

Imperative Of Research Output and Evidence-Based in Policy Formulation in Nigeria: A Catalyst to National Development

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ABSTRACT

The impact of research outcomes and evidence-based in policy making process in every political system cannot be underestimated, as it serves as veritable instrument in accurate and result oriented policies, especially in the developed countries. However, evidence-based research has been the agitation of academics and policy makers over the years. In Nigeria, this practice is so unpopular because its lack of political will of leaders and apparent gap between researchers, research informed outcomes and policy makers. Whereas, the socio-economic and technical challenges of the society usually transform to political agenda of government, evidence-based research often play major role. The study uses secondary data to highlight the imperative of research output and evidence-informed outcome in policy making. And conclude that if Nigeria embrace this, it will bring optima and successful development policies in the country.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The term policy does not lend itself to easy definition. In fact, it has been observed that no concept in social science parlance has suffered many contexts in which it is employed than public policy [1]. A policy, whether public or private is a course of action or several plans adopted or pursued in response to a given problem or in order to achieve an objective. Public policy can thus be seen as an intention, pronouncement, a general plan or action adopted by government to solve a social problem, counter a threat, deal with a given circumstance or pursue an objective in a given state [2]. The inclusion of intention and pronouncement of a king may have the force of law and his

intentions may guide the direction of his pronouncement and laws. For instance, the pronouncement of President Bola Tinubu on his inauguration as President of Federal Republic of Nigeria in May 25, 2023 on oil subsidy removal had immediate effect on Nigeria's economy. However, in entrancing national development in any country, the place of relevant, efficient and effective policies is by no means tangential [3].

In view of achieving societal goals and the intentions that underline actions, public policy connotes the actions of government exemplified by political decisions for implementation programmers. Towards understanding the problem of public policy paradox in Nigeria starts from

appreciating that public policy is not a political process. It is propertied nurtured, rationalized and clothed by the type of politics in a given state. Whereas, the process of public policy formulation in Nigeria is quite intricate and stakeholder – driven. It is characterized as a complex, dynamic, constantly evolving interactive and adaptive system where actors are engaged in a goal-driven decision-making process and have a great deal of autonomy in the way they organize their work [4].

There is a plethora of overt and covert factors that influence policy, making process and outcome. These factors include but are not limited to philosophy of governance, goals and objectives, strategy and quantum of existing resources with respect to human financial, technical and managerial capacity, political relatives of the day, economic limitations, byists, habits, traditions and values [5], [6]. Put differently, research evidence is one factor among many that influence policy-making [7]. [8] submit that the depth and quality of knowledge used by policy maker are important denominators for the operations of the above stated factors. [7]. Opined that research evidence is useful for impacting the depth and quality of knowledge needed in policy making process. Therefore, over the time in Nigeria the relationship between policy makers and researcher are complex. Researcher is directly expedient in the policy process is controvertible. It is obvious, especially in the developing countries like Nigeria, the use of research output in policy formulation is relatively poor. In view of this asserting [9] submit that in Nigeria study aimed at investing the incentives that drives policy makers to make use of research outlined in environmental management, posits that political manipulation and ambition seems to be among the strongest determinants of factors influencing policy development process. A number of author studies revealed that research outcomes are circumstantially used or in some instances handy to endorse predetermined policy positions.

The unwholesome motives and unethical practices that govern politics in Nigeria determine our public policies thus,

just like politics is uncharitable in the country, public policy is unimpressive and unsuitable. Although, in a political system where a progressive ideology is none existing, it is not the public policy that would be weak but the national economy which is also in the shackles of imperialist manipulation. In a developing nation as Nigeria, the government often has to play the largest, or certainly the lead role. This is the national development plan usually declares that the Federal Government will occupy the commanding height in the quest for national development and provide the leadership and administration necessary to achieve national objective. In view of this, the adequacy and effective formulation and implementation of public privacy are virtually important to the entire nation. This is a clear epitomy of the significant role of the public policy, not only in functional development but also as a key factor in pulling and pushing both the private and public sectors to attain national overall objectives. Likewise, it is the only viable instrument to undertake the enormous task of national and economic integration.

Admittedly, policy engaged research is supposed to provide empirical evidence to inform policy making process and outcome. Simply because the policy-making process is inherently political and processes of obtaining research evidence often fails to meet required quality standards, these accounts for policy makers to result to opinion-based policy as against evidence-based policy.

However, there is growing initiative particularly in developed worlds aimed at increasing uptake of evidence in policy making and this is by building linkages and networks for researchers and policy makers [10], setting up assessable and user-friendly databases [11] and procedures for conscripting and using evidence-informed policy brief, and also training of decision makers on how to use systematic reviewer information. Unfortunately, evidence-based policy is yet to attain good standing in Nigeria as with other developing countries, as attest to by dearth of empirical studies and policy briefs on the subject.

2. METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive approach based on secondary data. The choice of this approach was considered appropriate because the paper aims to examine the importance of research output and evidence-based policy formulation in Nigeria by drawing on existing knowledge, policy experiences, and documented evidence rather than generating primary field data. As indicated in the manuscript, the study uses secondary data to explain how research-informed evidence can improve policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria.

The data were obtained from relevant academic literature, policy-related publications, government documents, institutional reports, and other credible documentary sources discussing public policy, policy implementation, and evidence-based policymaking in Nigeria and comparable developing-country contexts. The analysis was conducted through document review and qualitative content analysis by identifying major themes related to the policy-making process, barriers to evidence uptake, and the relevance of research output in national development. To strengthen the discussion, the study focused on three strategic sectors highlighted in the paper, namely education, health, and the economy, in order to show how the absence or use of research evidence affects policy outcomes in Nigeria.

3. RESULT AND FINDING

3.1 *Policy-making process*

It is observable fact that policy in Nigeria is characterized by instability. In the last three decades, policies such as privatization, energy, monetization etc, have witnessed unnecessary instability. The observable phenomenon which has implications on governance and political stability is a product of many factors. Thus, the first is that policy-making process in Nigeria is a product of four inter-related factors, viz; one, the nature of the country's public policy and

implementation; two, our policy actors, three, public institution, four, public policy environment.

The second, which derive from the first is that public policies in Nigeria inevitably produce bad governance. The third is that public policy-making process (that is totally devoid of research output) lead to unproductive outcome in the country while the fourth is that good governance and achievable objectives of public policies would require re-engineering, refinement, commitment and transparency in our public policy process.

But it is true that greater privacy characteristics of bureaucratic operation does promote accommodation and comprises in the development of public policy. Participants, in administrative discussion can back down more easily from positions they previously taken if they have not put their earlier point of view on public record, in case of researchers. Compromise solutions that may be difficult to explain to constituents can be agreed to more easily in private than public, because the responsibility for discussion in this case is obscure. Because stalemate would be worse alternative for the groups whose interest are involved, privacy may have a constructive off upon the policy process, encouraging such mutual adjustment of interest.

Even though, there are advantageous aspect of privacy in policy deliberation. The cost of this bureaucratic policy making are also high. Because of the restrictions of secrecy many executive officials make decisions on policy questions without having full access to the fact processed by government that are relevant to these decisions. Secret information does not circulate any better within the government that it does to the public. Moreover, when policies are determined in private, the sources of influence on these decisions may be unknown and many groups whose interest are affected may not be consulted at all.

Consequently, it is much more difficult to identify and reverse mistakes when policy deliberations and decisions are made in secret by some chosen few—the saints rather than the sinners. This is particularly a problem in policy affairs, where the possibility of irreversible error-of-fait accomplished that cannot be undone – is heightened because so much of policy formulation takes place in the cloistered corridors of bureaucracy. In domestic policy, on the other hand, interaction among executive agencies legislative communities, and community groups is so constant that very width of what is decided can be long cancelled, it is hard to escape the conclusion that more widely a policy proposal is discussed, the more likely it is that it defects will be exposed.

Obviously, even the reform legislation has permitted withholding of information in specified situations, as when legitimate claims to privacy by citizens might be endangered by release of data in the government's files. These so-called exemption from the principle of disclosure have often been seized upon by administrative agencies to justify secrecy. Consider this description of the way in which the freedom of information Act was administered after its first enactment in 1966. The bureaucracy did not want this law. This attitude of opposition has manifested itself during the first years of the act's operation in excessive processing fees, response delays and pleas of ignorance when petitioned for documents in terms of other than the exact title or other type of prease identification.

Another paradox appears in policymaking as it is carried on within a bureaucratic setting. Although Max Weber and other scholars of the subject say the coming bureaucracy abandoned ultimate triumph of rationality, many of its modern critics see bureaucracy today as having characteristics that contribute instead to irrationality in decision. As in directed earlier, bureaucratic organizations provide societies with a

capacity to handle problems and to provide services that are indispensable for the functioning of a civilized society in a modern industrialized environment.

Implementation; public policy implementation is the act and process of converting a policy into reality or simply enforcing the policy. That is, it is the process of translating policy mandates into action, and policy goals into reality. It refers to the action taken to accomplish the intents, objectives and desired outcome of a policy.

The implementation process consists of the implementing organization, the socio-political and economics environment, the policy target group, the policy objectives, the emulated methods of implementation and the policy resources [12]. it hopes that “by concentrating on the implementation of programmed, as well as the institution, we should be able to increase the probability that policy promises will be realized” [13]. This stems from the fact, vague and contradictory polices are difficult to implement. And that, the motion of where implementation starts from and where it ends is not settled matter [14]. Whereas, a number of factors adversely affect implementation. [13] consider law and multiplicity of decision point, [15] went beyond structural issues that dominated federalism to uncover the policy relationship, inter-organizational and enforcement activities related to policy and [16] mentioned the implementer close to the action and the immediate implementation process. However, factors affecting implementation, and are likely to vary according to the particular policy, but nonetheless, they all presumably set to improve the implementation of public policy.

3.2 Evidence – Based Policy Research

Evidence-based policy research is not a recent concept, it has gained political, currency in the United Kingdom since 1997 under the Blair administration with the reforming and modernizing

mandate, which was committed to putting and to ideologically-driven politics and replacing it with national decision making [7]. Evidence-based policy research involve the use of scientifically skilled and method in addition to political support to identify and practices capable improving policy with relevant outcomes.

The United nation identified evidence-based policy making as a “policy process that helps planners make better-informed decisions by putting the best available evidence at the centre of the policy process. Public policy-making process often exhibit erratic turns, [17] argued that “public policy-making arena is fraught with confusion, contradictions, and consternations”. The inference that can be drawn from this assertion is that public policy even in the developed countries faces some challenges, though over the years, they have devised means of coping with them, this input premised on acceptability or evidence-based research output in process of public-policy formulation or re-engineering the policy to incorporate the research-based evidence. Besides, the patriotism and dedication of policy actors in such countries to national and human development may account for the successful implementation and favourable outcomes of their policy. Evidence-based policy inform the decisions around policies, programmes and projects by putting the best available evidence at heart of policy development and implementation [6].

Unfortunately, Nigeria’s public policy is characterized with instability and unfruitfulness because of un reckon with any output of research as basis for formulation of public policy. As a result, many of the social problems do not become part of the public agenda, in the same vein, many of the problems that are recognized by the public do not get enlisted in the formal agenda that included for consideration by the policy-makers.

Of course, hat differentiates a developed country from a developing one is what proportion of these social problems become redefined as political problem and find their ways into political agenda. The reality in the developing countries is that our public policies are half-baked and poorly thought out. It is observable that good policies go array during implementation. This is because of the effects of a number of intervening variables such as the nature of bureaucracy and other institutions, various groups competing for values and resources, type of ruling elite and their orientations, ideology, parasitic godfathers, over politicization, among other things.

But as it may, [18] remarked that ‘majorly of academic, studies in evidence-based policy research are unsurprisingly written by and for academic with little involvement of policy-makers as co-authors, indicating that policy-makers are not involved in developing or carrying out relevant research.

3.3 *Research Uptake and Evidence-Based Policy Making in Nigeria’s Development*

In a resource-endowed and diverse society like Nigeria where policy making must take into consideration the peculiarities of the diverse needs and context within the country, evidence-influenced resource distribution cannot be over emphasized [19], [20]. Empirical evidence-reveals that research can positively address the political socio-economic, religious, culttural and health factors that define policy-making and policy implemental. The failure to uptake research outcomes constitutes a major obstacle to development progress in Nigeria as with most of low- and middle-income countries. Besides, it is observed that the absence of research output in policy menu open, leaving the gap to be filled in an ad hoc manner. For policy-makers in Nigeria, evidence could be perceived as a way of reducing risks in the sectors mentioned above and even legal risk. In case that programmes do not work

as expected, as it is with a fair number of programmes and policies in Nigeria, research can be embraced to provide alternative courses for action [21]. [22] posit that if policy-makers are unaware of, or ignore evidence on the root causes of problems. The lesson policy makers must learn result in judicious use of scarce resources because research have help in identifying barriers and facilitators of programme goals such in the long run the chances of producing positive outcomes would have been increased [22]. However, because of the absence of spirit of constitution, the people have mastered how to circumvent its letter. Kalu, 2010 argued quite correctly that the absence of an established policy framework has created avenues for mismanagement of public resources with no mechanism for holding public officials responsible for their roles in government.

Whereas, in those countries where there is concern for the welfare of the people, many social problems get transformed into political problems as a result of proper use of research outcomes and are enlisted on agenda formation.

3.4 The Educational Sector and evidence-based Policy Making

Education has remained a potent tool at accelerating the progress of development of the individual and of a nation as a whole. A nation is however saddled with the responsibility of educating. Its citizens through uniform educational programme. In Nigeria, since independence and since 1976 when Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced and implemented throughout the country, education has become the federal government legislative duty with state government as partners in the business of educating the masses. During democratic era, education is regarded as a major dividend of democracy. It forms the manifestoes of many political parties into powers. [23] remarks that education is a companion which no misfortune can depress; no crime can destroy and no enemies can alienate, no despotism can

enslave. At home: a friend, society ornament, it chastens vice, and it gives at once grade and government to genius. Without it, what is man? A splendid slave, a reasoning savage. Therefore, to increase contribution to development through knowledge production and distribution, universities especially in the developing countries need shift from the notion of commodification of knowledge is embraced. In developed countries, Universities have become politically and economically important as institutions that produce and transfer knowledge [24]. For instance, People Republic of China has stopped awarding phd (Doctor of Philosophy) based on mere writhing of thesis but now it is purely practical endeavor that the result will capable of contributing to economic development of the country. Therefore, Universities in developing countries should get reshaped by the drive for policy-oriented research and adopt the idea and movement for evidence-based knowledge production which in turn may affect the reward system at Unisersity. In turn policy makers in Nigeria should emulate their counterparts in developed countries who perceive evidence-based educational policy as affordable, both financially and conceptually and as a fruitful endeavor. The concept of Equal Educational Opportunity (EEO) is entrenched in the UBE policy because. Nigerian government is definition of EEO is that of the under opportunity given to every school age child to benefit from UBE. It is however, noticeable that to get admission to primary school, the readiness of the child and that of his/her parent, and the matured age of entrance are determinant qualification for entry. This is a policy with underlying philosophy of equal educational opportunity, a lot of factors have to be put in place. The correct meaning of the terms embedded in the concept which must be properly understood because a good approach at motive of UBE into a form of reality demands that the knowledge, the

ideology and meaning of the term must be subjected to analysis. This policy could bring expected result because, the expertise and outcomes of research were totally avoided in the process of formulating the policy. [25] summarized that the advent of the evidence-based movement in fields as varied as medicine, criminology and education represents not simply a new thirst for evidence, but for evidence of a particular kind.

3.5 *The Health Sector and Evidence-based Policy Making*

More than any other sector, the public health sector globally and in Nigeria has benefited from evidence-based policy Making in the development of public health [20] for instance, based on scientific evidence, the production of water, food and drugs were controlled in Nigeria [26]. Also, WHO EVIPNet programme on access to artemising based combination therapies (ACT) for complicated malaria was adopted in Burkina Faso with successful outcomes [22], [27]. The government of Tanzania has carried out health service reforms informed by research evidence that helped out infant mortality by 40 percent [28].

Inadequate social and medical amenities as the country compound the poor state of health in Nigeria. The country suffers from the academic shortage of modern medical equipment such as computed tomography scanners, x-rays, computerized testing and diagnostic equipment [29]. However, in Nigeria, there are with no interest in transfer and uptake of research into policy and practices because of underlying factors institution against success in the health sector. A national survey and diagnostic equipment indicated that 5% of the medical equipment in public health institutions in Nigeria was not installed. Another 5% of the installed equipment was not commissioned. Only 10% of 90% of medical equipment in use was functioning optimally [30]. All these

medical equipment supplied to the health sector are courtesy of 1996/1997 Petroleum Trust (Special) Fund. Nonetheless, research is coming in handy, in addressing some persisting health problems. Progress is slow for there is minimal political commitment to the use of evidence in policy and practice in Nigeria [31]. More on lack of political will on the part of government in Nigeria, the attendant brain drain continues to adversely affect Nigerian health establishment, reducing the percentage of medical personnel available to meet the needs of the country's large population. The number of health professionals joining the brain drain has reached the peak in recent years in apparent response to huge demands emanating from developed countries [32].

3.6 *The Economic Sector and Evidence-based Policy Making*

Privatization of public enterprises come to the forefront as a major component of Nigeria's economic reform process at the bellies of the World Bank and other international organization [33]. Privatization started in Nigeria in 1998, as an integral and critical component of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that was initiated in 1986. Since then, privatization reform has been the only language every Nigeria's government seems to understand without recourse to the enabling mix of the factors that stimulate private sector driven economy. As regard failing economic reforms and programmes in Nigeria as observable in the country, many of the approaches adopted in the attempt to improve economy in Nigeria in the past were unsuccessful for the reason that the programmes and policies created were not sufficiently influenced by empirical facts that research delivers. Most of the economic policies adopted in Nigeria are imported from developed worlds where there is good governance, security, functional infrastructures and political stability. Many a times, the leaders (government) lack the full knowledge of

policy put in place. However, in the early 1960s, Nigeria was only concerned about nationalization and the policy encouraged public enterprises, but the language changed from nationalization to privatization in the 1980s. The inefficiency in government-owned enterprise led to the clamor for privatization. Despite the abundance of human, material, and fiscal resources, Nigeria's state has not been able to achieve and sustain growth and developments through privatization reform. Obviously lack of evidence-based research outcome accounted for the failure. Hence, the debate for or against privatization of public enterprise still lingers on, coupled with the general questions that still remain unresolved today, such as whether organizations privatized in Nigeria have done better than when they were not privatized.

[7] assert that evidence-based policy making brings about poverty reduction, development performance improvement and on the whole more lives being saved. [34] corroborating strategies that progressive policy makers in Nigeria may also adopt to enhance evidence-informed policy making which include encouraging researchers to increase the production of quality research evidence based and strengthening policy makers capacity to use evidence.

4. CONCLUSION

Globally, using evidence to inform policy making is not new, especially in the developed worlds, but it appears that the practice in the developing worlds, such as Nigeria is not well visible and this often account for policy failure. No doubt, the possibilities of policy-relevant research provide identifying problems, prioritizing with respect to resources and needs in policy making, monitoring and evaluating policies to ensure successful policy implementation. However, the success and better adherence to evidence-informed in the process of policy making in Nigeria rely on the quality of research evidence and its availability at disposal of policy makers. More so, the wide gap between researchers and policymakers needs to be closed, essentially to involve policy users in the research process and communicate empirical evidence timely.

Conclusively, understanding the barriers and facilitators in the interaction between policymakers and researchers on the way to achieve evidence-based policy making, is the key to and delivery of research evidence. Lastly, in Nigeria, there must be reorientation of policymakers to see researchers as partners in progress and allow their political will to embrace the use of research evidence in the process of policy making.

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