

The Role of Impact Evaluation on Policy Implementation in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper x-rayed the role of impact evaluation on policy implementation in Nigeria. This is against the backdrop of the state of the country's development (under-developed) despite the huge potentials – both human and material resources available. Policies are very crucial in governance as it is what governments utilize in the pursuit of its goals – which are attempts at resolving numerous social cum political problems that confront the citizenry and its environment. Policies therefore, are interventions employed by government to deal with public and/or social phenomena for the growth and development of the state. Impact evaluation appraises how the intervention under evaluation influences outcomes and whether these consequences cum effects are intended or unintended. Impact evaluation also serves as checks and balances on public policies and provide direction and innovative focus for public policies as well as provide unique information on the efficacy and value of social programmes. The paper explored and clarified concepts such as policy, public policy, policy analysis, public policy implementation and policy impact. The paper concludes that since impact evaluation is a major panacea for performance failures of organisations and programmes, and given the woeful performance of the Nigeria public service institutions and programmes, institutionalizing impact evaluation in the public policy process in Nigeria becomes quite imperative. The paper also note that impact evaluation will also be of immense benefit to the policy process in Nigeria as it will among others, inform policy makers about potential economic, social and environmental ramifications of policies, improve transparency and increase public participation in order to reflect a range of considerations, thereby improving the legitimacy of policies.*

Keywords: Policy, Public Policy, Public Policy Implementation, Policy Analysis, Policy Impact, Impact Evaluation, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the years, public policies have indeed, gone far beyond new and naïve aspirations for acquiring societally relevant knowledge, and there has been a growing scepticism and criticism of the credibility of public policies to produce objective empirical and normative truths. Essentially, it should be noted that implementation of public policy is an aspect of the policy process; though it seems to be the most important segment in the policy management and yet the least taken care of (Nkwede, 2014). Realistically, a policy in practice seldom differs from the intentions with which it is made.

Policy analysis failed then to recognize and study the implementation process as the major determinant of policy success. The lack of adequate academic attention, made the implementation process to be until recently, the least conceptualized and understood of the three major components of the policy process; policy formulation, implementation and impact (Ikelegbe, 2006). Impact evaluation appraises how the intervention under evaluation influences outcomes and whether these consequences cum effects are intended or unintended. The proper analysis of impact requires a counterfactual of what those outcomes would have been in the absence of the intervention. It does establish whether the intervention had a welfare effect on individuals, households, and communities, and whether this

effect can be attributed to the concerned intervention. Impact evaluation further seeks to present and determine the long run results that are generated by policy decision makers, often through programs or projects and interventions. Interestingly, impact evaluation may be direct or indirect, positive or negative, intended or unintended.

Nigeria is a country acknowledged locally and globally as one with enormous human and material resources that is capable of transforming its current state of underdevelopment (Chukwurah, Nnamani & Nduba, 2020). Despite this, the Nigeria public service has been woeful in service delivery leading to the unenviable state of underdevelopment in the country. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to understand and explore cum examine the place or role of impact evaluation on policy implementation in Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1 Policy

There are varied definitions of policy and they address it from different perspectives and with varying degrees of emphasis (Ikelegbe, 2006). Some emphasize policy as action, others see it as choice. Yet others see it in terms of the scope of choice. A policy is simply actions

taken or to be taken and actions not taken or not to be taken by government or private organizations. It is a statement of what an organization wants to do, what it is doing, what it is not doing and what would not be done. It specifies the line of action or proposed line of action in relation to certain problems and activities. It can also be regarded as general rules, regulations, guiding practices or actions and directives relating to particular public activities or problems (Ikelegbe, 2006). Policy also entails a definite course of action selected from among alternatives and in the light of given conditions to guide and usually determine present and future decisions.

The concept of policy is central to governments, private organizations and communities. Government commits much time, energy and resources to the development and implementation of policy. Public officials often spend much time in making policy statements, declaring policy intentions, outlining policies, allocating and committing huge sums of money to implementing them and explaining how actions fit into existing policies (Ikelegbe, 2006). Policy involves choice made from several alternatives; proposed courses of actions or projected set of decisions; goal oriented; deals with particular needs, problems or problem areas; and, provides a framework within which present and future actions are undertaken.

2.1.2 Public Policy

Differences abound in the definition of public policy, and it may simply be futile trying to discover which is correct or proper. One of the widely quoted, but simple definitions of public policy is that by (Dye 1975, p. 5), where he defines public policy as “what government chooses to do or not to do.” He went further to explain that: Government do many things. They regulate conflicts within society, they organize society to carry on conflicts with other societies, and they distribute a great variety of symbolic rewards and material services to members of the society and extracts money from the society, most at times in the form of taxes. Thus policies regulate behaviour, organize bureaucracies, distribute benefits and extract taxes or all of these at once.

One crucial point to note from the above conceptualization is the concepts of 'non decisions'. The reason is that a decision by government to ignore a problem, or make changes is in a sense a policy decision because it tends to favour the perpetuation of the status quo. Secondly, there may be a divergence between what governments decide to do and what they actually do. Public policy is a future oriented inquiry into the optimum means of achieving a given governmental objective. Thus it is a governmental programme found in a nations laws or in public statements by a functionary of government. Similarly, public policy is seen as government programme of action which stands for various degrees of goal articulation and normative

regulations of government activities, that is what government intends to do or achieve and how it intends to do it (Egonmwan, 2004). Chandler and Plano (1988) regards public policy as the strategic use of resources to alleviate national problems of governmental concerns. Furthermore, Robert and Clark (1982, p. 116) understands public policy as “series of steps taken by the government to solve problems, make decisions, allocate resources or values, implement policies and in general, to do the things expected of them by their constituencies.

For Sharkansky (1970), public policy refers to important activities of government. The reality however is that public policy embraces all governmental activities or outputs as it affects members of the society, and cannot be limited only to important activities of government. Public policy is also defined as a purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (Anderson, 1975). It is a series of goal-oriented actions taken by government actors (Leichter, 1979). Public policy also connotes official statements determining the plan of action or what the government wants to do. Whatever the for it takes, however, public policy is what public administrators execute.

The literature on public policy can basically be bisected into two broad streams. The first is an attempt to analyse the process of public policy making and implementation; its endeavour is descriptive rather than prescriptive. This can be categorized along six emphases; elitism, groups, systems, institutionalism, non-institutionalism, and organized anarchy, which falls under the descriptive orientation (Henry, 1999). On the other hand, the second stream attempts to analyse the outputs or effects of public policy. This involves an attempt to prescribe ways public policy is made. In this context, models of instrumentalism, rationalism and the strategic planning readily comes to mind, which are prescriptive based. In an ideal situation, the public policy making process is divided into different phases or stages, which rightly includes problem identification, policy initiation, deliberation and formulation, implementation and the policy evaluation stages accordingly.

The adopted policy is only a statement of intentions, expectations, goals, prescriptions, standards and requirements; it is basically a carefully drafted set of exhortations, directions and hopes. Therefore, most public policies require actions and enforcement mechanisms to make them effective. The special character of public policies stems from the fact that, they are basically formulated for the public by authorities. This implies that those persons, who engage in the daily affairs of a political system, are recognized by most members of the system as having responsibility for these matters and take decision that are accepted as binding (Anderson, 1975). The argument is that;

public policy has to do with actions taken by public authorities.

More so, due to the fact that, it is a product of governmental 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, defence, transportation, health care, education, welfare, etc. and expressions of public policy embraces laws, judicial decisions, executive orders and rules, government budgets, local ordinances, administrative decisions, 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 societal problems, particularly those considered to require public or collective action. Again public policies can be categorized as being distributive, redistributive, regulatory and constituent respectively in accordance with the purpose they are created to serve in the society.

2.1.3 Policy Analysis

Policy analysis is concerned with the idea that there should be identifiable objectives and attention should be paid to whether those objectives are achieved. While policy analysis is similar to a broadly conceived version of systems analysis, Dror (1968) pointed out the boundary that separates a narrow study from one with large policy concern. According to him, in policy analysis:

1. Much attention should be paid to the political implications of public decisions and policy instead of ignoring or paying little emphasis to such political considerations as representatives.
2. A broad conception of decision making would be involved instead of viewing all decision making as mainly a process of resource allocation.
3. Emphasis should be placed on creativity and search for new policy alternative with explicit attention to the encouragement of innovative thinking.
4. There should be extensive reliance on quantitative methods.
5. Emphasis should also be placed on futuristic thinking.
6. The approach should be less rigid but none the less systematic in which one would recognize a complexity of means/ends interdependence, a multiplicity of relevant criteria of decision and the partial and tentative nature of every analysis.

Policy analysis therefore aims at providing information that will contribute in making an agency politically and socially relevant (Abah, 2012). Egonmwan in Okeke (2001, pp. 31-32) explains the concept of policy analysis within the framework of behavioural and normative models. According to him, the behavioural model of policy

analysis involves a systematic investigation of a particular policy area without either approving or disapproving of such policy. Impliedly, it is the description, analysis and explanation of causes and consequences of public policy on the society through the use of scientific standards of inference, mainly to increase knowledge about the policy area of concern and to promote scientific scholarship. The behavioural model has been criticised for being of little or no direct relevance to administrative practice. However, it can contribute to the awareness of conditions likely to be present in governmental and administrative contexts and which may exert a powerful influence on available policy options.

The normative model conceptualises policy analysis in the context of a study as a prelude to policy decision making. Such a study is geared towards the solution of a practical problem of the society and it is future oriented. The approach is analytical and prescriptive. It aims at the improvement of the society through social engineering in terms of improvement in the quality of policy decision making by using such instruments as systematic learning, sensitivity, creativity, innovation, explicit appreciation of the role of extra-rational variables like intuition, tacit knowledge, experience and haunches in policy decision making as well as adaptation including organisational change, all intended to make those who govern to govern better.

Policies are goals, objectives and missions that guide the agency while analysis evaluates and seeks alternative means and ends in the intricate pursuit of policy recommendations. By attempting to come out of the wood of day to day administration, policy analysis seeks knowledge and opportunities for coping with an uncertain future. Because policy analysis is not concerned with protecting the status quo but with proffering alternatives for improvement, it should be seen as a variant of planning. Complementing the agency's decision process, policy analysis is a tool of social change. Policy analysis is expensive in time, talent and money. It requires a high degree of creativity in order to imagine new policies and to test them without requiring actual experience.

Policy analysis calls for the creation of systems in which the elements are linked to one another and to the operational indications so that costs and effectiveness of alternatives can be systematically compared. Policy analysis is facilitated when:

- i. Goals are easily specified
- ii. A large margin of error is allowable, and
- iii. A cost for contemplating policy alternatives makes large expenditure on analysis worthwhile.

2.1.4 Public Policy Implementation

Public policy implementation is the act and process of converting a policy into reality or simply enforcing the policy. That is, it is the process of translating policy mandates into actions, and policy goals into reality. It refers to the actions taken to accomplish the intents, objectives and desired outcomes of a policy. The implementation process consists of the implementing organs, the socio-political and economic environment, the policy target group, the policy objectives, the enumerated methods of implementation and the policy resources (Sharkansky & Meter 1975).

It hopes that “by concentrating on the implementation of program, as well as the initiation, we should be able to increase the probability that policy promises will be realized” (Pressman & Wildavsky 1984, p. 7). Paradoxically, implementation is in many ways a slippery subject. This stems from the fact that, vague and contradictory policies are difficult to implement. Furthermore, the issue of where implementation starts from and where it ends is not a settled matter (Ingram, 1992). Though, it is commonly seen as a stage. Schneider (1986) suggests that implementation is 'after the adoption of a policy and before the reutilization of operations, activities, and tasks that are governed by the policy'. It appeals to democratic instincts to mark the start of implementation following the completion of policy making (Ingram, 1992). Browne and Wildavsky (1984) view implementation as a process of mutual adaptation in which policies and program adapt to their environment and each alter the other.

By and large, a number of factors adversely affect implementation. Pressman and Wildavsky, (1984) considers law and multiplicity of decision points. Van Meter and Van Horn, (1975) went beyond structural issues that dominated federalism to uncover the policy relationships; inter-organizational communication and enforcement activities related to policy, and McLaughlin (1976) mentioned the implementor closest to the action and the immediate environment. Yet, Bardach (1977) stresses the external monitoring of the implementation process.

2.1.5 Policy Impact

Policy impact refers to the consequences of public policy on the environment. According to Dye (2004) policy impact refers to the effect of a policy on real world conditions. This definition broadly encompasses all effects or consequences on every facet of the society. These include; the impact on the target situation or group; the impact on situations or groups other than the target group or situation and the impact on future as well as immediate conditions. Dye's conception is broad because all policies have varied effects, which could be direct or indirect and intended or unintended on various segments of the population and society. The impact on the target group is however the major preoccupation because it is the concern of the programme

objectives. Thus, the key question in impact analysis is whether the policy achieved desired objectives or simply, whether there are measurable changes in the social or physical environment that was intended by the policy (Ikelegbe, 2006).

The impact of a policy may be primary or secondary, direct or indirect, internal or external, immediate or futuristic, negative or positive, intended or unintended and tangible or symbolic. Primary impact refers to directly measurable effects or changes resulting from programme activity. Secondary impacts are effects that are not immediately evident, but are possibly the results of programme activity. Impact may also be in a time perspective, in terms of short term or long term, immediate or future oriented. Often times, immediate impact may be positive, but long term effects may be negative. The nature of long term impacts tends to depend on proper planning, design and steering of programmes. Programmes with immediate impact tend to be more attractive to political leaders to whom immediate results for actions is a considerable asset, because of the consequences for followership, support and political tenure.

Effects may be so broad and diffused among various groups and environments that are external to the policy's immediate environment and situations. Against this backdrop, ripples of a policy activity may affect considerably large external environments. Such impact on situations, groups and environments, for which the programme was not targeted, directed and intentioned, could be referred to as external or spillover effects. Those effects on intended or targeted environments, groups and situations are internal impacts. Sometimes external impact may be more pronounced and positive. This may be a consequence of spillover effects or the misdirection of implementation to wrong goals and situations.

The impact of a policy may be tangible and measurable. Policies for example may be intended to cause real changes or material allocation of benefits. Policies may also only have non tangible impact because they were so intended. Thus, real actions may not have been taken to execute them. Symbolic impacts may be statements of actions intended to demonstrate care and concern of government and to cause positive effects in orientations, attitudes, virtues and values. They may just be affirmations of values, aspirations and hopes, or just acknowledgements of problems, activities and achievements. Actions such as speeches, rhetorics, parades and visits may not achieve tangible effects but may give psychological satisfaction, or heighten the sense of self-worth, achievement and acceptance.

Impact may also be intended and unintended. Intended impact is effect on the intended or desired policy

problem, situation and population. Unintended consequences are those that were not desired or not among policy intentions and objectives. Most public policies have some unintended effects and some may even have largely unintended effects. There are several reasons why intended or desired impact may not be achieved. The direction and purpose of the policy may have changed or have been changed at the implementing stage. There might be so many events and changes external to the programme which may have intervened to abort intended impact. Impact may be positive or negative, depending on the nature of consequences for the environment. Negative impacts are costs to the policy and its target group, while positive impacts are benefits. Cost could be in the form of inconveniences, dislocations, losses or other negative social, economic and political effects generated by a policy.

The determination of the impact of public policy is often difficult, largely because of the possibilities of long range, diffused, subtle and indirect effects. It however involves the identification and determination of the exact problem or situation which the policy was designed to resolve, the identification of the target groups that the policy was directed at and the determination of the desired effects and exact nature of changes desired. It also involves the determination of effects through data gathering and analysis and the establishment of some criteria, which relate effects to policy problem, targets and desired changes (Ikelegbe, 2006).

3. THE ROLE OF IMPACT EVALUATION ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA

Impact evaluation's role pertains to all aspects of governmental programmes. However, the role of impact evaluation can be more appreciated when examined appropriately in terms of its overall contributions to policy development, implementation and performance. Impact evaluation is a tool for improving policy making. It utilizes rigorous scientific methods or procedures to identify whether a policy or project has achieved the desired change that it set to achieve. This research method allows policy makers to take evidence-based decisions on how to scale up a program, and can also allow changes to be made during the implementation of a policy or programme, based on evidence collected during policy implementation. The major aim of impact evaluation is to determine the impact of the policies and provide required feedback to the policy framers and implementers for ushering improvements in the policy already made or in its executing mechanism.

Impact evaluation performs several functions in policy analysis, it provides reliable information about policy performance. The objective of evaluation here is to measure the impact of policies on society. It reveals the goal achievement level and helps to understand the degree to

which policy issues have been resolved. Impact evaluation often serve an accountability purpose to determine if and how well a programme worked. Impact evaluation can also help answer programme design questions to determine which, among several alternatives, is the most effective approach.

Impact evaluation also helps to clarify the values that underline the selection of goals and objectives. Since appropriateness of policy goals and objectives can be questioned in relation to the problem being addressed, impact evaluation provides procedures for valuing the goals and objectives on its own. Impact evaluation may also result in efforts to restructure policy problems. It also contributes to the emergence of new objectives and potential solutions. Impact evaluation is primarily an effort to analyse policy out comes in terms of some sets of objectives.

Furthermore, impact evaluation helps policy makers to gain the confidence to make changes, communicate the potential impact of the changes and implement policies. Impact evaluation is used to access how intervention projects are able to affect development agencies and institutions to accountably evaluate development programme outcomes and assess their impact on people's lives. It helps to identify the most effective alternatives and can therefore be used to allocate scarce resources towards their most effective use. It uses research methods which allow evaluators to separate the causal impact of a specific project or intervention from changes in outcomes due to other factors. It is a powerful tool not only to measure the true impact of policies, but also to understand how and why, perhaps even more importantly, how to make them work better.

Impact evaluation is a major panacea for performance failures of organizations and programmes. In fact, the growth of impact evaluation in the United States for example arose out of the gross failures of the mass social welfare programmes of the Johnson administration and post Johnson era (Ikelegbe, 2006). Today, impact evaluation is a requirement and an institutionalized aspect of many large public programmes in the advanced states. The woeful performance of the Nigeria public service institutions and programmes demand an institutionalization of impact evaluation in the public sector. Besides, in the situation of scarce resources (especially with dwindling revenue consequent upon the impact of the corona virus pandemic and worsened by a mono-cultural economy, i.e. dependent or relying heavily on oil alone), poor services and gross competition by various services and sectors for the allocation of scarce resources, the efforts of the Nigerian government should be directed at ensuring performance and a good worth for monies invested. A good strategy for this is impact evaluation.

Given the current state of underdevelopment in Nigeria despite infinite number of public policies made to redirect her to a better state, it becomes quite imperative for public policies to undergo impact evaluation in order to access as well as understand whether the policies are having the intended effects as well as gauge its unintended effects. Impact evaluation therefore is very significant and relevant in policy processes in Nigeria as it will:

- Inform policy makers about potential economic, social and environmental ramifications of policies.
- Improve transparency so that contributions to sustainability and better regulations are disclosed and special interest lobbying is discouraged.
- Increase public participation in order to reflect a range of considerations, thereby improving the legitimacy of policies.
- Clarify how public policy helps achieve its goals and priorities through policy indicators.

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- Contribute to continuous learning in policy development by identifying causalities that inform ex-post review of policies.

4. CONCLUSION

Impact evaluation plays a significant role in policy implementation. Impact evaluation is a sine-qua-non for effective and efficient public policy implementation. It serves as a performance measurement mechanism, as a way of coming to terms with the intended and unintended policy impact. Furthermore, it serves as checks and balances on public policies, and provides direction and innovative focus for public policies. Impact evaluations can provide unique information on the efficacy and value of social programmes. Judicious use can help in the formulation of sound social policy and expand the state of knowledge about what helps the poor and vulnerable as well as improve on the current state of development in the country.