

## **PUBLIC POLICY AND CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA POLITICS: A PILLAR FOR SUSTAINABLE SECURITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study investigates the role of citizens' participation in shaping public policy in Nigeria's democratic landscape. Despite democratic advancements, Nigeria's political system still struggles with citizen disengagement and exclusionary policy-making processes. This research explores the barriers and facilitators of citizens' participation in policy-making, highlighting the impact of civic engagement on policy outcomes. Using a content analysis approach, this study reveals the complex interplay between citizen participation, political will, and institutional frameworks in Nigeria. The findings underscore the need for inclusive policy-making processes, citizen-centric governance, and institutional reforms to enhance democratic accountability and responsiveness in Nigeria. The study contributes to the ongoing discourse on citizen participation, public policy, and democratic governance in Africa's most populous nation.*

**Keywords:** *Public Policy, Policy Implementation, Citizens' participation, sustainable security.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Citizen participation has become a very important phenomenon in the world. Although it is necessary for the development of a country, some countries of the world are yet to introduce it in their development policies. Nigeria, like other countries of the world is still struggling to develop. It is noteworthy that it is one of the countries in Africa still having difficulties in achieving sustainable security. After more than fifty-eight years of independence, the scenario in the country remains disappointing (De Graaf, 2017).

Citizen participation was instituted to enhance government's public accountability in policy and decision making to achieve good governance and improve development (Chiweza, 2005; Hussein, 2003).

The need to bring the citizen to mainstream of socio-political, cultural and economic development of a country cannot be overemphasized. One of the ways of achieving this is through citizens' participation in public policy making and implementation process. Policies set up by organizations play an important role in maintaining a positive experience for those people the policies would affect (Wikipedia, 2013).

This calls for an urgent need in strengthening and encouraging effective citizen participation in policy making and implementation process especially at the grassroots level in Nigeria.

No doubt, public policy and its processes (policymaking and implementation) represent a fundamental aspect of government, governance, and the activities of non-governmental institutions and groups. This assertion is situated by Sambo (1999: 282) when he asserts that human conduct is administered by the policy because there would always be one policy regulating the behaviour of persons at the individual level, society, and/or organization, categorized as private and public policies. While private policy is narrow and restricted in scope, public policy is wide and covers the interest of a large population of people.

The importance of public policy decisions in economic growth, development, and sustainable security which is the essence of good governance is not in doubt. The assertion, the former Prime Minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher (cit. Mills 2014: 1) asserts that it is impossible to enjoy the fruits of effort without first making the effort. The inference of this statement is that without good policies and effective implementation, the likelihood of failure of government and governance is very high as it appears in many African countries including Nigeria. Mills (2014) pointing out the importance of public policy decision further stressed that the main reason countries in Africa are poor is because leaders in these countries chose to be poor because they falter in public policy processes and several negative factors affect the processes of public policy. In Nigeria, the history of public policy represents a narrative of governance and the overall conditions of the country in the sense that the dynamics and inconsistencies of statehood from colonialism to independence in 1960. As Cloete (2013) argued that citizens participation in the making and implementation of public policy is indispensable for sustaining democracy and promoting good governance which in turn sustain security capacity of the state. According to Eze (2010; 7), security policy deals with the broad issues of the management of the multiple threats to the core and context-specific values in the international system. Security threats could be of two kinds the conventional security threats, which are associated with a foreign element or government and is usually responded to according to conventional practice and doctrine following laid down pattern (Bassey;1993). The second typology of security threats have been defined as new or emerging security threats and are generally nongovernmental, dynamic, random and driven by variety of causes and forces. These are of two types. In the first place are the political security threats. The political fallout of the democratisation process in the age of globalisation has brought a high degree of political uncertainty and instability, defining the overarching security situation in the sub-region in a special way.

In the much of developing countries, policies which ought to have the citizens at their centre of focus, most times are usually at variance with the desires of the people or are not even within those expected needs of the citizens. Thus, public policy, in most situations does not reflect the demands of the masses but rather the prevailing values of the policy makers.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Public Policy**

"A public policy is a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a public problem" (Dye, 2012). "Public policy is the sum of government activities, whether pursued directly or through agents, as they affect the lives of citizens" (Laswell, 1958). "Public policy is a set of interrelated decisions made by a political entity, including governments, regarding the selection of goals and the means of achieving them" (Anderson, 2003). "Public policy refers to the actions taken by government to address public problems and improve the quality of life for citizens" (Theodoulou & Cahn, 2017).

A public policy refers to how the government addresses or doesn't address issues that affect the public and this could be through regulation, legislation, funding priorities or other actions (Hayes, 2001). This definition shows that public policy as a purposive and consistent course of action produced as a response to a perceived problem of a constituency, formulated by a specific political process, and adopted, implemented, and enforced by a public agency.

These definitions highlight the key aspects of public policy, including:

- Course of action or inaction
- Addressing public problems
- Government activities or decisions
- Affecting citizens' lives
- Selecting goals and means
- Improving quality of life

### **Policy Implementation**

Policies codify a set of goals and actions, the manner in which a policy is implemented is not linear and may change over time for a variety of reasons, only some of which are controlled by policymakers. Policies are often redefined and interpreted throughout the implementation process as they confront the realities of implementation on the ground (Alesch & Petak 2001:19).

Policy implementation refers to the mechanisms, resources, and relationships that link policies to programme action. More specifically it means to carry out, accomplish, fulfil, produce or complete a given task. Therefore, understanding the nature of policy implementation is important because international experience indicates that policies, once adopted, are not always implemented as envisioned and do not necessarily achieve the intended results (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973:32; Calista 1994:120; Love 2004:72; Bhuyan *et al.* 2010:1).

Moreover, some services are provided with scant attention to how such activities fit into or contribute to broader policy goals. Policy-makers and programme implementers also often have a limited understanding of how broader policies might help overcome service-delivery obstacles. Too often, policy and programme assessments emphasise outputs (for example, the number of people trained) or outcomes (for example, increased knowledge among trainees) but neglect the policy-implementation process which could shed light on the barriers to effective implementation. Assessing the policy implementation process “opens up the ‘black box’ to provide greater understanding of why programmes work or do not work and the factors that contribute to programme success” (Love 2003:4).

Researchers have formulated numerous theories to demonstrate the essence of policy implementation and the factors that contribute to success or failure, including the different levels, processes, and stakeholders involved in implementing public policy (Thomas & Grindle 1990:1165; Calista 1994:131; Matland 1995:153; Alesch & Petak 2001:15; Brinkerhoff & Crosby 2002:43; Bressers 2004:291; and O’Toole 2004:315). However, providing an entire review of the literature is beyond the scope of this article. At the risk of oversimplifying, *implementation* can be considered as the process of carrying out and accomplishing a policy (Pressman & Wildavsky 1973:32). Implementation is often viewed as part of a linear process that proceeds directly from the predictions and prescriptions given by the official to the policy-maker(s), to implementation, and then to policy outcomes (Meier 1991:45).

Policy implementation is not necessarily a coherent, continuous process; instead, it is frequently fragmented and interrupted (Walt & Gilson 1994:361). Therefore, implementation problems are no longer primarily a management problem, confined to relations between a manager and a subordinate, or

to processes within a single institution. Implementation of public policy stretched across spheres of government (in South Africa, from national and provincial to local) and across the agents of government from legislative to executive to administrative units (McLaughlin 1987:172).

### **Citizens' participation**

Research on citizen participation produces a complex and untidy literature (Kweit & Kweit, 1981). As a contested concept (Day, 1997), it is not surprising that it is plagued with definitional problems. Citizen participation can refer to a range of different actions by different people (Pateman, 1970). To Fisitzgerald, McCarthy, Carton, Connor, Lync & Adam, (2016) citizen participation is meant as an umbrella term that describes the activities by which people's concerns, needs, interests and values are incorporated into decisions and actions on public matters and issues. It is impossible to establish a universal definition of participation. An understanding of the concept is often assumed; in practice, development actions are often based on differing perceptions of participation and different perceptions of the level and quality of participation being sought, partly because of the lack of experience of effective participation practice. The literature gives a series of definitions of participation ranging from "token involvement of people", to, "autonomous decision making by popular organizations at local level" At its most basic, participation is "to take part" - this is very simplistic and implies that everyone is participating at some level in every action.

Citizen participation, according to Devas and Grant (2003), is the 'ways in which citizens exercise influence and control over the decisions that affect them'. Gaventa and Valderrama (1999 citing Cunill, 1997) refer to it as 'the intervention of citizens with determined social interests in public activities'. This can be directly or indirectly. Direct participation, the focus of this study, occurs where citizens - individually or in various forms of self-organization - are actively engaged in the decision-making processes on matters affecting them. Indirect participation is where citizens express their preferences through their elected and other representatives. It (indirect participation) is also referred to as political participation as the citizens' role is limited to selecting representatives.

### **Sustainable Security**

Security policy of any state derives from its geo-strategic environment and the kind of security threats perceived to be confronting the state. It is the primary responsibility of any state to ensure the safety of life and property of its citizens. This provides the basis for outlining principles of national defence and security policy. Security, on the other hand, is defined as freedom from danger or threats to a nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values and legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people itself (Imobighe;1987). He also defined national security as human security which should be the bedrock of national security as it is the security of ordinary men and women in society (Imobighe; 2003).

The application of sustainability to state security was encouraged by the 1987 Brundtland Report. The report defined the importance of sustainable development to regional security, and pointed out the dangers of unconstrained development and the chronic failure of many Western development programs that had benefited corrupt leaders and over harvested scarce or vulnerable renewable resources. In 1994, the UN Development Program published the Human Development Report, which defined the elements of human security. This report defined state security in terms of human security (freedom from want and freedom from fear) and encouraged the national security community to analyze the contribution human security made to building state stability. The idea that state security was related to human security and environmental sustainability provided a new framework for analyzing state security, failed states, and the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit. Sustainability of a state's resource base was essential for state governments to meet demands placed on the political system. Sustainability was also

an objective for policymakers seeking to maintain regional security.

### **Connection between Citizen Participation and Policy Making**

Citizen participation is valuable and beneficial to society at the national, community, and personal levels because it has the capacity to bring about improvements in communities and neighbourhoods, build relationships and strengthen the social fabric, and create feelings of personal and collective empowerment (Florin & Wandersman, 1990). Meaningful citizen participation infuses policy making processes with the resources and insights of those who are most affected by the policy outputs, and promote decisions that benefit average citizens (Crawford, Kotval, Rauhe & Kotval, 2008). Both practitioners and academics recognize the value of citizen participation in planning decisions for theoretical and practical reasons (Laurian, 2004). Participation benefits democratic processes because it increases government accountability to the public, infuses lay knowledge into decision making, and improves public support for policies. Participation also benefits the planning profession because it increases public awareness of and appreciation for planning (Laurian, 2004).

The need to involve citizens in a meaningful way in public policy-making has been reinforced by increased dialogue about the value of participatory planning and the necessity of understanding cultural dimensions in planning (Crawford, Kotval, Rauhe & Kotval, 2008).

Involving citizens in planning and designing their own communities promotes a transparent, democratic public policy-making process (Crawford, Kotval, Rauhe & Kotval, 2008). Engaging citizens in the decision making process is the fundamental principle of democratic governance. Citizens' participation in societal decision making is the fulcrum of a democracy and a “force for creating a sense of community and a sense of control over our lives and institutions” (Wandersman, Florin, Friedmann, & Meier, 1987). Equal participation by all citizens ideally requires policymakers to consider the needs, experiences, and opinions of these citizens when deciding how to prioritize resources. Access to citizen participation is crucial for the empowerment of disadvantaged and marginalized communities to have a legitimate voice in the crucial decisions policymakers (Gutierrez, 1990).

### **Challenges to Public Participation in Political Processes in Nigeria**

Adeoti and Olaniyan (2014:5-6) claim that “the root of the decadence in the democratization dates back to the colonial period. The nationalists, either in Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa made one fundamental error in their struggle to decolonize and democratize their respective countries. They did not allow mass participation in the political emancipation of their countries”.

For Joseph (2014) one of constant and critical hydra-headed malaise afflicting public participation in political processes in Nigeria is that of cultural systems denoting group boundaries in class and ethnicity most often than not, Nigerians usually base their participation on class and ethnicity. This problem has the tendency of preventing people from involving themselves in honest and objective participation and has also led to many becoming disinterested in participation. Participation is thus based on class and ethnic considerations and not on the Nigerian nation building project.

Though a global phenomenon, the high intensity of poverty in Nigeria is obviously a great challenge for participation. “There is widespread poverty in Nigeria despite its great endowments this is in spite of the efforts by successive regimes in Nigeria to introduce different programmes to alleviate poverty. Hence, there is an established link between poverty alleviation programmes (strategies), governance/politics. The failure of such programmes is blamed on the absence of good governance and citizens’ participation. Poverty has made Nigeria to attain an unenviable status as one of the poorest countries in the world, such that no government (no matter the level), organization, community, clan or family can survive effectively without introducing one kind of poverty reduction strategy or the other. This problem is essentially not



that of programme and strategies so adapted in poverty reduction efforts. Nigeria has not been known to lack in such efforts; yet she is still ranked among the world's 25 poorest nations" (Aderibigbe 2015:1-2).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Public Participation Theory and System Theory**

This paper is hinged on the works of Sherry Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" (1969), this theory emphasizes the importance of citizen involvement in decision-making processes. It argues that public participation leads to more inclusive, responsive, and accountable governance. Relying on David Easton theoretical models of "*The System Theory*" (1953) and "*Analysis of Political System*" (1965), the necessity of citizens' engagement can be better understood within the framework of policy making environment, given the realities of the system theory as a dominant paradigm in the policy analysis literature. Easton sees the society as a political system where there is a system of interaction through which binding and authoritative allocations are made. Public policy therefore, is the response of the political system to demands brought to request on it from the environment. The very assumption of the political system responding to its environment coupled with the forces generated from the environment are pointers to the germane issues of citizens engagement and its implications for policy making process. The forces generated from the environment are specifically referring to those demands and the supports usually made on the government by individuals and groups seeking authoritative allocations of values from the government. In terms of demands, these could also be about the specific needs and desires of individuals and groups in the society from the government while, support comprises of those actions rendered in the form of civic duties and obligations to the government.

## **Methodology**

By methodology in this context we simply mean the study used content analysis approach for our discussion.

## **Conclusion**

Citizen participation in governance is a foundation upon which the support, legitimacy and strength of democratic institutions can be based. However, the socioeconomic, political and historical conditions of the country have a significant influence on the context of public participation and governance. The strong link between public participation and a healthy, robust democracy is undeniable. Citizen participation offers a channel through which the public can give inputs into decision-making in terms of the making and implementation of policy. In order to reinforce democratic principles in public institutions; public participation in the field of public administration should therefore be encouraged.

## **Recommendation**

In considering citizen participation for the objective of advancing public accountability in the policy making, a successful citizen participation programme should be well organized, constructive, systematic and legally binding to have chances of achieving positive impact (Golubovic, 2010). Well- organized citizen participation entails facilitation of information sharing between the institutions and actors involved in decision making. The information should be objective, reliable, and up to date and

user friendly to those involved (OECD, 2001). For example, when dealing with local citizens who can barely read, it is inappropriate to design leaflets or pamphlets as information dissemination tool since it bars their chances of learning.

In addition, there should also be clear goals and rules that govern the interactions and processes in the exercise of participation (Yang & Callahan, 2005). These goals and rules should define the bounds and exact intents of the participation exercise to ascertain a concrete potential base of accountability and transparency in the decision-making processes (Malena et al., 2004). The processes of citizen participation should be open to public scrutiny to ensure transparency (Phillips & Orsini, 2002:9). At the same-time, the results of a citizen participation process should demonstrate the strength of citizens' voice (Arnstein, 1969).

The need for strategizing ways of enhancing and encouraging citizen participation in the making and implementation of policy cannot be overemphasized. To this end, this study therefore calls for government at all levels to have a rethink towards running an inclusive government. Citizen and most especially the beneficiaries of any public policy or program should be encouraged and educated through intensive public enlightenment on the importance of citizen participation in governance.

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