



GOVERNANCE DEFICIT, PUBLIC POLICY, AND THE CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

To achieve the quality of governance, there must be synergy between the government and its civil service. The former will be making policies and the latter will interpret them for implementation. However, there has been a gap between policy-making and policy implementation, which has continued to culminate in policy summersault, hence the deficit in governance. Given the foregoing, the study examines the place of civil servants in policy formulation and implementation; analyses the nexus between public policy and quality of governance, and identifies challenges hindering civil servants from effectively implementing government policies. The study relies on the authors' observation of governance events in Nigeria, and secondary data including textbooks, journals, official government documents, newspapers, and internet sources. The study data were analyzed using content analysis. On the place of civil servants in policy formulation and implementation, the study showed that civil servants provide policy advisory roles; give rational solutions to policy problems; offer advice to policymakers, and mediate between different interest groups and politicians. Concerning the nexus between policy-making and the quality of governance, the study revealed that good policies propel the quality of governance, as such, they help make the governance system more accountable and reasonable for the citizens. The study identified the challenges impeding the civil service from effectively implementing governmental policies including the non/low involvement of the civil servants in the policy planning process; the practice of making gains from the budget for social services; over-ambitious public policies and programmes; and inadequate/insufficient resources, among others. The study concluded that, as far, as the government and the civil service are not on the same page, concerning policy-making and policy implementation, the governance deficit will continue to subsist.

Keywords: Governance Deficit; Public Administration; Civil Service, Institutionalised Corruption; and Accountability

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1. Introduction

One of the key challenges to effective governance in the developing world is the lack of the ability of political leaders in governments to pursue comprehensive policies and programmes for the development of their countries. Whereas, public administration as a discipline has not only thrown light on the governmental processes but also made the government accessible to the populace. In other words, public administration concern is the management of public policies and programmes, as well as the effective execution of these programmes and policies for the benefit of society (University of Pittsburgh, n.d.). Public administration has also emphasized the expected roles of political leadership, in the governance of a country, especially in the areas of serving and caring for society for the advancement of the common good and positive change in society (Longley, 2022).

As plausible as the aforementioned in respect of, public administration, it amounted to nothing without involving civil servants (public administrators) in planning governmental policies and programmes. In other words, the realization of the above depends largely on the involvement of public administrators in governmental policies and programmes. Suffice it to say, that public administrators are the agents of governance, given their roles as interpreters and implementers of governmental policies. Public administration professionals could be seen working at different levels of government be it, the local, state, or federal level of government, with the responsibilities of determining the policies and programmes of governments for the development of society and the benefit of the populace. Their works, thus, cover - planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, controlling governance, and administrative activities of the society among others.

The foregoing notwithstanding, public administrators have been facing various challenges in performing some of their statutory responsibilities that could aid good governance, especially in the areas of interpreting and implementing governmental policies and programmes, to bring about social services delivery and socio-economic development of the country. Without these actions from the administrators, public policy will remain a proposed course of action, or the government intends action. The fact that public policies and programmes are designed to solve the perceived problems of the public and the need for the government to solve the problems of the people necessitate the working together of the government and its public administrators (Inakefe, et al.; 2021). In essence, whether the government will be termed good or bad will largely depend on the quality of its policies and programmes, how administrators execute these policies and programmes, and how effective the policies and programmes are in terms of the benefit accrued to the

public. Thus, the efficiency of administrators, in this regard, could be measured by their input, to policy decisions of the government, the best way to tackle the existing challenges, as well as, likely challenges in the future. However, public administrators' efficiency is always inhibited by their exclusion from the planning and formulation of policies and programmes of the government, while the government expects them to implement those policies and programmes effectively. The practice has continued to constitute a cog in the wheel of national development. Ordinarily one should have expected that when public policies and programmes are formulated, the formulators should be able to provide the details on how the policies and programmes will be implemented. However, many of the so-called decision makers or decision formulators are not well grounded in the areas of policy decision-making, they are only making decisions by virtue of their political offices, and thus, force their already made decisions on the public administrators to "perform the miracle" of implementing the policy they do not contribute to. Therefore, there should be synergy, between the government and the civil service of the country, for the quality of governance to be achieved. The synergy between the duo is essential, in that, the former will be making policies, which the latter will interpret, for implementation. However, there has been a gap between policy-making and policy implementation, which has continued to culminate in policy summersault, hence the deficit in governance.

Given the foregoing, the study examines the place of civil servants in policy formulation and implementation; analyses the nexus between public policy and quality of governance, and identifies challenges hindering civil servants from appropriately implementing government policies.

2. The Place of Civil Servants in Policy Formulation and Implementation

The participation of civil servants in the policy process of a country cannot be overemphasized; it has been studied for a long (see Lindblom, 1959), and the study of the subject is continuous. As such, different scholars from diverse perspectives, and backgrounds have continued to put forward their views concerning the subject. Civil service could be seen as the body of government officials employed in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial (Chapman, et al.; 2024). In other words, the civil service is a body of permanent officials employed to assist the political executive in formulating and implementing the policies and programmes of government.

The civil service is, therefore, an important government agent with specific roles in planning or preparing the ground for the process of making governmental policies. In essence, any effective policy must be adequately planned, while civil service is at the core of policy planning. Planning starts with the gathering of relevant data or information. This is because the quality of data or information gathered will go a long way in determining the quality of the government's policies (Anyanwu, et al.; 2011). Since it is only the civil servants that keep records, they are, therefore, indispensable in the area of supplying the data and information needed for quality policies of the government. Hence, their exclusion from policy-making processes can be counterproductive.

According to Salisu (2009), one of the continuing challenges of governments, especially of developing countries, has been how to bring about an improvement to the service delivery of their countries for the benefit of the citizenry. To achieve this, one important instrument of governance that cannot be isolated is the civil service. The civil servants (public administrators) can facilitate the creation, delivery, and sustenance of essential public services. Civil servants are, therefore, a key factor in the processes of policy formulation and execution, and through them, essential services for the people are provided.

A typical government has different responsibilities that it must fulfill, from effective management of public finances to putting in place essential public services, among others. Given that, the civil service comprises different professionals who work in different sectors of government and help the government in running the governance and administrative affairs of the country, the government has to involve them in pursuing its developmental programmes. Civil service, therefore, assists in the delivery of public services, as well as supports the government's policies. They, also offer advice and support to commissioners/ministers and other government officials in carrying out their official responsibilities (Free Balance, 2022).

Civil service involvement in policymaking processes is in line with the features of democracy, and its involvement can also contribute immensely to good public policy. Civil servants play a crucial role in mediation between different interest groups and politicians, both of whom push their agenda without considering either the problem frames or policy options. They are expected to be impartial, and in their impartiality, they can handle the businesses and activities of the government more effectively and efficiently. They do this by rendering advice to political officeholders based on their accumulated experience in the services of government more than any other stakeholders, this further makes them vital in the areas of policy formulation and implementation (Aubin, et al.; 2018).

Governments across the globe, Nigeria inclusive carry the burden of economic and socio-political development (Ola, 1990). And Nigeria, being a heterogenous environment has greater challenges of development and rationale for the allocation of its resources. The citizens see the civil service as an organ in charge of implementing development goals and administering government policies. They expected the civil service to play its role in formulating development strategies, via governmental policies and programmes to stimulate social and economic changes, manifesting in employment generation, improved standard of living, and other social services. Thus, the civil service's place in Nigeria's socio-economic and political development cannot be overemphasized. The Nigerian government for long, has been striving to be an instrument of change, vis-a-vis assumed responsibility for funding education, generating employment, and providing social infrastructure, among others. The government can only rely on the assistance and cooperation of the civil service to perform some of these laudable tasks (Ezeani, 2005).

However, the failure of successive governments to develop the country, and solve the socio-economic and other problems confronting the people, has been partly attributed to the civil service unethical practices in public offices. In essence, the poor governance system offered by successive governments of Nigeria was a result of the Nigerian "civil service that has, over time, lost its inherited commitment to political neutrality, professionalism, and a developmental meritocratic ethos" (Olowu et al.; 1997: 1). This perhaps explains why the civil servants in Nigeria, despite their essentiality, are always neglected when it comes to the policymaking processes. The poor attitude of the civil servants to work and their general misconduct have continued to limit the quality of services rendered by the Nigerian civil service to the people. The rules and regulations guiding the civil service works are no longer observed, consequently, the civil service of Nigeria has lost its image and productivity. The scenario is aptly captured by Okpata, who states thus

The Nigerian Civil service today is a battered institution that has virtually lost its attributes of anonymity, neutrality, and security of tenure, an institution in which morality has reached its nadir, in which excessive caution, undue bureaucratic practices, corruption, and interminable delays have become the hallmarks (Okpata, 2014, p. 19).

Be as it may, the civil service's place in the policymaking processes cannot be undermined, as it remains the engine room for the implementation of government policies and programmes, and as such, the government cannot do away with the civil service.

3. The Nexus Between Public Policy and Quality of Governance

Public policies are made to solve problems of the public and, it is as old as governments. Be it in oligarchy, monarchical, aristocratic, tyrannical, democratic, or any other form of government, one common thing is governmental policy. In whatever form the government may be, in as much it exists, it means the public policy is being formulated and implemented (eGyanKosh, n.d.). In essence, public policy has to do with government actions toward solving the problems confronting its citizens. Public policies are actions considered and implemented to combat issues that are troubling the people and society. Policymaking, however, is the procedure by which government translates its political vision into actions and programmes to bring about societal changes (USAID/Iraq, 1999).

Given the above, planning and implementing public policy is one of the major parts of governmental activities. Making policies is, however, not exclusively the business of the government, but that of the citizens as a whole, and other institutions and organizations within the country. Involving the citizens and other stakeholders in the policy processes is the only means through which the people can have a say in a matter that has to do with their welfare (Unacademy, 2024). Pointing out the importance of involving the citizens in policymaking processes, UNDP states:

Unless people can participate meaningfully in the events and processes that shape their lives, national human development paths will be neither desirable nor sustainable. People should be able to influence policymaking and results – and young people in particular should be able to look forward to greater economic opportunities and political participation and accountability (UNDP, 2013, p. 6).

In supporting the above, Adeyeye (2022) avers that public policy and its processes are essential aspects of government, and as such, the government depends on good policy decisions to provide social amenities and enhance better living conditions for the populace.

Public policy has been a consistent driver of public governance and a propeller of national development. Nevertheless, the type and application of policies, on the one hand, will determine whether the governance system will be good or bad. On the other hand, only good governance can develop good policies. Thus, a good policy coupled with effective public governance can easily transform the nation's economy or bring about a stronger economy. This can consequently, lead to an improved standard of living of the citizens (Adegbami & Uche, 2016; Adegbami & Adepoju, 2017). In essence, the capacity of the government to develop and apply public policies that are all-inclusive and participatory will go a long way toward motivating the citizens to freely engage in socio-economic and political activities, by contributing their quotas for the realization of good governance (Sharma, Sadana & Kaur, 2013).

Mills (2014) pinpointed the significance of public policy, and why it has not been able to aid development in many African countries. According to him, many African

countries are poor by choice. They are poor, due to their political leaders' weaknesses in public policy processes which result in poor public policy processes. African countries are also guilty of policy inconsistencies, and undue influence on policies of governments by the political actors. This has continued to negatively impact the quality of public policies and their implementation with the attendant effects on the general development of the state.

Whatever the case may be, the government remains a major stakeholder in policy making, and so, decides how the policy should be. In other words, a policy decision is always the perception of the ruling government. A typical decision is always expected to be for the peace and development of the generality, suffice it to say, that public policy is tied to good governance. This is because the realization of nation-building is one of the key objectives of public policy, and only well-implemented quality public policies are conditions for national development, vis-à-vis the provision of social services, reduction in the poverty rate, decrease in the unemployment rate, and redressing of income inequality among others (Adhikari, 2020).

4. Why Civil Servants Cannot Effectively Implement Governmental Policies?

Making policy for the public is traditionally seen as an exclusive function of government. For over a decade now; several efforts to improve policymaking have been made, especially, since civil servants, politicians, and academics continue to express concerns about how policy is made and its potency to meet different challenges of the people and the society. The concerns expressed above are not out of place, because "the strength of policymaking is integral to the strength of government as a whole, and that of the country at large" (Hallsworth, Parker & Rutter, 2011, p. 4), so, whenever policies fail, the costs could be immeasurable on the people and society.

Even the best-designed policy will fail if the government machinery does not enable the translation of policy decisions into action. Governments are, therefore, expected to develop and deploy tools and practices strategically to enhance the quality, and effect of policies and services (OECD, 2020). This is to prevent the civil service from having problems while implementing public policies because, whenever a country's civil service faces difficulties in implementing public policies, people will not get better public services.

Given the above, this section attempts to discuss, some of the challenges hindering the appropriate implementation policies of government by the civil service. The challenges include, but are not limited to the following:

4.1. Non/Low Involvement of the Civil Servants in the Policy Planning Process

The challenges limiting the civil service from appropriately implementing government policies commence at the conception stage of public policy. On different occasions, the civil servants (public administrators), are not well involved in the planning process of the policy. The civil servants are believed to be closer and relate with people from time to time than the executive, and so, can identify some of their problems which policies are to be made to solve. The non-involvement of the civil service at this critical stage has remained a challenge inhibiting them from implementing the policies effectively. It is assumed that any policy made without the suggestions and contributions of the civil servants is a policy forced on them, and there is the likelihood they may not well understand the policy, thereby, limiting the level at which the policies can be implemented.

4.2. The Practice of Making Gains from the Budget for Social Services

In Nigeria, most of the policies are subordinated to the personal gains of the political officeholders and their cliques. As such, policies are made most of the time to compensate the political leaders and their cronies. Thus, a policy is often judged based on its political merits rather than the development for people's benefit. The political actors in Nigeria, any day and anytime, see their involvement in the politics of Nigeria as an investment that must yield a huge return. Beyond this is their belief that the country is their private business and they have the power to run it anyhow. This explains why, most of the time, policies made by the political actors are anti-people. These policies usually lack well-defined goals and targets and are difficult to implement.

Similarly, whenever a budget is made for social services, the politicians who head the ministries/departments/units outsmart the public administrators or sometimes in conjunction with the administrators divert the money budgeted for public goods. For instance, in January 2024, Nigeria's president suspended the country's Minister of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation Mrs. Betta Edu over cases of corruption. It was alleged that the Minister used a private bank account to make financial transactions on behalf of the ministry under the social welfare programmes. Betta Edu's malpractice was revealed following a leaked memo through which she directed the Accountant-General of the Federation, to transfer the sum of N585m to a private account belonging to one Oniyelu Bridget (Sanusi, 2024). This was not the first time that this type of anomaly has been committed in the Ministry. Mrs. Edu's predecessor, Mrs. Sadiya Umar-Farouq has also been interrogated; by the country's anti-corruption agency for allegedly misappropriating the sum of N37.1bn during her tenure in office (Agbo, 2024).

In a similar vein, the National Coordinator of the National Social Investment Programmes Agency (NSIPA), Ms. Halima Shehu has equally been quizzed over alleged scandals in the ministry. She was arrested and interrogated, by the anti-corruption agency in connection with the movement of a huge sum of N44bn from

the NSIPA account to private accounts within the last four days in December 2023 (Abe, 2024).

4.3. Over-Ambitious Public Policies and Programmes

Over-ambitious policies and programmes for development also create hindrances for public administrators. While having an ambition concerning the project for development is not bad, however, being too ambitious can cause policy abandonment at some point. Some of the successive governments of Nigeria are fond of formulating over-ambitious policies and programmes, most of which are not borne out of a genuine effort to transform national development but to play politics and boost the egos of the political officeholders. Some of these policies from the point of making them have appeared unrealizable. Such policies include housing for all, free education for all, free health services for all, and total eradication of poverty, among others; most of which lack clear-cut direction. In many instances, there are inadequate resources, especially human resources, to handle some of these public policies. The financial resources available too, may not be able to handle some of these policy projects, when this happens, the public administrators are, thus, inhibited considerably from implementing such public policies.

4.4. Inadequate/Insufficient Resources

Many units and departments within the civil service of Nigeria that are saddled with the responsibility of implementing public policies are without the required resources, especially, human and financial resources, and so, they cannot effectively implement the policies made. In many civil service units and departments there are inadequate staff. Their inadequateness, sometimes is in the areas of having the required technical, managerial, and other professionals to handle the policy implementation. The composition of government bureaucracy as concerned the expertise and skill goes a long way to determine whether public policy will be effectively implemented or not (Ikelegbe, 1996). As such, when there are competent hands, policies can be conveniently formulated and effectively implemented.

Similarly, any policy that has been effectively communicated is equally expected to be sufficiently backed up with financial resources. Put differently, after implementation orders or instructions are well-defined and perfectly transmitted, adequate funds must be made available, this is because insufficient funding of policy will result in implementation difficulties. It is to this extent that Bhayani (2024) states that the failure to allocate adequate resources, especially funding has become a common pitfall in policy implementation.

4.5. Change in Government

This has also been found to be hampering the implementation of public policy by the civil service. In Nigeria, anytime there is a change in government, the new government in their bid to promote themselves and their political party suppresses

the existing policy programmes of the former administration. Since the target of the new government is to block out the achievements of the former administration, they will stop at nothing to achieve that. One of the steps is to direct the civil service from the continued implementation of policy programmes of the past administration. Complying with the directives issued by the new government means that the policy programmes of the past administration should be stopped, it does not matter, whether the said public policies are laudable or not. In essence, the policies of previous administrations are hardly pursued by the succeeding ones. This practice partly explains why little or no attention is paid to the issue of maintenance of projects or programmes created or initiated by preceding regimes (Ugwuanyi & Chukwuemeka, 2013).

4.6. Poor or Ineffective Communication

Effective communication is one of the key requirements for proper implementation of policy, however, it could also inhibit policy implementation if not taken into account. Effective communication is very critical in supporting the design and delivery of policies and services. Effective communication, besides assisting in creating awareness, is also essential for enforcing compliance and behaviour change resulting from policy implementation (OECD, 2021). Thus, it is through communication that the strategies and approaches to policy implementation are transmitted to the appropriate units of the civil service. In other words, inadequate communication or ambiguous information can breed misperceptions or misunderstandings. And when such happens, the implementors of policies may get confused about what is required of them, and how to go about it. To that extent, implementation directives, beyond transmission must not be vague and distorted but must be clear and consistent. In essence, efficient and effective policy communication will help the implementors to understand, and be able to; implement the policy (Knowledge Sector Initiative, 2021). Anything outside the foregoing; can cause serious impediments to policy implementation. ;

4.7. The Disposition or Attitude of Public Administrators

This is another factor that hinders the effective implementation of public policy. The way most public administrators exercise their implementation discretion largely depends on their disposition toward the policy. In essence, the level of success of public policy depends on how public administrators conceive the policies as affecting the public and their interests. For instance, when a particular policy is conceived as non-beneficial to them, in their capacities as public administrators and a key implementor of the policy, their attitude or disposition to such policy may not be encouraging. When such happens, it will adversely affect the proper implementation of the policy. However, if a particular policy is considered beneficial to public administrators, such policy will receive special attention and as such, be implemented to the letter (Makinde, 2005).

4.8. Inefficient or Poor Bureaucratic Structure

Inefficient or poor bureaucratic structure can impede the effective implementation of public policy. Implementation of policy can be problematic when dealing with multiple and complex policies. The bureaucrats are the people expected to be employed based on merit and competence; and are saddled with the responsibilities of advising the political officeholders, as well as, to implement policies formulated by the government. However, when the recruitment processes of the bureaucrats are faulty, it affects their performance. As such, factors such as politicization of recruitment/appointment, undue political interference and disagreement between the political and administrative class, and inadequateness of required skills account for the poor performance of the Nigerian bureaucracy. and as such, hamper the needed coordination necessary for the successful implementation of multiple and complex policies, particularly those policies that require the cooperation of different units of the country's bureaucracy.

4.9. The Social, Political, Economic, Religious, and Cultural Environment

Another factor that hinders public administrators from effectively implementing public policies is their failure to take into account the social, political, economic, and cultural environment when putting up a particular policy. Policy implementors in a Muslim-dominated community may face some challenges if they are to implement a policy that contradicts or is against the practice and tenets of Islam. Similarly, in a situation where the party that controls the state is different from that of the federal level, a policy that is differently run, from the manifesto of the government at the state level is likely to suffer at the implementation stage. This is because the government, at the state level and its civil service may not give its logistics support to this policy. In addition, failure to consider the economic status and viability of the government may also hinder the implementation of public policy by public administrators. No matter how laudable a policy may be when it is not supported financially such a policy will suffer implementation problems. The ongoing project may have to stop if enough money is not available to complete it.

In the areas of culture, a policy may face stiff resistance from the people if it contradicts their culture. When it comes to policymaking and implementation, culture plays an important role. Culture gives a comprehensive knowledge and awareness of societal influences, on behaviour; which goes beyond economic maximization, as well as, offers insights and opportunities for policy action. Therefore, culture can influence policy-making and implementation; as such; it should be carefully considered to achieve effective implementation of policy (Makinde, 2005).

In essence, for some time now, the relationship between civil servants when it comes to the making of public policies has not been mutual or cordial. Politicians normally consider the policy-making activities and the government as theirs, and that they have the people's mandates to rule. And so, they are the ones to decide what to do,

or not to do. Lending credence to this is Kenneth Clarke (a British politician who served his country in the capacity of; Home Secretary from 1992 to 1993) while giving evidence in the United Kingdom Parliament. According to him:

The relationship between the politicians and the civil servants has changed very badly...I think the Civil Service has lost its policy role. ...Unfortunately, I think, far too often policies are produced instantly in response to media and public pressures without the people who are going to be in the department involved in the delivery of it having a proper opportunity to advise, even knowing entirely what is going on, and certainly not being given long enough to formulate both the policy and the legislation in line with their political masters' wishes (Clarke, in Parliament UK, 2008, Q. 135).

5. Concluding Remarks

The act of policymaking has traditionally been considered an exclusive function of government, for over a decade now; several efforts at improving policymaking have been made, while concerns regarding the potency of policies at meeting various challenges of the people and the society have been expressed. Making comprehensive policies for development has continued to be the bane to effective governance in Nigeria. The non or low inclusion of civil servants, in the planning of government policies even whittles down the implementation of a few policies made for development. Even though; civil servants are expected to interpret, implement governmental policies, and perform other statutory functions, they cannot do so because of their exclusion, from policy decision-making.

In Nigeria, it is obvious; that many of the so-called decision makers or decision formulators are not well grounded in policy decision-making. They are only engaging in, decision-making because of their political offices and, afterward, force these decisions on the public administrators to “perform the miracle” of implementation. This practice has continued to constitute a cog in the wheel of national development.

Therefore, the challenges impeding the civil service from effectively implementing policies of government include the non/low involvement of the civil servants in the policy planning process; the practice of making gains from the budget for social services; over-ambitious public policies and programmes; and inadequate/insufficient resources. Other challenges include change in government; poor or ineffective communication; the disposition or attitude of public administrators; inefficient or poor bureaucratic structure, as well as; the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural environment.

The study concluded that be as it may, the civil service's place in the policymaking processes cannot be undermined, as it remains the engine room for the implementation of government policies and programmes, and as such, the

government cannot do away with its civil service. And as far, as the government and the civil service are not on the same page, concerning policy-making and policy implementation, the governance deficit will continue to subsist.

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