

Governance, Public Policy Implementation and Development: Strengthening Institutional Machinery in Africa

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Abstract

One of the functions of government is the formulation and implementation of public policy. Policies are the drivers of development. However, public policy failures in most African states and Nigeria have left the country with a lot of development challenges. This is despite the enormous material resources at her disposal to become a great and prosperous nation. For quite some time, so many policies and programmes, initiated by the federal government, failed to achieve the desired objectives. The paper, therefore, attempts a literature survey on the experiences of some African countries in policy formulation and implementation. Data are obtained from secondary sources and analyzed with content analytical techniques. This paper argues that strengthening the institutional machinery of government is one of the key components of achieving the gains of public policy through development in Africa.

Keywords: *Governance, public policy, development, institutional machinery*

Introduction

In recent times, the continent of Africa is faced several challenges in governance and development. This ranges from economic recession, criminality, corruption, and ineptitude in leadership to national insecurity and poverty. Ajulor (2015) disclosed that "in some countries, there is intractable political wrangle going on from last so many decades and still conflict is unresolved. The African Continent is a true political and social mosaic. Some countries are making a real move towards democracy. There are others in which the democratic experiment is in fragile situations". In many others, the political, social, and State infrastructure has failed.

The problem of underdevelopment and insecurity, analyzed by Collier (2007), shows how certain economic conditions make a country prone to civil war and to the ensuing cycle of violence, from which it is difficult to escape. His study found that "countries are prone to civil war when faced with a combination of low income, dependence on primary commodity exports, and poor governance that is not inclusive, along with high-income inequality. A study conducted by the Oslo Peace Research Institute projected peace and conflict patterns globally until 2050". The estimates show a "decrease in worldwide violence in general, except in a few countries, which include African states such as Ethiopia and Nigeria. Ethiopia is considered vulnerable based on security, ideological, socioeconomic, religious, and ethnic conflicts and how the state responds to these conflicts" (Collier, 2007).

On this premise, he admitted that "The role of public policy, driven by state actors seems to be in question. Weak policies caused by the abilities of the political actors or the capacity of the institutional framework are some of the problems affecting the prospects of good governance in Africa. Africa has come a long way to good governance; its experience in this is even exemplary in some cases, especially given its widespread underdevelopment" (Collier, 2007). Africa has the right to take pride in its achievements. Yet, it should strive to build on them, address structural problems and confront future challenges. In this regard, it is most decisive to win the battle for peace and security, the people of Africa must achieve their struggle in the field of good governance and development if they want to see a strong progressive African continent free from poverty, conflict, and other challenges. These challenges drive the interest of this paper. The paper examines the trajectory of governance, public policy implementation, and development in Africa.

Methodology

The study is descriptive. Data are obtained from secondary sources; libraries, research reports and bulletins, government gazettes, and policy reports. The data explains the trajectory of governance, public policy implementation, and development in Africa. The discussion is guided by the objectives and conceptual discourse. The data obtained is evaluated using the content analytical method. The theoretical discussions and literature provide the framework for the conclusion and policy recommendations for the study.

Conceptual model

The study designs a conceptual model for evaluating institutional policies, through functional machinery, which is capable of determining public policy impact. The role of the government

is to drive a competitive economy. This is done through the formulation of public policies. Policies are the instruments of the state. The effective implementation of public policies is determined by the structure of functional and efficient bureaucracy. The impacts of policies are therefore ascertained through the achievement of development goals as indicated by the needs of the state.

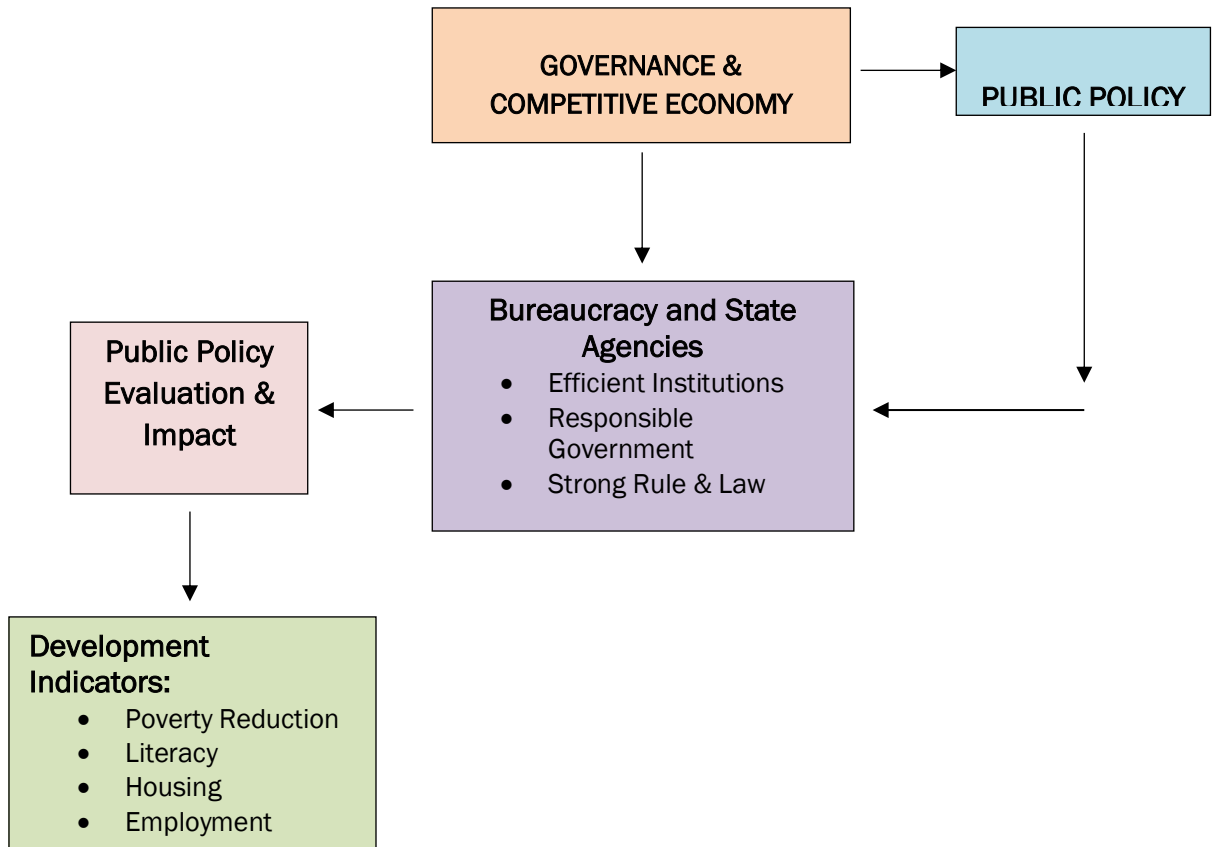


Fig 1: Conceptual model for evaluating institutional policies, through functional machinery
Source: Author, 2022

Literature review

This study interrogates three major concepts, governance, public policy, and development. According to the United Nations (UN), governance refers to the activities of all political and administrative authorities to govern their country. Meanwhile, as stated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), governance is a concept in which a country is managed, including economic, policy, and legal aspects. Thus, in general, governance has the meaning: of the decision-making process and the process of determining which policies will be implemented and not be implemented. Governance is "the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)" (UNESCAP, 2009). Governance is the process of measuring how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption and with due regard for the rule of law.

Citing the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the concept of good governance has eight principles.

1. Participation: Participation in the concept of good governance here is an opportunity for everyone to voice their opinions through institutions or representations. In addition, everyone, without exception, has the right to freedom of association and expression.

2. Rule of law: To implement good governance, the legal framework in the country must be enforced impartially, especially concerning human rights law.

3. Transparency: Transparency means that every policy taken and implemented by the government must be carried out under existing regulations. In addition, there must be a guarantee that any information related to the policy can be accessed by everyone, especially those who are directly affected by the policy.

4. Responsiveness: Good governance needs institutions and processes to attempt to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable time.

5. Consensus oriented: This fifth principle is related to the decision-making process. When the decision-making process cannot accommodate everyone's wishes, then at a minimum, the decision must be a decision that can be accepted by everyone and does not harm anyone.

6. Equity and inclusiveness: Good governance ensures justice for the community. Everyone has the same opportunity to maintain and improve their welfare.

7. Effectiveness and efficiency: Every decision-making process and its institutions must be able to produce decisions that meet every community's needs. Community resources must also be utilized optimally by the government.

8. Accountability: All institutions involved in good governance have full responsibility to the public for the sake of improving the quality of society.

One of the mandates of government is to design and implement public policy. A policy is a purposive course of action taken to deal with a problem or concern. Policies are political, management, financial, and administrative mechanisms that are arranged to achieve explicit goals. It deals with a deliberate set of principles formulated to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. Policies reflect a statement of intent and are implemented as a procedure or protocol (Dye, 1976). Policy denotes, among other elements, guidance for action. It may take the form of:

- a. A declaration of goals;
- b. A declaration of course of action;
- c. A declaration of general purpose; and/or
- d. An authoritative decision (Schneider, 2005).

According to Anam (2016), public policy is best described as “the heart, soul, and identity of governments everywhere”. He added that it is the fundamental framework within which the actions of the government are undertaken to achieve its goals. It is a purposive and consistent course of action strategically designed to address specific goals of local, regional, and international interest, through enabling public institutions and machinery. According to Friedrich (1963), it is a proposed course of action of a person, group, or government within a given environment providing obstacles and opportunities in which the policy was proposed to utilize opportunities and overcome obstacles. Jenkins (1978) added that public policy is a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation where those decisions should, in principle be within the power of those actors to achieve.

According to the Society for International Development (2021), “Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components”. The report states further that the “purpose of development is a rise in the level and quality of life of the population, and the creation or expansion of local regional income and employment opportunities, without damaging the resources of the environment”. As key indicators, development must positively affect all aspects of quality change and the creation of conditions for a continuation of that change, quantitative and qualitative. Anam (2015) admitted that there is a direct correlation between governance, public policy, and development.

Perspectives on public policy and development trends in Africa

According to Dialoke, Ukah, and Maduagwuna (2007), “Africa is a continent on the margins of world politics. This is even more the case today, with world public opinion and policymakers more turned into developments in the Middle East and elsewhere”. They acknowledged that “Over the last few years, donor’s aid to the continent has declined markedly, due to the international economic crisis. Still, the continent struggles to address its developmental challenges tirelessly”. Since its establishment in 2002, the African Union (AU) has spearheaded common African efforts to this effect. Indeed, the real conundrum in Africa is not a lack of resources, but rather a lack of good governance. “Africa is rich in natural resources, but cannot exploit them adequately and properly, despite recent achievements. This is first and foremost due to governance problems such as weak institutions, absence of rule of law, and rampant corruption. Democracy requires more than free elections” (Ggoobi, 2016). Beyond elections, the quest for democracy and good governance in Africa often snags on structural problems, including state fragility, institutional weakness, tribalism, conflict, and ethnic discrimination, vested interests, crime networks, corruption, and lack of democratic culture. These are all demanding problems that need concerted action (Ggoobi, 2016).

Ajulor (2016) reiterated that “A history of colonialism, armed conflicts, mismanagement, lack of rule of law and corruption has meant that despite its abundant natural resources, Africa remains underdeveloped and in poverty, hunger, natural disasters, and endemic diseases are prevalent”. He added that conflict in Africa, due to weak institutions and public policy are major challenges that most of the countries in Africa are facing for the last three-four decades and conflict is still unresolved in most of the countries. The government is spending a lot of

money on preventive measures to control the menace but still, the governments are not successful in managing the conflicts. Ijaduola (2008) maintained that “these resources and money could have been spent on developmental purposes. No continent has been so mistreated, martyred, and misunderstood as Africa has been over centuries”. Yet, Africa is a very rich continent and a beautiful and agreeable place, inhabited by decent and industrious people. Africa has probably the largest reserves of untapped natural resources in the world, of gold, diamonds, oil, natural gas, and various minerals and fruits, but these are often the sources of violent conflicts that have destructive consequences for the economies of the African continent” (André, 2012)

The effects of poor public policy implementation are far-reaching. Most African countries are still among the poorest countries in the world. Kaimuri and Kosimbei (2017) however, stated that real gross domestic product per capita and terms of trade are insignificant in determining sustainable development. In the era of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight goals were slated to be achieved by 2015 with 18 targets and 48 indicators. By the time MDGs was terminated and replaced by Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), 11 out of about 57 countries made an impact in some of the eight goals such as Libya, South Africa, Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea, Cape Verde, Egypt, Eritrea, Gabon, and Comoros. Nigeria was not among the countries with a significant impact on the eight goals (Maduabum, 2016).

Maduabum argues further that apart from the inability of most African countries to achieve MDGs goals, five goals are still worrisome. They include: Reducing the slum population; reducing waste; Combating climate change; Marine conservation; and reducing violent deaths. With the advent of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targeting 17 goals by 2030, the case of Africa is even more sympathetic as many of them including Nigeria have entered into economic recessions. If Africa does not take a bold step to come out of the recession, it might enter into a depression.

While “Africa is routinely touted as having 7 of the world’s 10 fastest-growing economies, it is also home to 15 out of the 20 least competitive. This is according to the World Economic Forum, which found that Africa remains the least economically competitive region in the world” (Maduabum, 2016). Moreover, (Maduabum, 2016) maintained that “Africa’s overall competitiveness has stagnated over the past decade due to structural factors, such as poor infrastructure and high transportation costs, and socio-economic and political factors. High levels of corruption and government inefficiency, combined with low levels of education, make Africa an expensive and risky place to do business”. Democratic countries in Africa are experiencing relative development compared to their authoritarian counterparts. The key components of a functional democracy – efficient institutions, responsible government policies, and a strong rule of law – are the same factors that contribute to a competitive economy (Maduabum, 2016).

Challenges of public policy implementation in Africa

Policy implementation is the process of changing a formulated policy into reality. It provides the operational area of function in carrying out the public policy declared by a competent authority. In the execution of public policy, the combination of human, material, machine,

and money is highly necessary (Ajulor, 2016). To Mbieli (2006), “policy implementation is critical to the success of any policy since it constitutes the epicenter of the policy process. It involves the identification of policy plans, programme, projects, and implementation”. Efficient and effective policy implementation would require inputs of sound managerial and administrative capabilities to avoid the policy implementation gap (Maduabum, 2008)

The first stage is identifying the need for goal setting. When the basics for goal setting are wrong, the process is negatively affected. This claim is supported by the goal-setting theory of public policy by John Locke. Locke derived his inspiration from Aristotle and argued that there is a definite relationship between clearly identified goals and performance. Goal setting theory stipulates that specific and challenging goals lead to a higher level of performance than do generalized goals, harder goals tend to make people think deeply about how to achieve them; thereby resulting in higher efficiency, which in the end will increase performance. However, goals should not be so challenging that they will be frustrating and discouraging in nature (Ijaduola, 2008).

Ijaduola (2008) explains that “public policy-making begins with the setting of realizable goals. The context of goals will give direction and focus to the government on the one hand and the policy implementers on the other. However, when the goals are unrealistic, the policy will eventually fail at the implementation stage”. In most developing countries and Nigeria in particular, it is discovered that silly goal set ultimately leads to policy failure. Sambo (2008) argues that the critical activity in the policy formulation and implementation process is goal setting. He explains that policymakers in developing countries engage in the elaborate exercise of goal setting by creating structures for planning. Hirschman (1963) argues that it is fashionable for developing countries to opt for a comprehensive or fundamental solution to policy problems. A well-defined public policy will strengthen the machinery of implementation.

Policy implementation however has its challenges. Some of them include improper planning, political instability, and bureaucratic bottleneck, the deliberate imposition of policy, complete alteration to the plan if it is not favorable to the implementers or civil servants saddled with the responsibility to implement it (Ajulor, 2016). Jones (1991) quoted in Ibrahim Paneo Yulianto, Kadji Zuchri Abdussamad and Rama Hiola (2017) explains that policy implementation can be influenced by organization, interpretation, and application. Many authors have also argued that Africa has no problem with policy plan or formulation other than the challenge of policy implementation. One of the challenges of policy implementation is the inability to involve the target beneficiaries in policy process (Dialoke, Ukah, and Maduagwuna 2017).

Ggoobi (2016) attributed underdevelopment in Uganda to the neglect of the rural areas, and, comprehensive policy design and planning without proper management. Policies imposed by the government without considering whether it meets the needs of the people or not. Reviewing South Africa’s Africa Agenda” Professor Chris Landsberg of University of Johannesburg argues that many NGOs have dubbed NEPAD a bottom-down scheme controlled by leaders and governments while they excluded civil society actors from NEPAD

processes (Landsberg, 2014). These are the issues African countries must correct so as to achieve and sustain development.

The African Development Bank cites the following elements of good governance in Africa:

- a. **Accountability:** Elected individuals and organizations charged with a public mandate should be held accountable for specific actions to the public from which they derive their authority. In a narrow sense, accountability focuses on the ability to account for the allocation, use, and control of public assets by legally accepted standards. In a broader sense, it is also concerned with the establishment and enforcement of rules of corporate governance.
- b. **Transparency:** The policies of the government should be publicly available and confidence developed in its intentions.
- c. **Combating Corruption:** Assistance should be provided to fight the abuse of public office for private gain.
- d. **Participation:** Stakeholders should exercise influence over public policy decisions and share control of resources and institutions that affect their lives, thereby providing a check on the power of government. This process occurs at various levels: at the grassroots, local government, and regional and national levels through flexible and decentralized forms of government.
- e. **Legal and Judicial Reforms:** A pro-governance and pro-development legal and judicial system should be created in which the laws are clear and are uniformly applied through an objective and independent judiciary

Findings and discussion

Strengthening institutional machinery for development in Africa

Promoting rapid growth and economic development cannot reduce poverty unless there is good governance present to design and implement inclusive development policies and social programs to attack poverty directly. The following are some of the elements of good governance that can support national development.

1. **Strong leadership:** Leadership involves goal setting or visioning, the capacity to motivate and/or inspire and mobilize efforts, energies, and talents to reach set goals. As Pat Utomi noted, leaders act as agents of their followers. He further said "It is clear that Africa has a crisis of leadership because we can see clearly that a sense of service is in short supply. It was not always so from the independence. African countries need strong, committed, and visionary leaders at all levels.
2. **The need to promote good governance:** Good governance means that the government is responsible for public trust. Government must be accountable, transparent, honest, and participatory, and must guarantee economic freedom—i.e.,

the right of citizens to freely exchange goods and contract with each other in business—and that is based on secured property rights, including land rights (Museveni, 2010). This is only possible by moving forward with constitutional reforms that place limits on government officials to prevent the abuse of power, guarantee economic freedoms, and control the negative incentives that drive corruption. A clear legal delineation and separation of public political activities from private economic activities are necessary to promote the well-being of members of the state.

3. **Building strong political institutions:** African countries need strong political institutions which must be just in policy making and policy implementation process. UN, UNDP, African Development Bank, and African Union can play a vital role in changing the conditions of bad governance in Africa. African countries need also a strong judiciary that could check on the misuse of power and corrupt politicians (Museveni, 2010). Besides, credible, efficient, accountable, and inclusive political institutions are the need of the hour in Africa. Moreover, civil society could play an important role in changing the nature of criminal and corrupt politics.
4. **Efficient administration of public institutions:** Administrative capacity is one of the key elements of a strong state. The public service and other institutions of government must be effective, responsive, and proactive. It is equivalent to purposive and development-oriented administration which is committed to improvement in the quality of life of the people. It implies a high level of organizational effectiveness (Abdul, 2003). It also relates to the capacity of the center of power of the political and administrative system to cope with the emerging challenges of society. It refers to the adoption of new values of governance to establish greater efficiency, legitimacy, and credibility of the system.
5. **Curbing corrupt practices:** By its very nature, corruption is the abuse of all internationally acknowledged human rights. It creates a vicious circle where human rights awareness is constantly paired with and undermined by the harsh realities of poor economic and political performance. Corruption is both the cause and the consequence of political turbulence, human rights abuses, and underdevelopment. Corruption is a challenge to everyone, and therefore action must be taken in various areas of society. This action must be taken by both public and private institutions. Civil society and vigilant individuals must play key roles in the fight against corruption.
6. **Setting up independent administrative watchdogs:** In Nigeria, SERVICON acts as a watchdog to the government. SERVICOM is an acronym for SERVICE COMPACT WITH ALL NIGERIANS. It is a social contract between the Federal Government of Nigeria and its People. SERVICOM was established on March 21, 2004 as a Presidential Initiative pledging to render quick and satisfactory service in all government Agencies to all Nigerians. It is premised on the imperative to give orientation to Nigerians to demand impeccable service as their rights. Aimed at inculcating in all Nigerians that those denying service in one window will meet the same treatment in another window and to instill the 'golden rule' in all Nigerians especially, where giving service is concerned. One of its mandates is to ensure that quality service delivery is provided to the citizens.

Hence, the democratic form of government has proved to be ineffective in checking the swindling of public funds for private gains by elected leaders as well as permanent bureaucrats. Misuse of power, fraud, chicanery, and embezzlement of funds are systematically perpetrated by the leaders of government and their unions, there must be independent institutional machinery to monitor the activities of public institutions (Mohamed, 2012).

Conclusion and policy recommendation

Good governance plays an essential role in achieving the multidimensional goal of public policy and development. However, Africa needs strong institutions. This may require external support. The African Union, along with the regional economic communities, should include efforts to strengthen democracy and governance in their economic development and integration strategies. More so, Africa needs a vibrant and robust civil society that can safeguard public interests. The role of the media in educating the public on the activities of government and checking dysfunctional political institutions must be supported (Mohamed, 2012). People must show active participation in politics and constructively influence the public policy process.

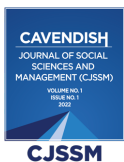
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