Information Policy Implementation in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Information policy implementation faces a range of challenges, especially in a resource-constrained country like Nigeria. Given the contexts in which policies are developed, including the policy's content, the nature of the policy formulation process, and the actors involved in the formulation and implementation processes, this paper examines the challenges of information policy implementation in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, a comprehensive literature review was conducted to arrive at an understanding of some of the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of information policy within the Nigerian context. The paper identifies issues and challenges within the wider policy literature and explains why it is critical to tackle each challenge for effective policy implementation. The paper reported a lack of a clear definition of responsibility and coordination, a lack of participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries, a lack of continuity and commitment to policy, compromise and conflict during implementation, overambition in policy formulation, and corruption as major factors hindering effective information policy implementation. The paper concludes by arguing that a supportive policy environment, the involvement of major stakeholders and beneficiaries, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and a good plan of action at the implementation stage can be regarded as necessary ingredients for effective policy implementation.

Keywords: Information policy, Policy implementation.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, political leaders and governments worldwide have assigned an increasingly central role to policy. Lennon (2009) define policy as a plan or course of action by a government, political party or business entity designed to influence and determine decisions, actions and other matters. Virtually all aspects of the social enterprise are now the object of policy, a dynamic and value-laden process through which a political system handles a public problem (Plank, Sykes, &Schneider, 2009).

Information policy emerged as a result of the unprecedented access to information as a result of the knowledge explosion that the Internet afforded. It encompasses the laws, regulations, doctrinal positions, and other societal decisions related to the creation, processing, flows, access, and use of information. It can include many issues, such as ICTs; information access, retrieval, and use; data protection; privacy; secrecy, security, veracity, and transparency of government records; freedom of information legislation; information management; copyright; intellectual property; and e-government. Because it evolved from issues encountered by many different sectors, it is complex and multi-dimensional, involving the fields of technology, communications, law, government, medicine, education, business, and economics.

Donald (2018) highlighted that recognising the ever-increasing importance of information man conceptual/operational endeavours (global villages, information superhighway, National

Information Infrastructure in the United States, Nigerian Information Policy) are examples of evidence that leaders in government, information industries, and libraries are genuinely interested in improving the access, retrieval, use and transfer of information from one human being to another. Technology is certainly a means to an end. However, the success of all these crucial initiatives lies in the proper formulation and successful implementation of policies. Without such a policy, the global information environment will become more like a ship without a rudder. In the broadest terms, the global policy should at least give general direction to the development of universal information/library service, the free flow of information, a compatible interconnection among telecommunication systems, and international asymmetry (Donald, 2018).

Public policy implementation has been described as the major problem confronting Nigeria in its effort to achieve national development. Implementation often turns out to be the graveyard of many policies. From experience, little attention is paid to the subject of policy implementation by policymakers. It is often taken for granted that once a policy is adopted by the government, it must be implemented and the desired goals achieved (Ahmed & Dantata 2016). The development, implementation, and long-term success of effective and sustainable solutions to global problems optimally occur in collaboration in successful policy implementation involving stakeholders, communities and societies (Love, 2004; Munyua, Adera & Jensen, 2009; James, 2005).

Dick (2003) argues that policy implantation is the most critical dimension in the policy process given the fact that the success or failure of any given policy is, to a high degree, a function of implementation. It is, perhaps in the context of the need for effective policy implementation and the likely factors that may constitute an obstacle to it (Ikelegbe2006). Different factors influence policy development and implementation, such as the content of the policy, the nature of the policy process, the actors involved in the process, and the context in which the policy is designed and implemented (Mthethwa, 2012).

Many scholars have identified factors that are significant in the analysis of policy implementation. For example, Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) identified factors such as the characteristics of implementing agencies, predisposition of implementers and resources as critical. McLaughlin (1987) emphasized that the level of interest, commitment, and support

demonstrated by principal actors had a significant impact on the likelihood of success. However, the implementation literature is divided on which factors are most important in determining implementation success or failure. Therefore, this paper seeks to discuss challenges associated with information policy implementation in Nigeria.

Conceptual clarity on Information Policy Implementation

The term policy is central to the operation and activities of both private organizations and public institutions. A policy option made by an individual or private institution is known as a private policy while the one made by the government or its institutions is called public policy (Ozor, 2004). Over the years there has been an ongoing attempt to define information policy. In 1990, Overman and Cahill, drawing on Terry Weingarten's publication from 1989, defined information policy as "the set of all public laws, regulations and policies that encourage, discourage or regulate the creation, use, storage and communication of information." (Overman& Cahill, 1990).

While policy implementation can be defined as "the stage where organizations in general executes an adopted policy as specified by the legislation or policy action. At this stage, various government agencies and departments, responsible for the respective area of policy, are formally made responsible for implementation" (Theodoulou & Kofinis, 2004). Many scholars regard policy implementation as a separate activity that takes place after the policy has been formulated. Although this view is held because there is little appreciation of the fact that building support for policies is an integral part of designing them. This widely held view on the separation of policy design from implementation has been attacked by scholars like (Pressenca & Wildavsky, 1973) as fatal from any sense of direction.

Policy Implementation Assessment

According to Bhuyan et al. (2010), assessing policy implementation is critical for three reasons. Firstly, it promotes accountability by holding policymakers and implementers accountable for meeting stated goals and reinvigorating commitment. Second, it improves effectiveness because understanding and addressing policy implementation barriers can improve program delivery. Finally, it promotes equity and quality by establishing minimum quality standards, promoting access, reducing inconsistencies among service providers and regions, and thus improving quality (Mthethwa, 2012).

Issues in Information Policy Formulation and Implementation

A large amount of energy and resources are spent on designing and preparing plans for all kinds with little or no thought given to the complex chains of reciprocal interactions and variables required and this can be seen usually in the widening gap between intentions and results. One of the major challenges that face policy implementation includes the formulation of policies that are not forward-looking, policies that do not take into account global trends and practices, policies not taking into consideration local economy, demographic challenges, globalization and technological advances as well as urbanization and climatic changes (Tan, 2014).

There can be a sharp distinction between formulating a policy and policy implementation. Despite implicit awareness that such distinctions exist, the assumption in government is that once the government has produced policies, it is up to those working at the periphery to implement them. Failure of policy implementation is therefore regarded as being a result of bad execution and not a bad policy (Pfeffer, 1992). Lynn and Wildavsky (1992) further suggested that the challenge presented to implementers depends very much on the problems passed along to them by policy formulators, success in implementing must be evaluated within the context of particular problems, and critical factors affecting implementation will vary with what is being attempted.

This is a typical situation in Nigeria, where the intentions of designers of policies are often underlined by a constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration coupled with the prevalence of high-level corruption. The resulting short-comings, difficulties and failures that have attended major policies in developing countries have help to direct attention to the need for planning explicitly, management of policy implementation in which adequate attention is paid to such factors as political variable and institutional capacity to execute and operate development projects (Ahmed & Dantata, 2016).

Most often in Nigeria, however, policies are well and brilliantly formulated but ineffectively implemented by the implementers (Obodoechi, 2009; Ikelegbe, 2006). This leads to the failure of public policies to achieve their target goals and objectives and to ultimately alleviate the problems for which they were designed. Implementation problem occurs when the desired result on the target beneficiaries is not achieved. Such a problem is not restricted to only the developing nations. Wherever and whenever the basic critical factors that are very crucial to

implementing public policy are missing, whether in developing or developed nations, there is bound to be an implementation problem. These critical factors are communication, resources, dispositions or attitudes, and bureaucratic structure (Edwards III, 1980).

Indeed, there are usually wide gaps between formulated policy goals and the achievement of those goals as a result of ineffective implementation in almost all facets of public administration in Nigeria (Ozor, 2004; Mankinde, 2005). So many factors operate simultaneously and they interact with each other to aid or hinder policy implementation all these are inherent right from the design. By implication, therefore, the implementation of every policy is a dynamic process, which involves the interaction of many variables (Makinde, 2005). For instance, communication is an essential ingredient for the effective implementation of public policy. Through communication, orders to implement policies are expected to be transmitted to the appropriate personnel clearly while such orders must be accurate and consistent. Inadequate information can lead to a misunderstanding on the part of the implementers who may be confused as to what exactly is required of them. In effect, implementation instructions that are not transmitted, that are distorted in transmission, that are vague, or that are inconsistent may cause serious obstacles to policy implementation. Conversely, directives that are too precise may hinder implementation by stifling creativity and adaptability (Edward III, 1980).

In the field of information technology, information policy is widely used (Priftis & Oppenheim, 1999). Despite the fact that information policy is widely used in the field of information technology, it is a multidisciplinary field of study. Therefore, Browne (1997) concluded that there have been a few pieces of research to produce a unique issue or combination of issues to depict the information policy field. Inconsistent issues of information will result in a policy conflict in all levels of society, government and the information industry (Browne, 1997).

Scholars such as Basri and Yusof (2008), Rabina and Johnston (2010) among others have identified a certain issue in information policy that are directly linked to the success or otherwise in information policy implementation.

These issues can be grouped into the following manner:

1. Developing Basic Information Infrastructure (the technologies that allow for access to information).

i- Applications and soft-wares

ii- The availability/relevance of the technology and facilities

iii- Connection/ networking

2. Access to Information Resources (the knowledge content; its accessibility e.g., via close access or open access; and its legal and ethical use).

   i- Access to information e.g., open access, fee base

   ii- access cost

   iii- Information resource management

   iv- Policy related to information life-cycle

   v- Protecting traditional knowledge including heritage/ legacy/ oral tradition

   vi- Information Exchange/ Resource Sharing

   vii- Digital divide

3. Information Literacy (the skills and competencies of individuals to effectively and efficiently find, use, manage, and communicate information for specific purposes).

   i- The need to support the education and training of information specialist

   ii- The need to support the user with knowledge, skills and competence on how to access

   iii- Information integrity/authentication

4. Legal and regulatory framework Issues in this category are:

   i- Intellectual property rights; data protection; access to information and censorship.

   ii- Terms and conditions of access as well as the agreement between the vendor and the information centre or library

   iii- Area of action needed to be addressed and who is responsible for what?

   iv- Government secrecy/ National Security

   v- Tax /employment law

5. Cost VS benefit analysis – the critical factors here are; legal; economic; institutional; social and culture; research and education.
6. The need for policy to support the development of the information sector in the economy.

Challenges in Information Policy Implementation

Different factors at different stages influence policy development and implementation, such as the content of the policy, the nature of the policy process, the actors involved in the process, and the context in which the policy is designed and implemented (Mthethwa, 2012). Like any other policy implementation, information policy implementation would not be an exception. Many policies have suffered at the stage of implementation and hardly serve their intended purposes. Many scholars expressed their views on the problems of policy implementation in Nigeria, while some problems are structural, others are environmental and attitudinal. These problems are discussed as follows;

1. Lack of clear definition of responsibility & coordination

To ensure the proper use of information systems and services, responsibilities need to be clearly defined and coordinated in accordance with the set goals. Given this, there is a need to delegate personnel to provide acceptable use parameters for the information technology systems, to ensure the continued effective and secure operation of those systems, and to protect the systems and services from problems such as error, fraud, defamation, infringement of intellectual property, unlawful discrimination, illegal activity, privacy violations, and service interruptions. Unfortunately, many policies require the involvement of many individuals at different levels of the implementation phase, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities. The problem with most policies seems to be that although they describe the ‘what’, they do not explain the 'how'. Policymakers must explain the ‘how’ because the primary focus of information policy implementation is putting policy into effect. As such, there needs to be a course of action put into place in terms of how to go about implementing policy (Barrett & Fudge, 1981; Hogwood& Gunn, 1984). Most often, information policies have no course of action presented as to how to go about implementing them. The absence of coordination and a clear definition of responsibility among the various personalities involved could lead to failure in the implementation.

2. Lack of participation of stakeholders in the implementation process

Lack of involvement of all the stakeholder by the administrator, which comes about as a result of lack of consultation has been a serious challenge in information policy implementation. The problem of a lack of consultation between government/management, relevant stakeholders and involve target groups the lack of consultation between government and relevant stakeholders is a direct "gun-wound" to successful policy implementation (Mkhize, 2015; Freedman, 2013; Currie *et al*., 2001; CDE Research, 1999). It should be noted that for policies to be successful they should involve relevant stakeholders and target groups and they should allow for the participatory system, whereby policymakers plan with the people rather than for the people in meeting their felt needs. Such participation will give the target groups a sense of belonging as well as get them committed to the successful implementation of the policy. Unfortunately, however, studies carried by Ogolo (1997) and Faleye (1999) revealed that policies failed to consider this important aspect of policy implementation. Most of the time, the target beneficiaries were not involved at the planning stage. And this eventually resulted in an implementation gap. Broadnax (1976:701) believes that the main reason for non-compliance of public policy is because all the relevant stakeholders/beneficiaries are 'often not activated until the implementation phase has begun". This failure then leads to a lack of support of that particular policy. However, to prevent this situation as far as humanly possible; Madigan *et al.* (2004) advise that "educating the "end-users" or the public on the contents of the policy.

3. Lack of involvement of professionals in the implementations process

Despite the increasingly central position of ICTs in our lives, information professionals, unfortunately, rarely have a voice in the creation and implementation of these policies, leading to many negative impacts on information professionals and organizations, from new responsibilities without accompanying support to policies that challenge professional values and ethics (Jaeger, Bertot, & Gorham, 2013).

4. Lack of continuity commitment to policy

In some cases, a change in government is accompanied by a shift in priorities. The situation tends to makes policy implementation more difficult in terms of switching over to entirely different priorities and objectives, which require new organizations, personnel, resources, and technology that are not always easy to provide. This led to the abandonment of many policies. In

addition to the above, there is what Egonmwan (1991) called "plan indiscipline". This occurs when originally planned projects are abandoned without convincing reasons, thus resulting in a distortion of the original plan. Abandonment of projects may also arise from ego-tripping, change of regime, which results in a lack of continuity, as explained earlier. Perhaps the most important point to emphasize with respect to policy implementation is the extent to which success or failure in implementation depends on the activities already carried out at the policy formulation stage.

5. Disagreement between the implementers, conflict during implementation and Compromise,

Disagreement between the policy implementers has been a challenging factor inhibiting successful policy implementation in Nigeria which led to compromise and conflict during implementation. Most of the times compromise that seeks to alter basic policy goals are made during implementation which is detrimental to the successful execution of programmes. It is most pathetic that in the Nigerian situation, policies that see the light of the day are policies that favour the insignificant few that govern. Any policy that is geared towards supporting the improved standard of living of the majority who are governed faces serious controversies and compromise (Effiong, 2013).

6. Over-ambition/ambitious in policy formulation

Over-ambition in policy formulation comes as a result of lack of knowledge, skills, experience and expertise is a problem and a challenge that necessitated the formulation of a policy as a result of that implementation becomes a serious problem (McLaughlin, 1987; Barrett, 2004; Lasswell, 2003). Egonmwan (1984) identified some problems that affect policy implementation in developing countries. Among them are the inadequate definition of goals; over-ambitious policy goals; and choice of inappropriate organizational structure in the implementation of policies. Inadequate definition of goals makes a policy lack clarity, internal consistency and compatibility with other policy goals with the result that the successful implementation of such a policy becomes problematic. This is a problem of communication. Goal definition varies in developing countries because people disagree about the objectives of a given programme or because people do not care to define such objectives because the objectives are not to their advantage (Egonmwan, 1984). In some other instances, the policymakers assume that they know

the needs of the target groups and therefore see no reason for clarity of goals (Madigan *et al.* 2004) further maintain that policies should not be vague because this would be likely to increase non-compliance.

7. Corruption

The corrupt tendencies of public officials and politicians in collusion with private organizations and individuals have no doubt had far-reaching consequences on the country's effective policy implementation. Corruption has infiltrated every aspect of our society. This is evident not only in the inflation of contract figures or percentage negotiations but also in the outright diversion of billions of naira intended for one or more programs (Ahmed & Dantata 2016). Corruption within the context of information policy implementation comes in myriad forms, ranging from conspiring to purchase sub-standard IT facilities to the inappropriate performance of assigned tasks in favour of some individual interests, among others, which affect successful policy implementation.

8. Lack of foresight

Policy implementation also faces challenges such as the formulation of policies that are not forward-looking, policies that do not take into account global trends and practices, policies that do not take into account the local economy, demographic challenges, globalization and technological advances, as well as urbanization and climatic changes (Tan et al, 2010). According to Anderson (as cited by Broadnax, 1976), the root causes of compliance and non-compliance should not be overlooked because they are an essential component in grasping the grim work that comes with attempting to implement public policy.

Conclusion

With the continued globalization of knowledge, changes in knowledge creation, the generation of non-print formats (multimedia and digital), the rapid expansion of wireless technology, and the need to increase the level of information/resource sharing, the time has come to develop an implementable information policy. Implementing any policy presents a number of challenges, particularly for those attempting to benefit the poorest social groups. However, policies are influenced by the contexts in which they are developed, such as the policy's content, the nature of the policy process, and the actors involved in the formulation and implementation processes.

Leadership, stakeholder engagement, context, resources, and operational issues, on the other hand, shape decisions and actions at various levels and are critical elements along the policy-to-action continuum. Some outcomes may take a long time to manifest; therefore, it is necessary to continuously assess progress to determine what is or is not being achieved and why. As a result, one practical way to consider information policy implementation is to consider the extent and form of activities carried out, as well as the nature of issues that arise during implementation (Love 2003; Love 2004). Without it, information policy implementation will resemble a ship without a rudder.

Way forward

In conclusion, major actors who are important at the implementation stage must be involved in the formulation and implementation of information policies. Bringing all institutions and actors involved in policy implementation under one roof is critical to successful implementation. Similarly, clearly defining the actor's roles and responsibilities is critical. Attention to policy issues should not end with the creation of policies, which is, in fact, only the beginning of the policy-to-action continuum, wherever and whenever they are designed to be successfully implemented. As a result, policies are living documents. They require various inputs to help them accomplish their goals. More attention should be given to clear guidelines and implementation plans, strong leadership, multispectral stakeholder involvement, adequate and accessible resources, and effective feedback and monitoring systems, which will enhance policy implementation (Mthethwa, 2012). When all these are put in place, it will go a long way toward ensuring the successful implementation of information policy.

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