



CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria's lack of appreciable development commensurate with its natural endowment in both human and material resources is less a reflection of wrong diagnosis of developmental issues than the fact that the country seldom achieves successful implementation of public policies and programmes. Developmental issues can be analyzed to death based on which policies and programmes are put in place but this will amount to nothing if those charged with the implementation lack the disposition to translate the fine and noble ideas into physical results that will impact positively on the standard and living conditions of the people. This state of affair has provoked the concern of this paper to interrogate the perpetual lack of successful implementation of public policies and programmes in Nigeria and the consequent lack of meaningful development in the country after 55 years of political independence. The paper proffers practical suggestions as remedial measures to improve policy implementation by government. This is not only timely but reassuring because achieving successful implementation of development programmes is a pre-requisite for the country's progress and development, especially the actualization of her dream to become one of the top twenty economies of the world in 2020.

Keywords: Policy, Implementation and Strategies

Background to the Study

In Nigeria like in most other third world countries, national development planning has come to be regarded as an essential and perhaps the only institutional mechanism for overcoming all obstacles to development and for ensuring a sustained high rate of economic growth. In effect, planning is seen as the most effective vehicle for attaining economic independence, which most developing countries come to regard as a necessary condition for consolidating their political independence. However, an interrogation of Nigeria's various development programmes reveals wide gap between the stated objectives of such programmes and the actual implementation or service deliveries. Hence, the noble objectives of attaining modern, diversified and selfsustaining economy remains at best mere wishful thinking.

In a most comprehensive and exhaustive study of development planning experience in some fifty-five third world countries including Nigeria, Albert Waterson cited in Odo (1986) concluded thus, an examination of post war planning history reveals that there have been many failures than successes in the implementation of development plans. By far the great majority of countries have failed to realize even modest income and output targets in their plans except for short periods. What is even more disturbing, the situation seems to be worsening instead of improving as countries continue to plan.

The results of planned development especially in Nigeria have been sadly disillusioning. By having series of development plans and programmes, it was felt the country should be able to not only raise the standard of living of the people, but transform the national economy into a modern, diversified and virtually self-sustaining. This has been the major objective, which underlay development efforts in Nigeria, yet poverty and underdevelopment have remained permanent features of the country due to non-achievement of successful implementation of development policies and programmes.

A recent review of some national development plans formulated during the 1970s found that only few had sections addressing implementation requirements in any detail (Odo, 1986). Similarly, there has been no consensus among international assistance agencies about how programme implementation can be improved in developing countries. Although many studies have been done on Nigeria and other third world countries, little effort has been made by development administration theorists to identify the factors that influence policy implementation. This is an unfortunate deficiency in our understanding of the policy process, which could lead to ill-advised conclusions on the part of policy makers. For example, when faced with an unsuccessful programme, many observers will attribute such failure to insufficient planning or inadequacy of the programme itself. Such conclusion is often unjustified as it does not satisfactorily explain the gap between stated policy intentions on the one hand and services delivery on the other. In other words, it fails to provide an understanding of how the system succeeds or fails in translating general policy objectives into concrete and meaningful public services.

Since Nigeria obtained self-governing status in 1960, considerable efforts have been expended by successive governments towards bringing about the rapid development of the country. The country, for instance, has had four development plans each with five years duration. There were also a plethora of development projects and programmes, which include the World Bank Assisted Agricultural Development Project (ADP); Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); Green Revolution; River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs); Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB); Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI); National Directorate of Employment (NDE); Community Bank; National Poverty Eradication programme (NAPEP); Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE); Vision 2020 among others.

However, there has always existed a yawning gulf between the lofty objectives of these development projects and programmes and their actual physical achievements. The greatest obstacle to Nigeria's drive towards achieving a high level of socioeconomic and political development has therefore, apparently been the inability to achieve successful implementation of the goals and objectives set forth in the various macro and micro development policies and programmes of the government. The paper highlights the common challenges that often arise in the implementation of policy and programme objectives in the country.

Statement of the problem

There is no doubt therefore, that one of the greatest problems that bedevil Nigeria today is as complex and intractable as finding effective ways of implementing development plans and programmes. The process of implementation has thus necessarily become a central concern of the

Nigerian state so much so that national development plans now recognize that implementation is at the core of development strategy (Odo, 1986). In this respect, Nigeria's development planners, these days, admit that effective implementation of development plans is as important if not more important than drawing up the plan. However, despite this awareness and the seemingly strong resolve to deal more aggressively with the problem of implementation, little has actually been done to anticipate administrative requirements in the formulation of development policies and programmes in the country.

Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the factors affecting effective policy implementation in Nigeria and useful strategies that can help mitigate these challenges.

Literature review

The paper attempts here to define the concepts of policy and implementation to enable a conceptualization of the implementation process. The literature will be examined within two broad concepts; policy and implementation.

Policy: Many divergent shades of opinion are common to the definition of policy. The concept of policy is of considerable utility in the study of public policy analysis, which involves policy formulation and implementation. Dye (1972) conceptualized public policy as what governments choose to do or not to do; and Easton (1965) defined it in terms of authoritative allocation of values for the whole society. Lasewell and Kaplan (1960) defined policy as a projected programme of goals, values and practices. Bauer (1968) described policy as a course setting action involving decisions of the widest ramifications and longer time perspective in the life of an organization.

For Lindblom (1966), policy is the outcome of decision-making processes set in motion in response to existing stimuli or change; and Dror (1973) defined policy as the direct output of public policy making. Anderson (1984) described policy as a relatively stable and purposive course of action followed by government in dealing with some problems or matters of concern. Other definitions refer to policy as bundles of government decisions based on issues including all actions and inactions of government.

For the purpose of this paper, policy is conceived as a guideline for action, prescribing in general terms the means for moving towards a desired course of event or outcome. For every established policy, there are set of programmes conducted in pursuit of its objectives. For example, the Universal Basic Education (UBE); and River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) were both educational and agricultural programmes targeted at achieving the Federal Government's policies of making primary education free and accessible to every Nigerian child; and commercializing agriculture to achieve food security for Nigeria and enhance rural development respectively. Similarly, to realize government's policy of poverty reduction or alleviation, the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) devised a number of measures and strategies to tackle the problem of poverty in the country.

Implementation: Several often conflicting uses of the concept of implementation are found in the existing literature. Policy implementation encompasses those actions by public and private individuals or groups that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions (Van meter, etal 1975). This involves both onetime efforts to transform policy decisions into operational terms as well as continuing efforts to achieve the large and small changes mandated by policy decisions. Williams (1977) stated that in its general form, an inquiry about implementation seeks to determine whether an organization can bring together men and materials in a cohesive organizational unit and motivate them in such a way as to carry out the organization's stated objectives.

Pressman and Williams (1973) argued that the world is full of policy proposals that are aborted. Therefore, the study of implementation should examine those factors that contribute to the realization and nonrealization of policy objectives. In other words, the term implementation involves all those things that must be done to achieve policy objectives once the strategic decisions have been made. In this paper, the concern is to examine and explain programme performance i.e. the degree to which anticipated services were actually delivered or simply, how much of what happened or what happened to what? To this end, indicators of actual service delivery in the regions of socioeconomic objectives of the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAS) with particular reference to the Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority (LBRBDA) were sampled and discussed. These include provision and distribution of agricultural extension services; agricultural loans and fertilizer; tractor hiring; number of roads, culverts and bridges constructed or maintained; number of community development projects executed; number of communities provided with safe drinking water and electricity; how many primary schools and health centers were built, etc.

Challenges of Policy Implementation in Nigeria

The problems of implementation are overwhelming complex. Relative to policy formulation, the analysis of the implementation process raises serious boundary problems. It is often difficult to define the relevant factors. Many of the variables needed to complete an implementation analysis are difficult, if not impossible to measure. For instance, unlike legislative and judicial arenas where votes or judgments are often recorded, discussions in an administrative setting are difficult to isolate. A comprehensive analysis of implementation requires that attention be given to multiple actions over an extended period of time, hence involving an enormous outlay of time and resources.

The implementation process varies depending on the nature of the policy to be implemented. Different types of policy decisions will display characteristic processes, structures and relationships among the variables that influence the implementation. Van Meter, et al (1975) classified policies according to two distinguishing characteristics namely: the amount of change involved; and the extent to which there is goal consensus among the participants in the implementation process. The element of change is important in at least two respects. First, implementation will be affected by the extent to which a policy deviates from previous policies. An incremental change, for instance, is more likely to engender a positive response than will drastic ones.

Also, the implementation process will be influenced by the amount of organizational change that is required. Policies which require only marginal change in established relationships are more likely to perform better. Generally, implementation will be most successful where goal consensus is high whereas, where goal consensus is low, the prospects for effective implementation will be most doubtful. The implementation analysis also requires that the goals and objectives be identified and measured since implementation cannot be adjudged as successful or otherwise without a goal against which to judge it.

Successive development programmes in Nigeria have not succeeded in significantly improving the lot of the people especially, the rural inhabitants. The rural areas suffer from extreme and dehumanizing poverty; lack of infrastructural facilities and social welfare services. The issue of rural development is vital to Nigeria because of its predominant rural based economy with about 80% of its total population residing in the rural areas engaging mainly in agriculture. One of the major challenges of the Nigerian nation today therefore, is that of developing the rural areas. The quality of life in rural Nigeria is a serious cause of concern. The Nigerian rural communities lacked basic social amenities and infrastructures such as potable water, good roads, electricity, health-care services, schools, good housing, among others.

In a deliberate effort to address these rural development challenges, the Federal Government in 1976 established the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) to serve as a catalyst for increased agricultural productivity and enhanced rural development through the provision of rural infrastructures. At independence in 1960, Nigeria had every reason to become a key player among the comity of nations considering its abundance of human and material resources. However, on the contrary, the country has recorded minimal progress in the provision of socioeconomic infrastructures necessary for the rapid development of the country, especially the rural areas. To this end, the quality of life in the rural areas has steadily deteriorated. As Obasanjo (2000) cited in Odo (2010) noted:

In 1960, poverty which included hunger, lack of shelter, safe drinking water, education, health, capital, poor sanitation, etc affected 15% of the Nigerian population; by 1980, it had grown to 28%; by 1985, it was 46% and by 1996, it was 66%.

Also, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) Report cited in Soludo (2015), poverty incidence and unemployment in Nigeria are simultaneously at alltime high levels. Poverty incidence, according to the Report, grew to 69% in 2010 and projected to 71% in 2011 with unemployment at 24%. Akpala (1986) argued that rural communities in Nigeria have remained underdeveloped, lacking in basic amenities such as access roads; potable water, electricity and the general dearth of rural infrastructures including poor education and health facilities, low agricultural productivity, and environmental degradation. The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) as a strategy of rural development; and to address the dwindling food production in the country, were established by Decree No 25 of June, 1976 and Decree No 37 of August, 1976 and charged with the following responsibilities (FRN, 1976):

1. To undertake comprehensive development of both surface and underground water resources for multipurpose use;
2. To undertake schemes for the control of floods and erosion, and for watershed management;
3. To construct and maintain dams, dykes, polders, wells, boreholes, irrigation and drainage systems and other works necessary for the achievement of the Authority's functions under this section;
4. To develop irrigation schemes for the production of crops and livestock and to lease the irrigated land to farmers or recognized associations in the locality of the area concerned, for a fee to be determined by the Authority concerned with the approval of the Commissioner (Minister);
5. To provide water from reservoirs, wells and boreholes, under the control of the Authority concerned for urban and rural water supply schemes on request by the state governments and when directed to do so by the Commissioner (Minister);
6. The control of pollution in rivers and lakes in the Authority's area in accordance with the nationally laid down standards; and
7. To resettle persons affected by the works and schemes specified in (c) and (d) above or under special settlement schemes.

Based on the policy objectives of the RBDAs, it was expected that the implementation would have stimulated economic growth and improved the quality of rural life across the country. However, despite the massive amount of resources expended on the scheme, there was no appreciable rural development in the country nor has the country achieved self sufficiency in food production. Indeed, decades after the establishment and operation of the RBDAs, most rural communities in Nigeria had remained in abject poverty, lacking the basic needs of life such as food, good access road, potable water, electricity supply, housing, education, and healthcare services. There is

therefore, a clear mismatch between the expected and actual performance, hence implementation remains a major challenge of Nigeria's development. The crawling posture of the Nigerian nation in socioeconomic and political development after 55 years of independence is rooted in the inability of the country to achieve successful implementation of the goals and objectives set forth in the various development policies and programmes of successive governments. The paper examined below in specific details the challenges of the RBDAs programme implementation, focusing on the Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority (LBRBDA).

Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority (LBRBDA)

The Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority (LBRBDA) was among the eleven River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) created by Decree No 25 of 1976. The geographical area referred to as the "Lower Benue River Basin" was defined by the enabling Decree as the region drained by the River Benue and its tributaries. The corporate objectives of the Authority were derived from the functions of the RBDAs as provided for in Decree No 25 of 1976 (FRN, 1976). The LBRBDA was to optimally harness, develop, conserve, control and organize the efficient utilization of the available land and water resources in the Lower Benue River Basin. This is with the aim of improving the socioeconomic structures and quality of life, particularly of the people living within the development zone of the Authority; and the country in general through modern irrigated farming and rural water supply for human, livestock and industrial consumption.

The objective of boosting agricultural production through largescale irrigation and developing water resource potentials of the country entails wide range of activities. These include direct agricultural production; construction of dams; drilling of boreholes for potable water supply; construction of rural roads to link project sites; among others. The LBRBDA was not particularly successful in terms of enhanced agricultural production and improved standard and living conditions of the people. For example, in 1985 the Authority projected a total yearly gross income of N64,235 million from agricultural production but realized only N36 million (Odo, 2010). This is as shown in Table 1.0 below, which provided the summary of crops production under the project (LBRBDA).

Table 1.0: Summary of Food Production Under LBRBDA, 1985

Crops	Net area cultivated (ha)	Yield tons (ha)	Tons	Economic price (₦)	Yearly projected gross income (₦000)
Yam	4,150	5.0	32,750	300	10,316
Rice	3,450	4.0	31,520	315	9,456
Maize	2,550	3.5	21,360	240	4,066
Cassava	400	40.0	30,400	350	7,968
Groundnut	3,750	3.0	21,360	350	7,437
Vegetable	450	25.0	21,250	350	10,640
Guinea corn	5,550	1.8	18,972	420	7,968
Others	1,400	15	38,900	160	6,384
Total	21,700				₦ 64,235

Source: Official Records of Farming activities at LBRBDA, Makurdi, 1985 in Odo (2010).

Agricultural production occupies a central place in the lives of Nigerians, especially the rural dwellers despite the rapid growth of the oil sector in the economy. Agriculture supports over 65% of Nigeria's population, hence very key to the survival of the people (Abba, etal, 1986). However, as shown in Table 1.0 above, the performance of agriculture within LBRBDA, which is reflective of developments in other RBDAs projects across the country had declined both in its share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and in absolute terms. This had translated into worsened food crisis

situation giving rise to an estimated food deficit of 5,538,000 metric tons in 1982 and 6,758,000 metric tons for 1985 (Abba, etal, 1986). The Decline in agricultural production is also, a measure of poverty and low income of the rural dwellers as well as the inability of the country to feed its population.

Another area which LBRBDA was expected to carry out activities outside food production in order to impact on the quality of lives of the people was infrastructural development. The implementation of LBRBDA projects implied a range of investments that were complementary to agriculture and should produce additional returns to the society. These include network of rural roads, electricity, potable water, schools, and healthcare facilities, among others. The LBRBDA projects were, for instance, expected to provide roads network to increase commerce and transportation within and outside the project areas. However, the LBRBDA did not for any single year, make budgetary allocations for the provision of rural roads network except for streets within the staff quarters and roads linking project sites to the outside (Odo, 2010). This is reflective of other infrastructural facilities, which cannot receive individual attention in the paper due to space constraint.

The success or otherwise of the LBRBDA projects like any other organization in goals attainment depend largely on the extent to which the target group are made to participate in the planning and implementation of their programmes. Generally, people participate in development programmes at three different levels viz; decisionmaking and planning for development programmes; direct implementation of development programmes; and at the level of ensuring the sustainability of development programmes or projects. However, the participation of the local communities in LBRBDA projects was minimal, if atal, due to the topdown approach of the organization. In this respect, decisions on land acquisition; siting of projects: employment matters as well as cropping policies were taken outside the project communities without much consideration for the rural people who were the target group.

The situation was compounded by the lack of adequate compensation for land and resettlement of the rural inhabitants who were displaced. In most cases, farm land was taken from the rural farmers without adequate compensation and communities were displaced without proper resettlement. Also, the largescale irrigation agriculture of the LBRBDA projects was too sophisticated in terms of capital requirement and technology to accommodate the rural farmers who were mainly peasants. This had further hiked their alienation and exclusion from the LBRBDA projects, thereby, posing serious challenges for the sustainability of LBRBDA projects. This is because the local communities, who could have owned the projects and continued from where the government stopped, were from the levels of conception and implementation excluded.

The River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs) scheme, unlike the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs), is a multipurpose scheme and therefore, capital intensive. The ADPs engaged in smallscale projects with low capital and technical inputs, which yielded immediate returns to the rural farmers. On the contrary, the agricultural development policies of the RBDAs benefited more the largescale farmers and marginalized the rural labor force in addition to alienating land and its produce from them. The cropping policies of RBDAs is thus, faulted as tending toward the further underdevelopment of the rural sector thereby, producing a direct opposite of the stated policy objectives of the scheme, which border on improving the standard and living conditions of the rural people.

In the foregoing discussions, it has been shown that the various challenges highlighted have marred the success of the Lower Benue River Basin Development Authority (LBRBDA) and by extension, the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs). The desire to make the rural people maximize the positive impacts of the RBDAs scheme considering its potentials for improved

agricultural productivity and rural infrastructural development were not realized. This is particularly worrisome given that in spite of the huge agricultural and human resource potentials of the rural areas, most of the rural dwellers live in extreme poverty with little or no access to the basic necessities of life.

Strategies for effective policy implementation in Nigeria

The following strategies are considered useful in promoting effective policy implementation in Nigeria.

1. **Good leadership:** The concept of good leadership is considered the most significant in enhancing effective policy implementation in Nigeria. The expectation of Nigerians, especially those who reside in the rural areas that the establishment of RBDAs would lead to their full integration into the broad national development framework was dashed. They had staked high hopes that RBDAs operations would be a major instrument for the attainment of the economic and social development needs of the rural dwellers. However, evidence abound that the problem of the rural areas of the country is not the lack of appropriate development policies and programmes but actually the political will to achieve successful implementation.

Thus, considering the strategic importance of good leadership to successful programme implementation and development, there should be a deliberate policy to promote leadership development in Nigeria. This should reverse the misconception of leadership in the country as corrupt, self-serving and incapable of dealing with the challenges of development plaguing the country. Good leadership should be value based and dealing with issues that matter most to the people at any given point in time.

The topofficials saddled with the responsibility of providing leadership in development programmes and projects and with special emphasis on RBDAs, should reinforce authority with leadership where authority is the right to secure compliance or the legitimacy to exercise power; while leadership is the ability to persuade, find expression to the feelings of the people; securing obedience without the application of force and above all, personal example. The appointment of chief executives of public organizations or parastatals should therefore, weigh more on considerations of competence or merit than patronage to cronies.

2. **Fighting Corruption:** Corruption is another factor that has impaired the successful implementation of public policies and programmes in Nigeria. Corruption takes place when people try to get what they do not deserve by using undue influence. The extent of corruption in the RBDAs rendered ineffective the performance of the Authorities to achieve set goals. In most development programmes and projects in Nigeria today, what matters most is the dubious interests of the officials entrusted with the implementation of such programmes and projects on contracts for feasibility study; construction; equipment supplies; among others. This can be addressed through moral discipline and appropriate policy measures to tackle corrupt practices within project operations. There should therefore, be a deliberate policy to strengthen accountability and sound financial management in which the resources of organizations are not left to the whims and caprices of, toplevel managers.
3. **Ensuring Community Participation in Policy Implementation:** The policy mandate of the RBDAs covers the restructuring of Nigeria's rural economy and society to lift it from being peasant and subsistence agricultural economy through transforming the

sociospatial structures of their productive activities. It has therefore, as its primary goal the facilitation of rural economic activities with the provision of economic and social infrastructures like roads, schools, hospitals, amongst others. Unfortunately, the success of RBDAs has been minimal and part of the challenge has been that the Authorities (RBDAs) had concentrated on series of useful and important activities for the people but not with the people. Thus, whatever the immediate success of the project, there is considerable apprehension as to the likelihood of its being sustained in the future.

The failure to build viable local organizations of farmers, which could on behalf of the farmers undertake the various activities and processes of rural development on a self-sustaining basis is perhaps the single most important factor that undermined the long-term significance of the RBDAs. Rural communities as critical stakeholders in the rural development process must be involved in their own development. A culture of community needs assessment should be built into RBDAs project planning and implementation bureaucracies: This will ensure that attention is paid during programme planning and implementation to satisfy community needs through effective participation of the community members or their representatives.

4. Provision of Adequate Finance: The activities of most development programmes and projects are often hampered by lack of adequate funding. In the case of the RBDAs programme, the annual subventions were not only inadequate but also irregular, which seriously affected the service delivery capabilities of the projects. In view of the importance of finance to the effective performance of development programmes and projects, there should be adequate funding. In addition, measures should be put in place to check late and irregular release of funds by the relevant authorities.
5. Provision of Rural Infrastructure: Generally, infrastructures are the lifewire of development. The Nigerian rural economy suffers from nonavailability of basic infrastructures, which had limited the movement of farm produce to the market just as it discouraged investments. The challenges of rural infrastructures such as access roads, electricity, potable water, schools, healthcare services, among others, had denied opportunities to the rural dwellers and should be addressed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is stressed that no part of the suggested measures for improving policy implementation in Nigeria, especially in relation to the RBDAS programmes should be considered in isolation; instead, they should be taken together as a holistic package due to the interplay of the key variables involved. Finally, it is hoped that the necessary political will to implement the suggested measures with a sense of commitment will not be lacking otherwise public programmes in Nigeria will continue to perform poorly with the result that the much desired rapid socioeconomic and political development of the country: and in particular, the vision of becoming one of the top twenty economies in the world in 2020 will remain a mirage to an infinity.

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