

Public Policy and Change Reactions from Citizens in Nigeria

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Abstract

Public Policy usually attracts reactions from the people in the society which may be positive or negative depending on the way such a policy is viewed by individuals, groups and society in general. The paper focused on change reactions from the citizens arising from some government policies. It was against this backdrop that the paper examined some policies embarked upon by government and the various change reactions arising therefrom. Using secondary data analysis, the paper examined some policy changes that have been embarked upon by successive administrations since 1999, and the reactions to these changes, with particular focus on President Jonathan's Administration as well as President Muhammadu Buhari's Administration and his Party, All Progressive Congress (APC), whose slogan is "Change". The three policies examined revealed that most of the reactions were negative. The paper, therefore, concluded that the citizens' negative reactions were a result of government's failure to interact with the people that the policies would affect before coming up with them. It was suggested that policy process should not be mutually exclusive to the formulators and implementers of public policy alone. Rather, the beneficiaries of public policies should be carried along through thorough enlightenment and accommodation of inputs and contributions from them.

Keywords

Policy, change, citizens, governance

Introduction

Across the globe, various governments appropriate one major and potent instrument called 'Policy' to address and tackle societal problems and issues within the public domain. Policy refers to a purposive course of action followed by actors or sets of actors usually related to government on a problem or matter of public concern (Meir and Bohte, 2007). Sharkansky (1978) described policy as referring to a proposal, an on-going programme, or the goals of a programme, major decisions, or the refusal to make certain decisions. Policies are directed at

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attaining certain goals, purposes and intentions. They deal with particular needs and problems in society. They, indeed, provide a framework in which decisions or a set of decisions are made in a particular area. When policies are well implemented, they become catalysts for great transformation in society. Public policy usually brings change and such a change attracts different reactions. While some people may support and applaud the change, others may not. This is the situation in the case of Nigeria where several policies have emanated from government and which have resulted in various reactions that are dependent on reasons ranging from personal conviction to political affiliation, as well as ethno-religious, economic and social factors. In most cases, the type of policy will determine the type of reaction. By this we mean that a symbolic policy may not attract much reaction as a material one.

A policy is symbolic when it has a little real material impact on the people because it does not confer any tangible advantage or disadvantage. Agagu (2010, p. 6) sees symbolic policies as those policies that are “directly or explicitly designed to foster, inculcate or celebrate values, beliefs, sentiments or attitudes of national consciousness or loyalty”. For example, raising the national flag before a ceremony commences does not bring any material gain to the people, and neither does it bring any disadvantage. On the contrary, material policies actually either provide tangible resources or substantive power to their beneficiaries or impose real disadvantages on those who are adversely affected (Anderson, 2000, p. 13-14). A situation whereby government goes ahead to pay for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) examinations of students in a certain community definitely would amount to the provision of material advantage to the people concerned.

Methodology

The paper utilized secondary data analysis to generate discussions, in-depth analysis of the three policies in focus as well as the concluding remarks.

Public Policy

The concept public policy probably has many definitions as the number of authors on the subject matter. Definitions of the concept are varied depending on the perspective upon which various authors view it. Robert and Clark (1982) as cited by Philip and Peter (2013) explain public policy as:

Series of steps taken by a government to solve problems, make decisions, allocate resources or values, implement

and, in general, to do the things expected of them by their constituencies.

Jenkins (1978) refers to public policy as a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group of actors concerning a certain problem. This definition is reinforced by Chakrabarty and Chand's (2012) description of public policy. They submitted that public policies are primarily framed by the government to satisfy public needs and demands; they are the means by which ends of collective community are served and that without policies, government and administration are rudderless. Generally speaking, public policy has been defined as actions taken or to be taken, by government in relation to certain problems affecting the society. It is also referred to as a statement specifying the line of action or proposed line of action in relation to certain problems and activities involving government. For the purpose of this paper, we would define public policy as actions or activities of government or its proposed actions and activities to bring about change to the situation of its people in response to public demand on it, or in an attempt to solve its own problems. The emphasis in this definition is on "change". Public policy is expected to bring some change in the behavior of the target population and it has to do with those areas which are so labeled as "public" (Sapru, 2006). Examples of such public policies are those policies in the spheres of education, health, security, finance, etc. because these areas affect the generality of the people and they differ from private policies. We have the Housing policy, the Anti-corruption law of the Federal government, as well as the removal of fuel subsidy, the Treasury Single Account (TSA) policy, and the National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill 2016, among others. However, the focus of the paper will be on some recent policy pronouncements of government which have attracted reactions from the people. Therefore, the removal of oil subsidy, the National Grazing Reserve (Establishment) Bill as well as the Integrated Personnel & Payroll Information System (IPPIS) will be the focus of this paper. Before going into the discussion on specific policies, let us have a cursory look into the link between policy and politics since they interact with each other.

Politics of Public Policy

Policy has been defined in various ways. Adopting Adamolekun's (1983) definition, policy is a course (just like a compass used in finding a path on the sea) involving decisions of widest ramifications and longest-term perspective in the life of an organization, a country, or a nation. Dror (1968) defines it as "general directives on the main lines of action to be followed". Another scholar, Vickers (1964) describes policies as "decisions, giving direction, coherence and continuity to the courses of action for which the decision-making body is responsible". On its own part, politics, which refers to the activities of government in the administration of the state through numerous decisions taken to allocate resources, as well as to resolve conflicts, permeates in every area of

administration or governance. It is from the various decisions taken that policies emerge, meaning that decision making is critical to policies and also to politics. Politics is defined as a particular social science involving the resolution of conflicts and the activity of government. Politics is viewed as the authoritative allocation of values such as making decision on who gets what. Harold Lasswell (1936) conceives politics as who gets what, when and how? This is in agreement with the view of David Easton (1965), who views politics from the perspective of the process of authoritative allocation of scarce values which may be in the form of services, goods and money, or in terms of the formulation of policies on different areas of governance such as health, education, and security, among others. According to Lasswell and Kaplan (1950, p. 1-5), politics “is the process of making and executing governmental decisions or policies”. On the other hand, Khan, 1997, views politics as activities revolving around the decision-making organs of the state which involve the concepts of power, authority, command, and control. While Lasswell and Kaplan’s definition of politics appears to be all embracing taking place in all spheres of human life, Khan views it from the narrow spheres of politics as it affects decision-making organ in the state. From the above, it is clear that policies can be referred to as political statements since they involve activities of government through political office holders, and/or members of the Legislative arm of government who, actually, make our laws. Furthermore, Ikelegbe (2006) views policy as governmental actions or course of actions or proposed actions or course of proposed actions that are directed at achieving certain goals. The above definitions confirm the fact that whether at the point of decision on who gets what, when and how, or at the point of taking action by government on specific needs, people are involved. Most of those that will be involved are those who have their own biases, values, and political preferences. Paki and Ebienu (2011) asserted that:

Most public policies in Nigeria are squarely a reflection of the personal interest of the political class rather than the demand of the citizens, and as such, policies lack public support in terms of implementation. This is attributed to lack of political sensitivity.

At the stage of recognizing that there is a problem to be solved, it is the people – the citizens, a group of people, the bureaucrats, or the legislative body – that will come up with policy demands. From the level of problem recognition to that of policy adoption, a lot of politicking is involved. When the demands are made on the government on certain issues, if they are not translated into a political issue, they may not get to be on the agenda. The agenda stage is that stage where government ruminates over the demands from the environment. Cochran, E.,

Lawrence, C., Carr, T.R. & Cayer, N.J. (2003) have stated that agenda setting is always a political process in which groups struggle for power to be in control. It is also at this level that ideological and interest groups compete to broaden the agenda or include their issues, or to narrow it by excluding issues that they do not support. After the adoption of policies, the implementation stage is very crucial and it involves a lot of deft politicking. Unarguably, there is no way a policy can be implemented successfully without adequate funding and availability of personnel. Allocation of funds, provision of infrastructure, as well as provision of personnel are political issues. If therefore, the government is not in favour of any policy, it is capable of frustrating it by failing to provide adequately for its implementation. A case in point was the Housing policy of Shagari's administration between 1979 and 2003. As a result of party differences, Bola Ige administration of the defunct Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in the then Oyo State was against the construction of low-cost houses in Ibadan, Oyo State. The Bola Ige administration allocated land to the government of Shagari of National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the outskirts of Ibadan. Consequently, the low-cost houses built by Shagari's administration were overgrown by bushes and inhabited by rodents and reptiles. Considering the contributions of each of the actors, namely, the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, the political party, even the citizens and the interest groups – politics will be found at every stage of the policy process from the problem recognition to the policy evaluation. Having discussed public policy to some extent, the next issue borders on “change”.

Meaning and Management of Change

Change is that activity that sometimes presses people out of their comfort zone. It is a pervasive influence, as well as an inescapable act of social and organizational life (Mullins, 1999). It can be for the better or for the worse depending on from which perspective one views it. Change, arising from public policy, needs to be well managed by the government in order to prevent chaos. Some of the rules for the effective management of change include thoughtful planning and sensitive implementation, and above all, consultation with, and involvement, of the people to be affected by the changes. This means that there must be interactions between the government and the people before policies are pronounced, i.e. during the formulation stage. Another rule is that change must be realistic, achievable and measurable. However, when it is an organizational change, some questions become relevant. They include questions such as: What do we want to achieve with this change, why, and how will we know that the change has been achieved? Who is affected by this change, and how will they react to it? How much of this change can we achieve ourselves, and what parts of the change do we need help with? However, our concern is the change emanating from government policies.

As earlier stated, change reactions can be positive or negative. When it is positive, government will be applauded by most of the citizenry. A change, for

example, which brings an increase in the income of the people, will surely bring positive reactions. However, a change that brings extra expenditure to the people, such as increase in taxation, will surely bring, with it, negative reactions. Majority of the citizens will react negatively by condemning the government or even staging a protest which may be prolonged or even turn violent.

Reactions to change are dependent on some of the following – fear of the unknown, inadequate or no information, threat to status, fear of failure, low trust in the government or in the organization initiating the change, as well as strong peer groups norms and being bound by custom. Reactions depend on the ways that the change beneficiaries or victims perceive the change, that is, the purpose of the change, the benefit of the change to them, and the future consequence of the change on their lives. This is why it is usually expected that the change agent must ensure that there are consultative communications in order to mobilize support for the change. When a change is imposed on the people, it attracts negative reactions.

How then must a change be handled in order to avoid policy failure? Change must be managed in a way that people would be able to cope with it. The change agent must realize that there are forces to contend with. Therefore, there is the need to identify the forces of resistance so as to understand the nature of the forces. There is a tool called Force-field analysis which is commonly used in management studies. The analysis starts from the belief that in a given moment, an organization is a state of equilibrium resulting from the balance between driving forces pushing for change and restraining forces that act against change. In order to bring about change, therefore, the balance of these forces must be altered so that the equilibrium moves. This means that there either needs to be an increase in the driving forces, or a decrease in the resistant forces.

The following steps are suggested to reduce resistance to change:

1. People must be involved at the formulation stage of any policy that is likely to attract negative response from the people. Before General Babangida embarked on the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in July 1986, there was a wide consultation with the people. SAP was a neo-liberal economic reform initiated by the Britton Woods Institution, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a condition for granting loans to developing countries, including Nigeria. Although majority of the people did not support the policy, Babangida still went ahead to implement it and the promulgation of the policy was not well received and it is believed that SAP was the origin of the current economic woes not only in Nigeria but in Africa generally (Abah and Naankiel, 2016).
2. The benefits of the policy must be explained to the people, as well as the envisaged problems. Failure to intimate the people with envisaged problems

may lead to government being labeled as being insincere. If the citizens have adequate information as regards both the benefits and challenges of a policy, they are more likely going to cooperate at the implementation stage.

3. Borrowing from John P. Kotter's (1996) eight steps to successful change, five suggestions which are relevant to policy change are given below. Although Kotter's suggestions are more relevant to business management, some can still be applied to government policy change. The suggestions are as follows:
 - (a) Inspire people to move, make objectives real and relevant;
 - (b) Get the right people in place with the right emotional commitment, and the right mix of skills and levels;
 - (c) Get the team to establish a simple vision and strategy, focus on emotional and creative aspects necessary to drive service and efficiency;
 - (d) Involve as many people as possible, communicate the essentials, simply, and in a way that they will appeal and respond to people's needs; and
 - (e) Remove obstacles; enable constructive feedback and lots of support from leaders.

The Nudge theory which is credited mainly to American academics, Richard Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein (2008) is relevant in the management of change, especially when government wants to "shift thinking and behavior of very large groups and potentially, entire societies". The Nudge theory is a concept of behavioral science which argues that "positive reinforcement and indirect suggestions to try to achieve non-forced compliance can influence the motives, incentives and decision making of groups and individuals. This is in contrast to direct instructions, legislation, or enforcement. Much of the theory is based on the 2002 Nobel prize winning work on human thinking of Daniel Kahneman & Amos Tversky, dating back to the 1970s, which, broadly, is called "heuristics". From the perspective of Nudge theory, heuristics refers to "the tendency of people to think emotionally and instinctively, rather than rationally and logically, based on a variety of influences. Our knowledge of heuristics will enable us know why and how people think, make decisions and behave. If not appropriately used, however, heuristic thinking can cause people to behave in ways that can create problems for the people themselves and the society in general (Kahneman & Amos Tversky, 2002). This problem is likely to come up if the people suspect or realize that government is trying to manipulate them.

Having discussed "change" from different angles, our focus will now be on three of the policies that attracted change reactions since 1999. The first one is the Oil subsidy removal (Jonathan Administration), the second is the proposed National Grazing Reserve Bill of 2016 (Buhari Administration) while the third is the introduction of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIIS) conceptualized in October 2006 to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in the storage of personnel records and administration of monthly payroll in such a way that it will reduce incidences of ghost workers.

Our discussion will start with the issue of removal of oil subsidy which came into existence during the tenure of President Goodluck Jonathan. In January 2012, the price of the premium motor spirit (PMS) was raised from N65 to N141 by the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan and this change was met with stiff resistance from a large majority of the people. It was believed by many of the citizens that the only benefit they derive from Nigeria, being an oil producing country, was getting fuel at a cheap price. It was also claimed that the increase in fuel pump price would raise the prices of other commodities and services, thereby reducing people's purchasing power. While the retailers were happy because it meant extra cash in their accounts, most of the consumers took to the street because of the hole it created in their own pockets. The removal of oil subsidy was viewed by the generality of the people as being evil, especially given the difference from the price it was before the change and the price recommended by the government. The change was perceived as a threat to the financial status of the people, and this brought a great distrust to the government of the day. Given the magnitude of the resistance, the price was brought down to N97, lower than the government proposed price of N141.

From all indications, however, it did not appear that government did much situational analysis which would have shown that such a policy would be strongly resisted. The Buhari Administration also tactically removed subsidy but the change reaction was not as violent as it was in 2012. Perhaps, at that time, there was more information on the action of the government or perhaps, the people had a high level of trust in the Buhari government. Unfortunately, however, the oil subsidy that was resisted during the Jonathan Administration has been surreptitiously brought back. The oil price has since increased to between N162 and N170 and the price may still go up.

The second issue to be discussed in this paper has to do with the proposed National Grazing Reserves Bill. As defined earlier, a public policy can be a proposed action and this makes the proposed National Grazing Bill qualify for our discussion. The Bill was first sponsored by Senator Zainab Kure, representing Niger Central in the 7th Senate but it was rejected. The Bill resurfaced but, this time, it was sponsored by Hon. Sadiq Ibrahim, an APC member representing Adamawa State Son/Fufore Constituency in the House of Representatives. It provides for the establishment of the National Grazing Reserve Commission which shall have power to, among other things, establish at least one cattle reserve in each state of the federation. The Commission is also mandated to:

- Manage, control and maintain the Cattle Reserves;
- Prescribe the persons who may be licensed to use the Grazing Reserves and determine the type and number of stocks permitted therein;
- Prescribe the manner in which the Grazing Reserves may be put to use;

- Fix charges for the Grazing Reserves;
- Maintain and ensure, in co-operation with the Nigerian police, the security of lives and property within the Reserve;
- Provide for and issue grazing permits to persons grazing within the Reserves;
- Develop infrastructure and basic amenities such as clinic, schools, etc. within the Reserves;
- Demarcate the land boundaries of the Grazing Reserves; and
- Prosecute persons who graze outside the Grazing Reserves and other offenders of the Regulations of the Commission (Vanguard, April 30, 2016).

This Bill has attracted both positive and negative reactions from the citizens, with the negative reactions being in the lead. Arguments have gone back and forth and it would be appropriate to interrogate some of these reactions. *The Vanguard* of April 30, 2016 had a bold headline: Nigerians say “No” to National Grazing Reserves Bill”. Below are samples of the readers’ reactions:

- (a) I do not subscribe to the idea or plan by President Muhammadu Buhari to apportion Grazing fields to Fulani herdsmen in all the states which is like giving them license to kill. In the last one year since President Muhammadu Buhari came to power, the Fulani herdsmen have killed, raped and sent many innocent lives to their untimely grave. Secondly, these Fulani herdsmen are into their private businesses. It’s like saying he will apportion special fishing fields for the average Ijaw fisherman at Argungu or other parts of the northern states that these fishermen are predominantly Northerners.
(Tosan Atie)
- (b) Why should government contemplate this evil in the first place” Where did these Fulani herdsmen come from to settle in this state. Don’t they have ancestral home? Did they fall from heaven with no origin? Please no one should think of coming to collect my only land in the name of grazing field.
(Ezekiel Sunday)
- (c) It is a good idea considering the crisis that has accompanied these Fulani herdsmen grazing in most parts of the country. However, in the South-South or Niger Delta particularly, I do not think the people will welcome this idea of giving out their land exclusively for the Fulani herdsmen. It is like forcefully seizing their lands from them and may lead to more problems. I am of the view that if the government is planning a grazing field, it should be in the Northern part of the country where the Fulanis are more dominant, as it will lead to further crisis particularly in the Niger Delta.
(Lewis Dufala)

- (d) I am in total support of this grazing field and I am surprised that the last National Assembly failed to look at the merits of this bill before striking it out. In my opinion such grazing field, if implemented, will go a long way in solving and preventing incessant clashes between farmers and the herdsmen because the herdsmen would be restricted and confined in a particular location which is far better than this indiscriminate roaming and grazing and the attendant problems it is currently causing the nation.

(Joseph Saturday Audu)

The comments above (negative and positive) reveal some key issues that bring about resistance to change, namely, the fear of the future, inadequate information on a policy, threat to status, distrust of government, and, of course, fear of the unknown. Even though it appears that the grazing proposal has not been effected, the herdsmen are accused of forcing their way through by taking their cattle to people's farms for grazing leading to killing, maiming and sometimes, raping. The resistance, mostly from the south-west region, has brought agitation from this region for the creation of Oduduwa State.

The third change that would be discussed focuses on the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS). This system was created in 2007 in the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation. By 2016, the Federal Government of Nigeria revealed its plan to automate the payroll and human resource database for the Federal Civil Service. Before the implementation of IPPIS, the salaries of federal civil servants including both academic and non-teaching staff of federal universities were paid into the accounts of the different ministries, departments and agencies for disbursement. There was no agitation from the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) until 2019, when the President and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (President Buhari) ordered salaries to be paid only to those who are enrolled in the IPPIS. This action attracted a lot of negative reactions especially from the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) who saw it as a deliberate effort to undermine the autonomy of the universities. With the IPPIS, academic staff of federal universities can no longer go for sabbatical in any other federal institution as was the practice before IPPIS. This was because the federal government would not pay double salary to any staff, meaning that such sabbatical leave would not yield any financial benefit to the lecturers. According to the President of ASUU, Professor Biodun Ogunyemi, the IPPIS software is not robust enough to cater for peculiarities of lecturers. These peculiarities include the negative effect on sabbatical staff, adjunct lecturers, contract staff, and other academic allowances for working in more than one institution. Other problems with the IPPIS were that provisions were not made for deduction of checkoff dues, cooperative dues, transfer of union dues, and payment of other

approved allowances. Apart from all these problems, it has been observed that in all governmental agencies like the Teaching Hospitals and Federal Medical Centers where IPPIS is already in operation, there are numerous cases of underpayment or short payments of salaries. Many staff experience ridiculous cases of short payments of their monthly salaries. Overtime, many of these cases have not been resolved. Some staff had travelled to the Accountant-General's office in Abuja repeatedly to lodge complaints. Some cases are still pending, unresolved yet. To worsen the whole situation, the federal government has failed to establish liaison offices in these agencies of government where workers' complaints of short payments could be taken and addressed.

From observations, however, the IPPIS could be said to have its merits as it would prevent the issue of ghost workers in the federal establishments. The policy, however, failed to take into consideration the peculiar nature of ASUU and this has led to this body embarking on strikes as a form of protest. The ASUU strike of 2020 lasted nine good months. Among the issues of contention, salary payment via IPPIS platform was a major one. Up till now, the matter of salary payment through the IPPIS has not been rested as the alternative salary payment platform tagged University Transparency Account System (UTAS) prepared by ASUU and submitted to the federal government is still undergoing integrity test. The series of strikes have brought great inconvenience both to students and their parents. In fact, many people believe that these strikes have had negative effects on the quality of tertiary education in Nigeria.

Public policies in Nigeria as discussed above show that problems arise from inadequate involvement at the formulation stage of beneficiaries of the policies. It is evident that those who should have been brought in at the formulation stage are ignored thereby missing out on their own contribution at this level. When this happens, those who should have made useful contributions that would reduce the incidences of negative reactions do not have that opportunity. The case of IPPIS is very germane to this claim. Even the proposed RUGA was a top-down decision which was not debated widely especially among the different groups of people. Without any doubt, such policies would always attract negative reactions and, most likely, result into policy failure.

The above discussions have clearly revealed that public policies in Nigeria do bring change to the lives of the citizens – negative or positive - depending on the side from which one looks at them. The change reactions as discussed above also show that, contrary to the belief of some people that Nigerians are docile, Nigerians have demonstrated, through the cited reactions, that the people who consider Nigerians as being docile may be wrong after all. However, there are some areas where one would expect reactions from the people but such reactions are not forthcoming. Such areas include the proposed rail line from Nigeria to the Niger Republic, the proposed establishment of a refinery in Daura (President Buhari's hometown), Katsina State and the flagrant deviation from the federal character policy in the appointment of Nigerians into key positions in government which is skewed towards a particular ethnic nationality over the

others. This has placed a particular sector of the country at an advantage over other regions. Although there are some reactions in the media but not the type that was witnessed during the oil subsidy removal and the RUGA proposition. It is, however, evident that sometimes, the citizens react, positively or negatively, when there is need for such. This, of course, does not mean that they do not believe in the new slogan – CHANGE BEGINS WITH ME. The change in this slogan, however, is not referring to the change that has been discussed in this paper, which is change arising from government policies.

Conclusion Remarks

As a matter of necessity, governments will continue to formulate and implement public policies for the good of the people. When policies are formulated, they will generate change reactions which could be positive or negative. This paper concludes that the citizens' negative reactions, as revealed in our discussion, were as a result of government failure to interact with the people that the policies would affect before coming up with these policies. It is suggested that for change reactions to be properly managed, there must be constant interactions between the government and the people before policies are pronounced. Also, the change agents must ensure that they engage the people in consultative communications so as to gain support from the expected beneficiaries for the proposed change.

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