

Interrogating the Basic Elements of Public Policy Using the Nigerian Examples

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Abstract

This paper is designed to provide a succinct understanding of the basic elements of public policy analysis. It also provided for explanation basic concepts in public policy, and it exposes the readers to actors in public analysis policy using Nigerian examples. Based on the belief that public policy is a multifaceted discipline and activity regarding the policy can be better understood when they are considered in the environment in which it occurs, where the players are involved, and why such a public policy is being undertaken. Relying on secondary sources of data, the paper found that in most cases the public policy in Nigeria is anchored on demand and the immediate needs of the environment or citizens. It also found that the crisis of priority of demands exists, the ability of the groups where such policy demand is coming from goes a long way in determining when it gets to the agenda stage and subsequent stage of the policy cycle in the country. The paper concludes that a strong public policy system in Nigeria depends on the understanding of the basic elements of public policy

Introduction

Public policy analysis is one of the subdivisions of politics. The attention of scholars on Public policy analysis became prominent after the Second World War and continues to spread in the 1960s and 1970s. The attention gained by public policy analysis led to a paradigm shift from the focus on institutions of government, their types, powers, functions, structures, and processes. The shift in attention of scholars was forward attributed to increasing awareness and concern for the welfare of the government towards the citizens, the effective implementation and poor performance of governmental programs and policies, as well as the advancement of political scientists in their quest for relevance in the modern government. An amplified understanding of public policy

can be done when considered within the environment and context where such activities take place. This is based on the belief that public policy is a multifaceted discipline and activity regarding policy and the players involved, and why such public policy is being undertaken can be better appreciated when scholar draws their understanding from the environment of such policy.

Again the demands for policy actions are generated in the environment and transmitted to society and at the same time, the environment places limits and constraints in some cases upon what can be done by policymakers (Onkware, 2015). In Nigeria for example, where we have diverse ethnic and religious inclinations some policy decisions of the government should reflect the diverse nature of the country for equity and fairness.

Also Included in the environment are the geographical characteristics, natural resources, climate, and topography; demographical variables like population size, age distribution, and spatial location; political culture; social structure; and the economic system. In addition to these factors, the reasons behind such policy demands equally play paramount in Nigeria's public policy discourse. Regional or community-based civil society movements with a strong desire to protect their own interests have grown since Nigeria's democratic transition. The Bayelsa Youth Federation of Nigeria (BYFN), Afenifere, Ohaneze Ndigbo, Arewa Consultative Forum, Middle Belt Forum, Egbe Afenifere, Odua People's Congress (OPC), Igbo People Council, and Ndigbo Liberation Movement are a few of these regionally based CSOs (Abari, 2013, p.13). The two most prominent CSOs that also arose after 1999 are the Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN) and Youths Earnestly Ask for Ababa (YEAA). They played a key role in quelling popular opposition to authoritarian rule. Pro-democracy NGOs such as the Transition Monitoring Group, Constitutional Rights Project, and Civil Liberties Organization, all of whom received questionable sums of money from foreign aid, were perceived as weaker than these groups (Chukwudi and Samuel, 2023).

This paper provides an understanding of the study of public policy analysis, it also provides a simplified explanation of the basic concepts in public policy, and it exposes the readers to actors in the public analysis policy.

Conceptual clarification

For a clear understanding of the concept of public policy analysis, for students, especially foundation students of public policy / public administration, political scientists, policymakers, practitioners, administrators, and of course the general public. The absence of consensus among scholars of political science and public

affairs analysts on the concept of public policy analysis makes it germane for us to subdivide the subject for broader understanding.

a) Public: According to Barret and Fudge (1981), the term public means a policy that is conceived and emanates from the public sector. The public sector here includes the institutions of the federal, state, and local governments. Examples of such public policy that emanate from the government's concern over the supply of potable water in the Niger-Delta geopolitical zone of Nigeria because of ravaging pollution as a result of oil spillage, the concern of provision of basic health services to the citizens, and the provision of security. According to Anderson (1975), the public is simply the act or action taken in the interest of the general public, governmental bodies, and officials.

b) Policy: The term policy was captured as a proposal on an ongoing project by Sharkansky (1978:23), thus "a proposal, an ongoing program, and other goals of a program, major decisions or the refusal to make certain decisions." According to Olaniyi, (1998), a policy is a set of decisions carried out by a political actor in an attempt to select suitable goals and methods of solving a specified situation. The attempt by the government of Nigeria for example to make the basic needs of the people of Niger Delta through the provision of suitable means of providing portal water for the people of Niger Delta can be regarded as policy. According to Oni (2019), views the concern of policy is in the making of decisions regarding attempts taken by the government in dealing with a current problem or matter of concern at a particular time. The policy is that decisions and programs are aimed at meeting a particular demand at a given period. A policy is a statement by the government or its agencies expressing what it plans to do or not to do, these include law, ruling, regulation, decision, or a combination (Birkland, 2001). According to Dahida & Maidoki

(2013), characteristics of a policy include choice or a critical or major decision taken from multiple choices by individuals, groups, and organizations; policies are proposed courses of action or statements of future actions; policy is goal-oriented; policies are designed to solve particular problems through the provision of direction and guide attaining set goals.

c) Public policy: From the perspective of Jerjins (1978) public policy is a set of interrelated decisions championed by the political actors or group of political actors who concern themselves with the selection of specific goals for attaining some measure of political solutions within their jurisdiction. Jerkins, the definition of public stresses the importance of political actors in the public policy process and in attaining policy goals, especially in findings solutions to societal problems. While Roberts and Clark (1982) opined that public policy is a series of attempts or steps taken by agencies of government to provide a solution to perceived problems, through policy decisions, allocation of resources or values, and the implementation of policies for the interest of constituencies. The attempt made by the Nigerian government through the provision of social intervention programs such as the N-power to reduce the high unemployment amongst the youth can be regarded as public policy. According to Roberts and Clark, public policy ordinarily is an attempt to provide solutions to the problem in society through the allocation of available resources at their disposal. Public policy is governmental decisions, indecision, action, and inactions to matters that concern the generality of the citizens and residents within its jurisdiction. It is important to note that the efforts made by the Nigerian government towards meeting the infra-structural and social needs of the citizen through various policy actions such as the national health scheme and Sure-P program are but only a few of the public policies in Nigeria. According to

Thomas Dye (1972), the public policy emphasizes that the indecision of the government in itself can be considered a policy. Dye sees public policy as what the governments choose to do or not to do. Thus, inaction is also a policy in itself. And the failure to make decisions or take steps is itself public policy since the resultant effect of the government's inaction could have a significant impact on the public. The government's actions and inactions, or whatever, the government chooses to do or not to do, are a reflection of the objectives and goals of such government (Oni, 2016). Public policies are an instructive instrument that guides governmental actions.

d) Policy analysis: Policy analysis, according to Oni (2016) simply means generating detailed knowledge of a proposed action plan or policy. Policy analysis is the systematic review of proposed and existing policies to ascertain their probable effectiveness, impact, and implication. For example, the Nigerian government's attempt to provide portal drinking water for the Niger Delta may require some level of project analysis to determine the implication of such policy to the government and the people of the area. Similarly, Shafritz (1986), sees policy analysis as a set of techniques aimed at answering the question as such what is the probable effect of a policy before it occurs. Policy analysis is a multidisciplinary inquiry designed specifically to formulate, systemically assess, and communicate useful information needed for the improvement and greater understanding of policies (Dunn, 2004).

Brief explanation on other important concepts in public policy analysis

a) Policy recommendation: According to Ponge (2013) policy recommendation entails "will need to be based on a systematic enumeration and weighing of all potential benefits and costs of an intervention if it is to be credible". Hence, policy recommendation requires an evaluation of the

potential gains, challenges, and impact of a governmental action plan regarding already defined societal problems. In Nigeria, for example, the recurrent farmer-herder conflict especially in the Northcentral geopolitical zone of the country requires an effective policy recommendation aimed at ending this menace and making the aspiration of both parties

b) Policy studies: This is the analysis of policy processes that could be normative. Here the focus is placed on a clear understanding of policy formulation up to implementation, as well as how to improve on them. In Nigeria for instance the government may adopt analytical procedures or develop models are developed for such purposes.

c) Policy science: This is the scientific method of studying policy processes with the view to making the study of the decision-making process scientific. This involves an interdisciplinary approach to solving a societal problem. This involves systematic methods of engaging the issues of boarding society.

d) Policy environment: This is referred to as the prevailing (external) factors or situations that influence, shape, and reshape the policy cycle, beginning from the formation up to the implementation stage. In Nigeria, for instance, the recently enacted Northeast Development Commission was influenced by the destruction caused by the activities of the insurgency group in the region, thus, we can say that the environment influence the enactment of the commission.

e) Policy demands: These are often the request made by the citizens make on the policy-makers and the concerned stakeholders on demanding necessary actions or inaction to solve an existing societal problem. Policy demands are made to draw the attention of policymakers to an issue during policy formulation processes. For instance, the enactment of the Anti-open Grazing Bill by some state governments was a response to

the outcry over the continuous farmer-herder conflict.

f) Policy decisions: This is the authoritative direction given to policy actions. Authoritative approval is the legal backing given to policy demand. Policy decisions are the actual statutes or an enactment given to societal demand. In this case, the enactment of the Anti-open Grazing Bill is the actual legal backing given to solving a perceived cause of the farmer-herder conflict in some states of the country.

g) Policy statements: These are a formal expression of opinion on public policy by institutions of government and the modality to achieving the said policy. These often come in form of decrees, presidential orders, regulations, and administrative rules. In Nigeria for example under the military regime policy statement can eventually stand as a policy decision, while a democratic government statement may not translate into actual policy until some procedure measures are taken.

h) Policy outputs: These are the reflections of the government's actual action and inaction to a policy decision or policy statement. Policy outputs show what the government has done regarding a societal problem.

i) Policy outcomes: According to Oni (2016, p.333) policy outcomes is the "overall manifestation of public policies in terms of the goals set for attainment. This manifestation could be intended or unintended consequences of policy for the society where the policy is implemented and this could be as a result of the action or inaction of government". Policy outcomes allow the assessment of public policy goals set at beginning of every policy.

j) Policy advocacy: According to Oni (2016, p.333), policy advocacy is "concerned with the activities of government designed to draw support and promote a particular policy through several means, including discussion, persuasion, and

political activism. It is also a means of creating awareness and sensitizing the public on the orientation and contents of a policy". The Nigerian government adopts this measure whenever they attempt to remove petroleum subsidies.

Significant of public policy analysis

a) Public policy analysis assists policymakers through the provision of relevant policy information for the efficient definition of the problem in society, as well as the identification of potential policy alternatives that can provide the solution to a defined problem and recommend the best policy alternative (Weldeslassie, 2021).

b) Linder and Peters (1988), also stressed the significant role of policy analysis in ensuring an efficient and effective policy-making process by providing an understanding of how policy alternatives are generated and analyzed and the fundamental goals attached to producing better policies.

c) Policy analysis, is significant because it helps policymakers to make informed policy decisions, and assist interest groups, policy actors, as well as researchers, using relevant policy data/information to elaborate and strengthen their policy ideas, arguments, and plans with reliable facts.

d) Public policy analysis helps to awaken citizens' participation and consciousness, as well as stimulate critical minds to take up the challenge of evaluating the impact of government policy decisions or planned activities. It provides a vital opportunity for various socio-cultural and interest groups and the general public in particular about the government's action plan and responses to the demands made by the public.

e) Policy analysis does not just stop at the identification of problems but it also saves the nation of Nigeria from various economic and political challenges through a systematic policy analysis of the country's policies (Dunn, 2015).

Hajer (2003, p.12) empathically captures the problem-solving nature of policy analysis through knowledge-driving actions thus "the commitment (of policy analysis) to a problem-orientation implies that knowledge is not to be pursued as a goal in itself, but to help resolve particular societal problems". Through policy, analysis knowledge is effectively utilized to solve a societal problem.

Types of public policy

a) Distributive policy: The distributive type of public policy just as the name implies is formulated by the government to create an avenue for the allocation of resources to the generality of the public. The policy emphasizes the need for equal access to resources. It also promotes the need for everyone to be carried along, to ensure that individuals benefit from it regardless of their status. Examples of distributive policies found in Nigeria include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) Act 1989, enacted to train young on skills needed for everyday activities, the National Programme on Immunization (NPI), enacted to aid the immunization of all children in the country irrespective of the geo-political zone and state, the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), enacted to cater for health needs of the civil servant and their family and to ensure free education for all children in the country the government enacted the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Policy, and other similar policies.

b) Re-distributive policy: Re-distributive policies are enacted for purpose of re-allocation of resources from geo-political zones to others, this is to ensure equilibrium. Re-distributive policy according to Olaniyi (1998), can be tagged as the "social inter-transfer of material resources", because it includes the allocation of resources through the transfer of available resources from one geo-political zone to another. This type of policy aims to ensure equilibrium, in the distribution of

the available resources including public amenities/facilities (Oni, 2016). This type of policy is a kind of zero-sum game nature because the gain of one geo-political zona is the loss of another (Oni, 2016). Examples of this re-distribute policy in Nigeria include the Petroleum Trust Fund Decree No. 25 of 1994 promulgated under the military regime for purpose of redistribution of excess funds generated from crude oil sales gotten from the Niger Delta to every sector of the country's economy, the Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P) of 2013 of the Goodluck Jonathan administration which dedicates the subsidy fund to amenities especially the construction and maintenance of roads.

c) Regulatory policy: The regulatory policy is essentially formulated to create a control mechanism in the conduct of human and societal affairs. This kind of policy involves setting rules and standards aimed at restricting certain behavioral threats or activities backed with commensurable sanctions. The regulatory policy makes rules and regulations based on certain terms and conditions and is backed by enforcement and adjudication mechanism in cases of any breach, hence its "low clientele supports" (cooperative behavior) (Olaniyi, 1998; Oni, 2016). The type of policy could be competitive or protective. The competitive aspect of the policy shows its restrictiveness in the number of citizens that can provide or are eligible to provide certain public goods/services or utilities, while the protective aspect of the policy focuses on the sets of conditions made to protect the general public against harmful activities of service providers (Oni, 2016). Regulatory policies enacted and current practice in Nigeria includes the Standards Organization of Nigeria (SON) established to ensure quality control in manufacturing products that are consumed or utilized in the country, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), which focuses on the regulations of the movement and use of hard drugs the

country, while the National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) which regulates the quality of foods, water, and drugs processed and consumed in the country.

d) Constituent policy: The constituent policy focuses on national orientation and cohesion. This type of policy draws attention to issues of national interest. Individuals, organizations or sectional interest does not have a place in the constituent policy. The constituent policy "serves the nation as a whole by protecting and promoting certain activities that are vital to national security and survival" (Oni, 2016:331). This type of policy includes the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme established after the civil war to enhance peace and reconciliatory move of the federal government, the siting of the Federal Capital Territory in Abuja with the aim of promoting national unity and cohesion.

Methods and approaches to policy analysis

a) Descriptive approach: The descriptive approach uses explanation and descriptions mechanism to understand public policy and governmental activities. The approach focuses on the history of policy, its development, causes of the phenomena that lead to policy formulation, and implementation, as well as consequences such as public policies. The descriptive approach possesses certain features such as her ability to seek an understanding of policy processes, it seeks to investigate policy contents, its implementation, and impact as well as the evaluation of a particular policy (Ikelegbe, 1996). This approach is concerned with the investigation and reporting of the behavioral pattern of policy-makers.

b) Prescriptive approach: The prescriptive approach focuses on the fundamental problems of society. And promotion/achievement of human dignity. The approach advocates that public policy analysts should center on the fundamental problems

of man in the society they live in as well to help in the achievement of human dignity (Lasswell and Deiner 1951). Lasswell and Deiner's arguments are the premise on the limit of analysis which indicates that policy analysis should not stop at the level of description both in practice and theory. The prescriptive approach stresses the improvement of the human condition, and to avoid human catastrophe. Intellectual capitulation and social interaction are what are needed by policy-makers to ameliorate the social problem. Thus, the prescriptive approach involves and employ social science analytical techniques; is problem-goal

c) Qualitative approach: Qualitative approach in public policy analysis involves the use of a narrative approach in analyzing societal issues. Thus, the approach adopts logical reasoning in its analysis. The use of statistical techniques, quantification information, and inferential analysis of statistical data does not apply to the qualitative approach. The descriptions and narrations of social issues and policy thrusts of the government are the main analytical tools in the qualitative approach. This approach described the processes involved in public policy and narrates and analyzes the impact and issues relating to the implementation of the policy quantitatively. It is important to point out that descriptive and prescriptive approaches to policy analysis can adopt qualitative analytical techniques.

e) Quantitative approach: Quantitative approach unlike the qualitative approach uses relies greatly on quantitative data techniques in analyzing public policy. The techniques used can be inferential analysis of statistical data, a simple calculation of means or percentages, analysis of variances, linear regression, and other complex quantitative tools for public policy analysis. This approach is informed by the result of statistical analysis.

f) Micro analytic approach: The micro or case study approach in public policy analysis concentrates on specific case policy for analysis. A case-by-case study of public policy analysis is the focus of this approach. The implication of the case-by-case approach is that creates room for depth and thorough investigation of a public policy. This approach most often uses descriptive or prescribed techniques in analyzing policy depending on the type of policy at hand. This approach provides a detailed examination and information on public policy, but, the approach is often criticized for being too narrow in focus.

g) Macro analytic approach: Macro-analytic approach unlike the microanalysis approach concerns the general aspects of public policy analysis. This approach takes a holistic view of policymaking and analysis and draws a broad knowledge as well as an understanding of various public policies. This approach provides insight into public policies and analysts. The central focus of this approach is to provide broader insight into public policy analysis. And a broader description, analysis, actions, and interactions involved between concerned stakeholders.

The Public policy-making process (the policy cycle)

a) Agenda-setting: Problem recognition is the starting point in the policy-making process. Problem recognition includes the identification of the social problem, and the definition of such problem that requires state intervention in form of policy formulation, which subsequently makes way for the problem to be put on the agenda list for prompt consideration and necessary public action (Werner and Kai, 2007). The agenda-setting stage of the policy cycle is nothing more than "the list of subjects or problems to which governmental officials, and people outside the government closely associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given

time" (Kingdon, 1995, p.3). Through the agenda-setting process diverse problems and issues are considered, including the potential strategies and instruments needed to shape and structure the formulation of a policy that would be acceptable to all, hence, this process presents the reason why some existing problems could receive similar of the level of attention, while some are recognized.

b) Policy Formulation and adoption stage: This is a critical pre-decision stage in the cycle of the policy process. The policy formulation stage aims at identifying the best possible solution to a defined societal problem. And this stage involves assessing the provided possible solutions to problems or, as well as exploring the series of options available for addressing an identified problem (Howlett and Ramsesh, 2003). According to Werner and Kai (2007:48), policy formulation is that which takes place "during this stage of the policy cycle, expressed problems, proposals, and demands are transformed into government programs". This stage involves the process of defining an issue, identifying solutions, and accepting and rejecting policy options for a defined problem (Howlett and Ramsesh, 2003). Policy formulation comes in various types such as routine formulation, which is a repetitive and changeless process that involves reformulating similar proposals; analogous formulation involves proffering a solution to a new problem by relying on what was done previously; while creative formulation involves attending to any problem with an essentially new proposal, in the form of a breakthrough from the past practice (Jones, 1977). Policy adoption involves the process of giving authorization to a proposal. The authorization of a proposal makes a planned course of action of the government legality. The authoritative ratification of a proposal which is referred to as policy adoption provides room for public accountability. This stage requires lobbying the legislature (members of the National Assembly) to legitimize the proposal, thereafter the executive signs it into law.

c) Policy implementation: This is a policy execution stage. According to the broad explanation of O'Toole (2000: 266), this entails "what happens between the establishment of an apparent intention on the part of the government to do something or to stop doing something, and the ultimate impact in the world of action". Policy implementation involves the gathering of human and material resources, and the utilization of such resources to achieve policy objectives. Policy implementation is all-encompassing aside from the civil service or the executive whose responsibility is to implement policy, the legislature conducts oversight on the policy implementation while the courts come to their dispute to interpret statutes as well as to provide clarity on the policy.

d) Policy evaluation: The evaluation stage of the policy cycle focuses on the intended and actual outcomes of the policies. Policy evaluation examines the intended target and impact of a policy. According to Werner and Kai (2007:54), Policy evaluations can "lead to diverse patterns of policy-learning, with different implications in terms of feedback mechanisms and a potential restart of the policy process...Evaluations could also lead to the termination of a policy". Policy evaluation is an assessment of the impact of a policy. Policy evaluation helps assess the performance of a policy through scientific interrogation of the workings of policies to determine whether to continue the policy or discontinue it, change a certain aspect of the policy, or overhaul them. Policy evaluation faces several constraints such as funding, certain restrictions attached to some policies, ethical considerations, ideological differences, and clarity of purpose (Onkware, 2015). Public policy evaluation involves assessing public program through the use of the goals and objectives the program was set to achieve, and eventually measuring the degree to which the said policy goal has been achieved, and of suggesting a way forward (Peters, 2018).

Actors in the policy process

The actors involved in public policy are both government and non-governmental institutions or bodies. Ikelegbe (1996) description sums up government and non-governmental actors who participate in public policy follow, The Role of Governmental Actors in the Public Policy Process:

a) The executive: Another important governmental actor in the public policy process is the executive arm of government, which comprises the president, governors, ministers, commissioners, cabinet, and political officeholders. The core responsibility of the executive arm of government in the public policy process is the implementation, coordination, and supervision of policy decisions (Dahida & Maidoki, 2013). The executive also has the role of initiating, enacting, implementing, and working on the feeding of policies for possible modification.

b) The legislative arm of government: The legislator has a great influence on public policy. The role of the legislature in the policy process begins with policy initiation, policy formulation, deliberation of policies, and oversight especially, during the implementation stage. The legislative arm expresses its influence over policy during lawmaking, oversight of the executive, monitoring of governmental expenditure, and expression of the opinion of the people they represent, through aggregate and articulated citizen demand and interests via quality legislation. According to Dahida & Maidoki (2013), the legislature is at the center of the policymaking process because through them demands are made by various groups and individuals, and they (the legislature) lead the discussion, mediation, and compromise paving way for policies.

c) The judiciary: The interpretation of policy passed or enacted by both the legislature and the executive arms of government are the core responsibility of the judiciary. The judiciary plays a crucial role in the public policy process especially

the adjudication of issues when conflicts and crises arise amongst interest groups and individuals, as well as judicial review policy actions. And as an actor in the policy process the judiciary moderate, mediate, interpret, adjudicate, review, and legalize public policy.

d) The bureaucracy: The bureaucracy plays a role in the policy process because policy formulation, implementation, and eventual evaluation take place within their context. According to Dahida & Maidoki (2013:59), "bureaucracy's role in public policy is that of bringing to bear policy-making and implementation, expertise, skill, and competence. The bureaucracy then is only conceived instrumentality in terms of enabling goal attainment". Bureaucracy in the present day seems to be socio-politically neutral in the process of policymaking.

Non-governmental actors include:

e) Political parties: Political parties play an influential role public policy process which arises from role their role in the political process that brought about the government. The programs political parties most often set during their campaign in their attempt to win control of governmental machinery become policies at the end of the day. This means that an electoral victory represents victory over policy options and policy performance presented to the electorate to choose which ones they consider to be the best alternative for them over a series of policies

f) The role interest groups: Various interest groups would often project and pursue their members' interests through policy initial, formulation, and the quest for implementation. The interest groups pursue them through "interact with governmental and non-governmental actors in the policy process because a lot of their interests are affected and dictated by governmental interventions and regulations" (Dahida & Maidoki,

2013, p.59). The place of interest groups in the policy process is a continuous one beginning with policy initiation, generation, formulation up to the implementation stage through steady influence.

g) The role of citizenry: The citizenry plays an important role in public policy in the country. They are important actors in the policy process of any nation they belong to. The citizenry prompts human demand emanating from the environment of policies, and the demands of the citizen are transformed into public policy to meet the yielding of the people. It is important to note that the citizenry contributes resources to policy implementation through their support or reject unfavorable policies (Ikelegbe, 1996).

h) Professional bodies and Civil Society: Professional bodies and civil society are critical non-governmental actors in public policy analysis. Professional bodies such as the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), and other bodies such as the Academic Staff Union of University (ASUU), provides policy advice to the government. Civil society also assists the government in providing policy advice and protesting against unfavorable policy decisions.

Theoretical approaches to the study of public policy

The theoretical approaches to the study of public policy that would be discussed briefly in this section include group theory, elite theory, institutionalism, political systems theory, policy output analysis, rational-choice theory, and incremental theory.

a) Elite theory: The theoretical approach of elitism views public policy from the values and preferences of ruling elites in the society at any given time. The central belief of the elite theory is that public policy is a product of the elite class not essentially a product of the majority of the people. The elite class is divided into the governing

elites and the non-governing elites. The governing elites are apparently in possession of qualities such as material resources, skills, and intellectual know-how, and the leadership needed to overshadow and influence public policy, while the masses which make up the majority of the population are destined to be ruled by the elite (Anyebe, 2018). According to Dye and Zeigler (1990), the elite theory views society as divided into sections the few powerful persons who allocate values and decide on which policies to adopt and the masses who do not have power and do not decide public policy. The scholars further state that the few who govern are drawn disproportionately from the upper socio-economic strata of society and the movement of members of the masses to the elite class of the society must be slow and continuous to ensure stability and to avoid revolution. The basic value of the society and the preservations of the system, incremental (minimum of alteration or dislocation) rather than revolutionary change are consensus shared among the elites. The influence of the masses is one of the attributes of the elite class, and for the masses to change the thread all stakeholders must be involved to subdue the elite from its constant influence.

b) Group theory: The proponent of the group theory of politics conceive public policy as a product of group struggle. The theory opined that public policies are a reflection of the activities of groups, who attempts or tries to influence public policy to their advantage (Anderson, 1997). The theory tries to analyze the influence various groups in society exert or exercise during public policy formulation, especially to their advantage. The group theory of public policy stresses the interaction among groups in society as an important element of politics, which is about searching for a compromise between competing interest groups. According to Enemuo (1999), the type of competition exhibited by the groups here

would determine the pattern of allocation of value and societal resources. The power of policy direction here is determined by the combination of these groups or groups that exert influence at a particular point in time. One of the central points of the group theory of policy analysis is that policy itself is a compromised equilibrium reached by groups after a genuine inter-group struggle (Latham, 1965). The role of the legislature here has been accurately captured by Latham (1965) when the scholar describes them as a “referee to the inter-group struggle and it ratifies the victories of the successful coalitions, as well as record the terms of the surrender, compromises, and conquest in the form of statutes or Bills” (Cited in Anyebe, 2018: 5). The theory presents a dynamic situation of the current reality of politics which is in itself a product of the struggle between interests represented in form of a group.

c) Systems theory: Another important theory of public policy is the systems theory. The system theory can be traced to David Easton in his famous work, ‘political system’ published in 1953. Easton’s perception of politics and political phenomena was a clear departure from the traditional model to a scientific mode signaling the arrival of a behaviorist revolution in the field of political science. The central features of the behavioral schools of thought are the promulgation of regularities, verification, techniques, quantification, values, systemization, pure science, and integration. The system theory sees public policy as a system of interaction in an organized society where the authoritative allocation of values is made and implemented in a form of policy decisions; arising in the form of response to a demand made from the environment (Anyebe, 2018). To Easton (1965), the environment is made of all the issues which are external to the political system. The system theory generates inputs from the political system derived from the environment in form of demands and supports. The demands

are usually made to satisfy the needs, interests, and values of individuals and groups, while support is rendered when the citizens, residents, groups, and individuals abide by their constitutional duties such as to vote and be voted for, pay taxes, obey laws, and abide by the verdict of the constitutional court (Anyebe, 2018). The support is imperative here because it determines the extent to which the legitimacy of the political system is accepted by the citizens, to guarantee effective outputs of the political system which comes in form of policies, laws, rules, and judicial pronouncement, which may further produce a recurrent output in of public policy changes and amendments. The demands made by groups or individuals are considered as input from the environment and the output from the political system comes in form of the allocation of resources with a provision for future inputs often emanating from the feedback received.

d) Institutional theory: The institutional theory concretized the concerns of political science in the early era which focuses on the institutions of government such as executives, legislatures, judiciary, and political parties, whose responsibility is to formulate and execute public policy on behalf of the government and the citizenry. This theory uses the descriptive approach to explain the formal and legal institutions of government. The central focus of the institutional theory is the structural relationships among the arms of government, legal powers, procedural rules, and functions of the government. Institutionalism focuses on the legal and structural aspects of policy analysis. The theory stresses the institution's arrangements and their significance on public policy. Investigating the nature of the relationships that exist between institutional and the content of public policy is one of the core concerns of institutional theory.

e) Incremental theory: Incremental approach is concerned with a small number of changes to

existing policies, such as a small percentage increase in the statutory provision or budget of certain ministries or parastatals. The incremental approach emphasizes a review of a limited number of policy alternatives and the implementation of changes in a series of small steps by the policy-maker. A limited or small change in the status quo is the major focus of this approach. This approach is constrained by some factors such as financial constraints, time, and complexity associated with understanding policies. These limitations make policy-makers often accept past policies that easily satisfy their needs. The weakness of this approach to some scholars is its conservative nature, discouragement of innovation, lack of guidelines through theory or directive for dealing with issues of policies, further, discouraging available policy alternatives and radical amendments of an existing policy (Anderson, 1997; Anyebe, 2018).

Conclusions

It is pertinent to conclude at this point with the words of Weldeclassie (2021:12) that “policy analysis knowledge is not a result, but utilizing knowledge to solve a problem is the objective”. The process of enacting a policy that is of public concern often has some element of dynamic characterized targeted at a specific objective or solving a particular societal issue. Public policy is a dynamic process that is characterized by a course or pattern of activities carried out to achieve predetermined objectives. The public policy process varies from one country to the other, for example in Nigeria, most often than not only the government institution and agencies play a great part in policy formulation and implementation excluding the critical role the non-governmental organization can play. Finally, the role of human and material resources in the public policy process cannot be overemphasized, and for any policies to succeed, all stakeholders must pledge their

commitments. A strong connection must be established continuously between the policymaker and the citizenry that is the direct beneficiary of the policies.

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