

Problems of Policy Implementation in Developing Nations: The Nigerian Experience

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ABSTRACT The paper attempted to identify and proffer possible solutions to the various problems facing developing nations as regards implementation of policies. Apart from discussing the general overview of policy implementation problems in both developed and developing nations, focus was on Nigeria while a great number of examples were taken from the Nigerian experience. The Better Life Programme (BLP) and the Family Support Programme (FSP) embarked upon by Nigeria's successive First Ladies between 1983 and 1998 (Mrs. Maryam Babangida and Mrs. Maryam Abacha respectively) were highlighted for empirical studies. Some implementation problems identified in the study include corruption, lack of continuity in government policies, inadequate human and material resources, all of which often lead to implementation gap, i.e. the widening of the distance between stated policy goals and the realization of such planned goals. The study concluded that it is apparent that policies are rolled out regularly in developing nations but, most of the time, without achieving the desired results.

INTRODUCTION

It has been observed that policy implementation is one of the major problems confronting developing nations. The focus of this paper will be on Nigeria, which happens to be one of the developing nations. According to Adamolekun (1983), policy implementation refers to the activities that are carried out in the light of established policies. It refers to the process of converting financial, material, technical and human inputs into outputs – goods and services (Egonmwan, 1991). Edwards (1980) defines policy implementation as a stage of policy making between the establishment of a policy (such as the passage of a legislative act, the issuing of an executive order, or the promulgation of a regulatory rule) and the consequences of the policy for the people whom it affects. It also involves a wide variety of actions such as issuing and enforcing directives, disbursing funds, making loans, assigning and hiring personnel, etc.

Implementation problem occurs when the desired result on the target beneficiaries is not achieved. Such problem is not restricted to only the developing nations. Wherever and whenever the basic critical factors that are very crucial to implementing public policy are missing, whether in developing or developed nations, there is bound to be implementation problem. These critical factors are communication, resources, dispositions or attitudes, and bureaucratic struc-

ture (Edwards III, 1980). The four factors operate simultaneously and they interact with each other to aid or hinder policy implementation. By implication, therefore, the implementation of every policy is a dynamic process, which involves the interaction of many variables as would be discussed below.

Communication is an essential ingredient for effective implementation of public policy. Through communication, orders to implement policies are expected to be transmitted to the appropriate personnel in a clear manner while such orders must be accurate and consistent. Inadequate information can lead to a misunderstanding on the part of the implementors who may be confused as to what exactly are required of them. In effect, implementation instructions that are not transmitted, that are distorted in transmission, that are vague, or that are inconsistent may cause serious obstacles to policy implementation. Conversely, directives that are too precise may hinder implementation by stifling creativity and adaptability (Edward III, 1980). Such precise directives do not leave room for implementors to exercise discretion and flexibility where and when the need arises.

Where implementation orders are clear, consistent and accurately transmitted, the absence of adequate resources will result in implementation problems. Resources include both the human and material such as adequate number of staff who are well equipped to carry out the

implementation, relevant and adequate information on implementation process, the authority to ensure that policies are carried out as they are intended, and facilities such as land, equipment, buildings, etc. as may be deemed necessary for the successful implementation of the policy. Without sufficient resources it means that laws will not be enforced, services will not be provided and reasonable regulations will not be developed.

In addition to communication and resources, disposition or attitude is another key factor that affects policy implementation. Most implementors can exercise considerable discretion in the implementation of policies because of either their independence from their nominal superiors who formulate the policies or as a result of the complexity of the policy itself. The way the implementors exercise their discretion depends, to a large extent, on their disposition toward the policy. Therefore the level of success will depend on how the implementers see the policies as affecting their organizational and personal interests. Where a policy will result in reduction of pay, low self-esteem, or loss of position to the implementors, the attitude/disposition will be affected adversely. On the other hand, if a policy will enhance the status, the pay or the self-esteem of the implementors, such implementors will be favorably disposed to it. For example, the very senior officers who currently enjoy the services of chauffeur-driven cars, government quarters and other benefits have not favored the present monetisation policy in Nigeria. For this reason, they may sabotage its implementation because the policy would deprive them of the benefits mentioned earlier on. They will now have to buy their own cars, maintain the cars, employ their own drivers as well as provide for their own accommodation.

On the other hand, the junior staffs that were not enjoying these benefits before the monetisation policy seem to be happy about it. Yet there is another policy that is being proposed and which seems to enjoy the support of those in authority in the universities, especially the Vice-Chancellors. By this proposed policy, Vice-Chancellors will be given more power, especially power to "hire and fire". This, however, has not gone down well with members of the academic staff who consider the policy as a very dangerous trend that can lead to intimidation of staff by the university authority. However, because the policy favors the Vice-Chancellors, they are favorably disposed to it.

From the two examples given above, one can see the case where the highly placed persons are opposed to a policy because of the benefits it (monetisation policy) takes away from them and where these same highly placed persons are supportive of another policy because of what is in it (the autonomy bill) for them. If, therefore, these officers are called upon to implement the policies above, we can imagine the likely way things will go depending on who is the implementor since we have been told that the way they (implementors) will exercise their discretion will depend, to a large extent, on their disposition toward the policy.

It is to be noted that the fact that communication, resources, and positive disposition are put in place does not guarantee implementation success. If there is no efficient bureaucratic structure, the problem of implementation can still arise especially when dealing with complex policies. As observed by Edward (1980) where there is organizational fragmentation it may hinder the coordination that is necessary to successfully implement a complex policy especially one that requires the cooperation of many people. It may also result in wastage of scarce resources, inhibit change, create confusion, lead to policies working at cross-purposes and, at the end, result in important functions being overlooked.

However, there are, in addition to the above, some problems that seem peculiar to developing nations in the area of policy implementation. These are usually problems that lead to implementation gap and which can be traced not only to the policy itself but also to the policy maker and the policy environment.

IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Stripped of all technicalities, implementation problem in most developing nations is the problem of a widening gap between intentions and results. Honadle (1979) tried to identify the problem associated with policy implementation as that of social carpenters and masons who fail to build to specifications and thus distort the beautiful blue print. Here he was equating policy with a building plan. Quoting him he said:

"Implementation is the nemesis of designers, it conjures up images of plans gone awry and of social carpenters and masons who fail to build to specifications and thereby distort the

beautiful blue prints for progress which were handed to them. It provokes memories of "good" ideas that did not work and places the blame on the second (and second-class) member of the policy and administration team..." (p.6)

The above quotation shows the importance that is attached to policy implementation and those that are responsible for implementing these policies. It also shows that no matter how beautiful the blueprint of a programme is, a defective implementation of it will make nonsense of the whole programme.

Unfortunately, the situation as described by Honadle above is what goes on in most developing countries, Nigeria inclusive. As stated by Egonmwan (1971) implementation in these countries often turns out to be the graveyard of policy where the intentions of the designer of policies are often undermined by a constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration in cooperation with people. Little attention is paid to the subject of policy implementation by policy decision makers while it is often taken for granted that once a policy is adopted by government it must be implemented and the desired goals achieved. The above lapse has often resulted in poor policy implementation, which, in effect, gives rise to implementation gap. There is policy failure when there is a sizeable gap between a policy decision and its implementation. Such a gap is characterized, for example, by the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer in spite of stated policy goal to the contrary. Implementation gap thus manifests in the "widening of the distance between stated policy goals and the realisation of such planned goals" (Egonmwan, 1991: 213). At this point, it will be worthwhile to highlight some of the causes of implementation gap citing examples from Nigeria.

IMPLEMENTATION GAP

There could be implementation gap as a result of many factors, which could arise from the policy itself, the policy maker, or the environment in which the policy has been made. Implementation gap can arise from the policy itself when such a policy emanates from government rather than from the target groups. By this, it means that planning is top-down. And, by implication, the target beneficiaries are not allowed to contribute to the formulation of the policies that affect their lives. This is usually what happens in most

developing nations as it happened in the case of the Better Life Programme (BLP) and the Family Support Programme (FSP) in Nigeria. Mrs. Mariam Babangida put the Better Life Programme in place in 1987 when her husband General Ibrahim Babangida was the Military President of Nigeria. The programme was targeted at rural women in Nigeria with the aim of creating awareness in women through mobilization so that they can realize, utilize and develop their potentials for a more fulfilling life and national development. The programme, however, transformed to The Family Support Programme in 1994 after General Sani Abacha became the Head of State in November 1993. The Family Support Programme under Mrs. Mariam Abacha focused on the family as a whole. The main objective of the programme was to improve and sustain family cohesion through the promotion of social and economic well being of the Nigerian family for its maximum contribution to national development. While one may wonder at the need for the change of name when both programmes seem to share similar focus, the reason may not be far fetched. It may be traced to the ego of our leaders and the fact that the government of Abacha toppled that of Shonekan. The Interim Government of Sonekan was put in place by General Babangida in 1993 and that administration was carrying out the programme of Mrs. Babangida – i.e. The Better Life Programme. Therefore, for General Abacha's wife to make a name for herself, it was necessary to initiate new programmes or, at least, change a few areas in the existing one and then give it a new name rather than continue with the programme initiated by the wife of the head of the previous government. This may explain one of the reasons why it is possible to find abandoned projects all over Nigeria.

Apart from the ego problem which sometimes culminates in lack of continuity as explained above, it should be noted that for policies to be successful they should involve target groups and they should allow for participatory system, whereby policy makers plan with the people rather than for the people in meeting their felt needs. Such participation will give the target groups a sense of belonging as well as get them committed to the successful implementation of the policy. Unfortunately, however, studies carried out on the two programmes mentioned earlier (BLP & FSP) by Ogolo (1997) and Faley (1999) revealed that the two programmes failed

to take this important aspect of policy implementation into consideration. Most of the time, the target beneficiaries were not involved at the planning stage. And this eventually resulted in implementation gap.

Another cause of implementation gap is the failure of the policy makers to take into consideration the social, political, economic and administrative variables when analysing for policy formulation. A policy maker in a muslim dominated community who formulates a policy that offends against the tenets of Islam is likely to face implementation problems. Such a person has not considered the socio-cultural variable. The same is true of political and economic variables. A policy that runs contrary to the manifesto of the government in power may suffer at the implementation stage because it may lack support, both financial and administrative. Also, failure to take the economic variable into consideration may also spell doom to policy implementation. What is the essence of formulating laudable policies without economic support? Such policies will suffer implementation gap. For example, where there is the need to employ staff for the purpose of implementation, or acquire equipment for similar action, adequate funding becomes very crucial. Lack of funds will only result in the inability of the policy implementors to function, as they should. Even where there is an ongoing project, if money fails to come up, such a project may become abandoned. In essence, the policy maker must be able to consider the environment – social, economic, political and cultural - in which he is formulating his policies if he is to avoid implementation gap.

Other serious problems are that of bribery and corruption which have contributed greatly to the failure of policy implementation in developing countries. For example, implementation problem may arise in a situation where huge amounts are earmarked for a project but the officers in charge of implementation steal such amounts or a substantial part of the amounts. A good example is the allegation contained in *The Guardian* of August 3, 1993 whereby the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was accused of inflating the cost of tankers bought for the corporation by N2.5 million. To quote Orewa (1997:155):

“Much as the idea of purchasing NNPC-Owned tankers is desirable, the NNPC has not denied the allegation by Chief Martin Ikediashi

in The Guardian of August 3, 1993 that the corporation is buying the tankers at N6.5 million as against the “factory price at Leventis, Anamco, and Incar Motors at just N4 or N4.5 million”.

Much as one would like to say that the policy of the corporation to have its own tankers was a good one, the corrupt practices of the implementors actually negated the intention of the corporation. Rather than save money for the corporation, the corrupt practices only succeeded in impoverishing the corporation contrary to the expected result of the policy. In his inaugural address in 1999, President Obasanjo identified corruption as the bane of development in Nigeria.

In addition to the above, there is what Egonmwan (1991) called “plan indiscipline”. This occurs when originally planned projects are abandoned without convincing reasons thus resulting in distortion of original plan. Abandonment of projects may also arise from ego tripping, change of regimes which results in lack of continuity as explained earlier. Perhaps, the most important point to emphasize in respect of policy implementation is the extent to which success or failure in implementation depends on the activities already carried out at the policy formulation stage. For instance, a resounding failure might occur if, because of the sophisticated techniques adopted in the analysis of alternatives that culminated in a policy choice, the implementation is taken for granted. Other variables as discussed above have to be taken into consideration. Adamolekun (1984) suggests that the best way out is to approach the implementation process with maximum flexibility taking into consideration the fact that many assumptions and probabilities characterize policy formulation techniques. As a matter of fact, he clearly stated that the formulation and implementation of policies are not completely distinct phases of activities and that there is no definite end to policy implementation. He arrived at this conclusion as a result of new demands that usually emerge after new tensions might have been generated as a result of implementation of new policies. Sometimes, new demands emerge that have to be transmitted to the policy making machinery; they are then processed and transformed into one or more policies that in turn have to be implemented. And, this may become cyclical.

As a matter of fact, the problem facing deve-

loping countries, most of the time, is not that of policy formulation but of implementation.

This can be clearly seen in the case of Nigerian Policy on Education, which seems to have failed to be effective. Adesina (1977) confirmed the non-effectiveness of this policy when he admitted that the policy on education has failed to be effective as a result of defective planning process, political constraints, financial constraints and statistical deficiencies. Another example of implementation gap can be found in the case of the defunct Better Life Programme (BLP) and the Family Support Programme (FSP) whereby their objectives were very laudable but the programmes failed to achieve most of the objectives due to faulty implementation process. In a recent study carried out by Makinde (2003) on the implementation of the Better Life and the Family Support Programmes in Osun State of Nigeria, it was discovered that the objectives of the two programmes which were primarily to empower women economically and politically were not achieved on a large scale due to implementation problems. Some of these problems include lack of continuity that arose as a result of change in government. Mrs. Mariam Babangida initiated the Better Life Programme. It was changed to Family Support Programme (FSP) when Mrs. Mariam Abacha came on board. The programme was suspended and changed to Women’s Right Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) when Mrs. Abdulsalami Abubakar became the First Lady. With the exit of Mrs. Abubakar, WRAPA metamorphosed to Child Care Trust (CCT), which has since become the focus of Mrs. Stella Obasanjo. From the above, one can see a clear evidence of discontinuity of

programme. Each First Lady, rather than continue with the predecessor’s programme, prefers to embark on a new one. While one cannot really say why this happens, it is quite possible to guess that perhaps each First Lady tries to make a name for herself by doing something different from what her predecessor did. This is the ego dimension as discussed earlier in this paper whereby each person wants to be seen as being unique.

In addition to above, other reasons given for the failure of the BLP and FSP to greatly empower rural women in Osun State as desired are given as lack of funds, inadequate manpower, inadequate monitoring of projects as well as inadequate maintenance of equipment. The table 1 (The table has its sources written below it.) will give a clear picture of the opinion of the beneficiaries of these programmes in Osun State as represented by the research sample consisting of fifty women selected from each of the three senatorial districts in Osun State through the purposive random sampling technique. Ile-Ogbo, Iperindo, and Ilobu represented the three Osun senatorial districts (Osun West, Osun East and Osun Central) respectively.

From the table 1, causes of implementation failure include some of the things we had earlier discussed such as lack of continuity of programmes, inadequate provision of manpower, inadequate maintenance of equipment and inadequate monitoring of projects. Others include the hijack of the programmes from the rural women by urban women, as well as the negative attitude of Local Government officials to the women after the demise of the programmes. It will not be out of place if we attribute the negative

Table 1: Reasons for the failure of the BLP & the FSP in greatly empowering rural women in Osun State

<i>Indicators of Causes of Failure</i>	<i>Iperindo</i>	<i>Ilobu</i>	<i>Ile-Ogbo</i>
Lack of cooperation among women	+	++	++
Lack of continuity of programmes	++	++	++
Lack of funds	++	++	++
Inadequate manpower	++	++	++
Inadequate maintenance of equipment	++	++	++
Inadequate monitoring of projects	++	++	++
Failure to train women on the use of the equipment supplied by BLP & FSP	++	++	++
Attitude of Local Government officials towards the women after the demise of BLP & FSP	-	-	++
Take-over of the programmes from the rural women by the “city women”	++	-	+

Source: Focus Group Discussions at Ilobu, Ile-Ogbo and Iperindo in Osun State in April 2002

Key: ++ Where an opinion was expressed in two or more groups
 + Where an opinion was expressed in only one group
 - Where an opinion was not expressed in any of the groups

attitude of the Local Government officials to the discontinuity of programmes, which we discussed earlier.

In addition to the problems highlighted in the above Table, Egonmwan (1984) identified some other problems that affect policy implementation in developing countries. Among them are: inadequate definition of goals; over-ambitious policy goals; and choice of inappropriate organizational structure in implementation of policies.

Inadequate definition of goals makes a policy to lack clarity, internal consistency and compatibility with other policy goals with the result that the successful implementation of such a policy becomes problematic. This is a problem of communication. Goal definition varies in developing countries because people disagree about the objectives of a given programme or because people do not care to define such objectives because the objectives are not to their advantage (Egonmwan, 1984: 242). In some other instances, the policy makers assume that they know the needs of the target groups and therefore see no reason for clarity of goals.

With regard to over-ambition in policy formulation, in developing countries like Nigeria, many policies tend to be over-ambitious, sweeping and fundamental in nature. This is as a result of some of those countries being influenced by special conditions that affect how programmes and policy goals are decided. Grindle (1990: 22-23) as cited in Egonmwan (1984) highlighted that the enormity of human and physical needs in poor countries, the desire to establish legitimacy, the desire to improve conditions, and the feelings that the deprivations of the colonial past must be obliterated create a situation in which political leaders are likely to formulate policies that will lead to radical and rapid improvement in the conditions of life. A good example was Nkrumah's ambitious rapid development programmes for Ghana when he was the Prime Minister of Ghana after her independence. Nkrumah was motivated to embark on very ambitious programmes in the early 1960s. The construction of Akosombo Dam for rapid industrialization of Ghana was a good example. Although the Dam was successfully constructed, part of the programmes that were to follow flopped because Ghana ran out of money due to a drop in the price of cocoa which was the basis of the country's budget. Grindle went further to state that over-ambitious policies are frequently beclouded in ideological context that

may hide the actual problems involved in executing them. If, at the planning stage, consideration had been given to the fact that the source of income for Ghana depended on international market forces which may swindle up and down, perhaps the project would have been pruned down to a size that would be manageable whichever way the market forces go.

From the example of Ghana given above, we should note that the scope and comprehensiveness of some policies may experience implementation bottlenecks arising from any, or a combination, of the following:

- lack of appropriate technology for implementation;
- inadequate human and material needs;
- over-stretching of available resources for maximum visibility and impact at the end of which nothing concrete may be achieved.

A good example of an over-ambitious policy is the "free education for all" in some of the southern states in Nigeria. The rate at which private institutions are being established in Nigeria shows that the public has lost confidence in public schools due to its ineffectiveness. Even many of those who are sometimes considered as illiterates in the society now prefer to send their children to fee-paying primary and secondary schools. They seem to have lost confidence in the free primary and secondary institutions. This is a pointer to the inability of government or its agents to successfully implement the free education policy due to its comprehensiveness.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The above discussion has been trying to explain why policies go wrong at the implementation stage, especially in developing nations. While we do not want to leave the impression that policy implementation in developing nations is always a disaster, the discussion has tried to highlight areas that need improvement. In conclusion, it is apparent that policies are rolled out regularly in developing nations but most of the time, without achieving the desired results.

For any government to be judged to be administratively competent, there must be evidence of bridging the gap between the intention of a policy and the actual achievement of the policy. This is where it becomes necessary for any policy maker, be it government or non-

governmental organization, to take the issue of policy implementation seriously even at the formulation stage. Towards a successful policy implementation, therefore, consideration should be given to the following:

(a) Target beneficiaries should be involved at the formulation stage in order for them to have an input in what affects their lives. This will also give them a sense of belonging and, therefore, a sense of commitment.

(b) Attention should be paid to both the manpower and financial resources which will be needed to implement the policy.

(c) There must be effective communication between the target beneficiaries and the implementors of policy programmes.

(d) The culture of discontinuing a policy once there is a change in government should be discouraged because even though government comes and goes, administration is continuous. There should be continuity in policy except if the policy is found not to be useful to the people.

(e) Provision should be put in place for adequate monitoring of projects, as poorly monitored projects will only yield undesired results.

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