. Vision 2020 and the current nine-point agenda are examples of such policies.
- III. **Insufficient Appropriate Technology for Implementation:** Implementing agencies frequently lack the requisite modern technology, managerial expertise, and administrative capacity essential for effective policy execution. The procedures employed in policy implementation often do not align with the established policy objectives. Cultural considerations can impede the use of new technology in program implementation areas. Examples include the populace's resistance to fertiliser usage due to traditional beliefs several decades ago, as well as the refusal of polio vaccines in several northern states.
- IV. **Absence of Continuity Policy Commitment:** Alterations in government frequently coincide with shifts in priorities. The circumstances complicate implementation

due to the transition to wholly different priorities and objectives, necessitating new organisations, individuals, resources, and technology that are not always readily available. This situation resulted in the abandoning of numerous policies.

- V. Ambiguity in Responsibility and Coordination: Numerous policies in Nigeria necessitate the participation of multiple agencies across various governmental tiers. The example encompasses a poverty reduction policy developed in phases, necessitating the participation of numerous agencies across all three levels of government. The lack of coordination and clear delineation of responsibilities among the numerous organisations involved resulted in the failure of the poverty alleviation policy.
- VI. Comparison during Implementation: Compromises often undermine fundamental policy objectives, adversely affecting the successful execution of programs. The various housing plans in Kano failed as they became instruments for rewarding party loyalists and economic and royal elites, so undermining the fundamental objective of providing homes to the general populace.
- VII. Corruption: The corrupt inclinations of public officials and politicians, in collusion with private entities and individuals, undoubtedly have far-reaching implications for the effective implementation of policies in the country. Corruption has infiltrated every facet of our societal existence. It is evident not just in the inflation of contract amounts or percentage negotiations but also in the outright misappropriation of billions of naira allocated for various programs. Agencies such as the EFCC and ICPC, established to combat and mitigate

corruption, have proven to be ineffective and lack substantial results in comparison to the pervasive corruption inside the nation (Daniel-Kalioi, 2019). These unethical tactics exemplify the diversion of billions of US dollars intended to enhance power supplies and stimulate the national economy, a matter that remains uninvestigated.

Effects of Government Policy Implementation Challenges on National Development

Considering the numerous issues and concerns already discussed, the matter of national growth appears somewhat ambiguous. National development is a multifaceted phenomenon that involves the comprehensive transformation of the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of society, necessitating commitment and structures favourable to the implementation of development programs (Agbazure, 2020). The influence of policy implementation on any economy is crucial. The primary obstacle impeding the development of underdeveloped nations such as Nigeria is the inadequate execution or flawed implementation of plans, programs, and projects (Opone & Kelikwuma, 2021).

Recently, the Nigerian government has under mounting pressure to deliver fundamental services, including education and healthcare facilities, due to a rising population and pervasive insecurity affecting many regions of the country. This is ascribed to the elevated levels of poverty and unemployment. It is obvious that when policy objectives are overly ambitious, poorly expressed, and not explicitly defined, implementation becomes increasingly difficult and complex, resulting in the overstretching of limited resources

for maximum impact, ultimately yielding no tangible outcomes.

S&P Global Rating (2025), observed that the Nigeria government in the recent year through has improved her economic growth prospects and microeconomic resilience.

Secondly, our public agencies, which are responsible for executing projects and programs, will face inefficiency and ineffectiveness in resource utilization without modern technology, managerial expertise, and administrative capability, leading to significant misappropriations and mismanagement.

Thirdly, frequent alterations in policies or shifts in objectives, resulting in the abandonment of several projects nationwide—primarily owing to governmental changes—have the potential to complicate our national development and necessitate concessions in our development plans. Ultimately, the government may lose concentration and direction, which will inevitably impact our national growth (Ujah et al., 2020).

Ultimately, national growth is unattainable in the presence of pervasive high-level corruption throughout the nation. The situation deteriorated to the point that it attracted the attention of international organisations, including the World Bank and Transparency International, resulting in Nigeria being classified among the most corrupt nations globally. The misallocation of billions of US dollars at NEPA (now Power Holding Company of Nigeria) and NNPC in recent years is evident. At one point, Transparency International pointed to Aso Rock as the most corrupt entity in the country. Nigerians have not yet recuperated from the oil

subsidy scandal, which totals trillions of naira, and no actions have been taken against the offenders (Atakpa & Ayogu, 2023). The repercussions of these unethical activities would undoubtedly result in a deficiency of fundamental necessities such as education, healthcare, nutrition, and housing. Poverty, unemployment, armed robbery, kidnapping, militancy, and terrorism will escalate, rendering the prospect of national growth a mere illusion.

Measures to Improve Government Policy Execution in Nigeria

Target Beneficiaries: No singular governmental program is adequate to address the populace's demands. Targeting a specific demographic enhances policy implementation efficacy. The target group must be engaged during the formulation stage to enable their contribution to factors that impact their life. This will help instill a sense of belonging and dedication.

Interaction and communication between the government and other organizations: adequate attention must be afforded to nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, the organized commercial sector, and civil society groups in the policy-making process.

Project Oversight: Adequate provisions must be established for the effective monitoring of projects to prevent abandonment and to assure the achievement of policy objectives. **Provision of Sufficient Resources:** Sufficient material and human resources necessary for the implementation of the policy must be supplied.

Effective Communication: There must be proficient communication between the intended beneficiaries and the executors of policy programs.

Promote a Culture of Continuity: The culture of policy discontinuities should be resisted. The national and state legislatures should implement legislation that ensure the continuity of programs designed to promote growth and development. Policy continuity is essential, except when the policy is deemed ineffective for the populace.

Significant Effort and Consistency of Efforts: The execution of policy will not inherently result from policy decisions; rather, it must be regarded as a deliberate and intentional process. Therefore, much effort is necessary to translate policy from purpose to execution; also, the resources required for effective implementation of pertinent policies must be allocated to achieve policy objectives.

Methodology for the Study

This study employs observational and participatory methodologies. The researcher analysed popular sentiment and dissent regarding government policies and engaged in group discussions concerning the functioning of government operations in Nigeria. The data for this study comprises both secondary and primary sources. The secondary source relied on existing records and documents, but the primary sources involved both watching national trends and participating in relevant discussions, as previously noted.

Conclusion

Fundamentally, the evaluation of success in implementation needs to be done within the context of specific challenges and crucial aspects that affect implementation. Furthermore, "success-prone" policies are not always clear. A beneficial leader is believed to be the significant political hidden hand that guides disorganised and desperate interests to converge in support of implementing policy. It is said that effective implementation is partially predetermined by strong leadership. Additionally, the external monitoring of the implementation process was an important component to consider. Close, continuous, and constant monitoring can significantly facilitate action. Effective and successful policy implementation is the key to national development. It is a building block that facilitates socio-economic and political progress, and it can only be achieved not through a continuous political commitment and clear definition of responsibilities and coordination, but also through a genuine commitment to eradicating corruption at all levels of government. This is the only way to achieve this goal.

Recommendations for Effective Policy Implementation in Nigeria

To guarantee efficient and successful policy implementation, the following proposals are presented.

- a. A deliberate and audacious separation of our development programs from the atypical influence of international institutions and their representatives is necessary. The task is challenging yet feasible.

b. Policy formulators should familiarise themselves with the social, economic, and environmental conditions of the area where the policy will be implemented. This will allow them to accurately delineate the issues and provide clarity on their intended direction.

c. Policy execution should adhere to a soldier-to-soldier approach. The government should be a continuum. The identity of the government that established a specific policy is irrelevant; what is of utmost importance is the interest of the users. Individuals who are benefiting should be a concern, provided that the policy is reasonable and attainable.

d. The government must uphold discipline among its officials. Corruption must be eradicated. A framework to provide effective oversight of personnel and financial resources should be established. Only those with exemplary track records should participate in significant assignments, and these individuals must be recognised as patriots based on their conduct.

e. The government and its personnel should not exhibit favouritism towards any specific ethnic nationality over others. Any officer entrusted with authority should fulfil it with the objective of serving the nation and its interests. The essence of One Nigeria should be upheld consistently.

f. In policy formulation, contingencies should be established for unforeseen events that may result in the termination or modification of the policy. Policymakers should refrain from

excessive confidence and ambition, as this impacts policy implementation.

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