

PUBLIC POLICY IN NIGERIA: PAIN IN PROCESS, GAIN IN POLITICKING

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ABSTRACT

Effective public policy serves as the blueprint for governance, translating society's ideals into actionable frameworks that guide the management of public resources and the pursuit of the common good. The necessity to provide residents with socioeconomic and infrastructural facilities remains a critical concern for countries worldwide, particularly emerging nations. In Nigeria, the public policy process is characterised by a complex web of institutional weaknesses, corruption, and political interference, leading to substantial challenges in governance and service delivery. Despite these issues, political actors have learned to exploit the system's inefficiencies to consolidate power and advance personal or party agendas. This creates a paradox in which public interests are frequently subordinated to political objectives, resulting in ineffective policy outcomes and widespread public dissatisfaction. This paper provides a comprehensive examination of the key challenges within Nigeria's public policy process, including the fragmentation of government agencies, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the pervasive influence of corruption. It argues that the politicisation of public policy not only undermines the public good but also exacerbates institutional weaknesses. To address these challenges, the paper recommends reforms aimed at strengthening institutions, enhancing transparency, and building capacity. By exploring the complex interplay between politics and policy, it offers insights into the obstacles and opportunities for improving public policy effectiveness in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Public policy, Nigeria, Governance, Corruption, Political interference and Institutional reform*

Introduction

Public policy is a fundamental element of governance, functioning as the mechanism through which governments address societal issues, allocate resources, and regulate various sectors of the economy (Pülzl & Treib, 2017). As a crucial aspect of governance, it shapes the future of nations (Pillar, 2023). Effective public policy is crucial for fostering economic growth, promoting social welfare, and ensuring political stability. However, in many developing countries, including Nigeria, the policy-making process faces significant challenges that undermine its effectiveness and result in poor governance outcomes. In Nigeria, the public policy process is particularly complex, shaped by a range of factors including institutional weaknesses, corruption, political interference, and limited technical capacity. These challenges not only hinder the formulation and implementation of effective policies but also create opportunities for political actors to manipulate the process for personal or party gain (Ogunkan, 2022).

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Onyekwelu et al. (2022) noted that Nigeria's public policy process is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation, with multiple government agencies often operating at cross-purposes due to insufficient coordination and communication. This fragmentation, combined with bureaucratic inefficiencies, results in delays in policy implementation and diminishes the overall effectiveness of government interventions. Furthermore, corruption is deeply ingrained in the Nigerian policy-making process, as political actors frequently exploit their influence to manipulate policy outcomes for personal or political gain.

Political interference remains a significant issue, with elected officials and other power brokers often shaping the policy process to serve their interests, typically at the expense of the public good (Obona, 2016). These challenges are further exacerbated by a lack of capacity within government institutions, which frequently lack the technical expertise and resources necessary to design and implement policies effectively (Asaju & Ayeni, 2021).

The main argument of this paper is that the Nigerian public policy process is fraught with challenges, and these problems constitute avenues for political entrepreneurs to exploit and push their agenda. It sets up a disjuncture where inefficiency and dysfunction serve the interests of some stakeholders while the general public is worse off, which clearly is a structure which political elites benefit from. The paper examines that paradox in considerable detail, showing how and why Nigeria's public policy process remains perennially challenged and just how such challenges are politically weaponised. It also provides policy solutions to improve the current modus operandi of its services, thereby helping ameliorate these issues and promoting a more efficient and accountable creation of regulation that benefits the public interest as a whole.

This paper employs the Policy Network Theory (PNT), which explains how networks and relationships influence policy outcomes. In the context of Nigeria, these networks often involve clientelism and patronage, where policy decisions are driven by personal loyalties rather than the public interest (Enroth, 2011; Ogundipe & Ojo, 2022). Corruption, including bribery and embezzlement, further erodes the integrity of the policy-making process (Eze & Iwuoha, 2023). However, PNT suggests that effective policy-making is achievable when supportive networks and relationships are fostered. In Nigeria, this could involve building diverse coalitions, strengthening institutions, and promoting transparency to reduce corruption and enhance accountability.

Literature Review

Public Policy Process in Nigeria

Public policy touches almost every aspect of life, from how and who schools educate to healthcare to the economy (Peters, 2017). An understanding of the policy process goes a long way in enabling policymakers to make genuine and strategic decisions that appropriately tackle societal challenges so as to serve citizens of different demographics. It also empowers all stakeholders – from government officials to civil society organisations – to evaluate the results of current policies and their impact and identify areas for further development or modification. According to Anderson (2019), public policy refers to the decisions, actions, and regulations formulated by governments and other institutions to address societal issues. This process is both complex and dynamic, involving several stages such as agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Public policy encompasses a wide range of activities, including decision-making, lawmaking, and regulatory actions, all of which shape the social, economic, and political landscape of a country. Birkland (2019) further emphasises that public policy is not limited to government actions alone but also includes the efforts of various institutions that collaborate to address societal challenges. By engaging in this process, these

institutions aim to influence societal outcomes through coordinated efforts that respond to public needs and priorities. Ultimately, public policy serves as the mechanism by which governments and institutions implement strategies that impact the welfare of society and contribute to the overall governance of a nation.

The public policy process in Nigeria is a multifaceted and complex undertaking shaped by a range of historical, political, and socioeconomic factors (Oyedele, 2017; Nwafor-Orizu et al., 2018). This process unfolds through several critical stages: policy formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage presents its own set of challenges, marked by bureaucratic hurdles, political interference, and limited resources. The formulation stage is often influenced by political interests and stakeholder negotiations, while the adoption phase requires legislative approval, which can be hindered by competing interests. Implementation faces additional obstacles, such as corruption, inefficiency, and inadequate infrastructure. Finally, the evaluation stage, which should assess the effectiveness of policies, is often neglected or underfunded. Understanding the intricacies and challenges at each of these stages is crucial for comprehending the broader issues that characterise public policy in Nigeria. This awareness is key for developing effective strategies to improve the policy-making process in the country.

Policy Formulation

Policy formulation is the initial stage of the public policy process, where problems are identified and potential solutions are proposed (Jann & Wegrich, 2017). In Nigeria, this stage is significantly shaped by the prevailing political and economic environment, as well as the interests of diverse stakeholders. Government ministries, agencies, and departments typically initiate the policy formulation process, but external actors also play a crucial role (Pillah, 2023). International organisations, donor agencies, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) exert substantial influence by providing expertise and financial resources or advocating for specific policy directions. These external actors often help shape the agenda and provide technical support to enhance the capacity of local institutions. As a result, the formulation of policies in Nigeria is a highly collaborative yet politically charged process, with multiple actors contributing to the identification of issues and the development of policy proposals aimed at addressing them.

A major challenge to policy formulation in Nigeria is that there is no conclusive data and research needed for informed decision-making (Oladipo, 2024). Accurate and trustworthy data serve as an indispensable foundation for meaningful policymaking. Well-founded data forms the basis for well-informed judgments, empowering policymakers to formulate policies that efficiently tackle social issues. The significance of incorporating solid data into the decision process in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. As Nigeria faces rising demands for infrastructure, healthcare, education, and employment, data-driven planning will be critical in anticipating and managing these challenges. Without trustworthy data, policies risk being poorly conceived or insufficiently targeted, resulting in inefficient resource allocation and potentially exacerbating existing social and economic imbalances. Oladipo (2024) notes that policies can be misdirected when policymakers are working from old, patchy, or inaccurate information that often fails to reflect the actual wants and needs of the people. A lack of this type of data impairs effective identification and mapping of needs, as well as accurate prediction of policy results. Additionally, the involvement of multiple stakeholders with often conflicting interests further complicates the process. As various actors, including political elites, interest groups, and external organisations, seek to protect their agendas, policy proposals are frequently diluted or compromised. This can result in policies that prioritise political expediency over effectiveness, leading to suboptimal outcomes. Consequently, the lack of robust data, combined with the need to balance competing interests, undermines the development of policies that are well-targeted and capable of achieving long-term national goals (Nielson, 2020).

Policy Implementation

Implementation is the critical stage in the policy process, where decisions are translated into actions. In Nigeria, this stage presents significant challenges due to a range of factors, including institutional weaknesses, capacity deficits, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. One of the major obstacles to effective implementation is poor coordination among government agencies, which often leads to overlapping functions and miscommunication. Additionally, insufficient funding undermines the ability of agencies to carry out their mandates, while the absence of robust accountability mechanisms means that policies are rarely executed as intended or monitored effectively. These issues, combined with corruption and political interference, further complicate the implementation process, making it difficult to achieve the desired outcomes.

A notable example of implementation challenges in Nigeria is the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), which was established to provide affordable healthcare to Nigerians. Despite its commendable objectives, the scheme has been hindered by delays, mismanagement, and corruption, significantly limiting its coverage and effectiveness. As a result, many of the intended beneficiaries still face difficulties accessing essential healthcare services. According to Nigeria Health Watch (2022), these issues highlight the persistent disconnect between policy objectives and implementation outcomes, a recurring challenge in the country's public policy process.

Policy Evaluation

The final stage in the policy process is evaluation, where the effectiveness and impact of a policy are critically assessed. In Nigeria, however, this stage is often overlooked or conducted superficially, which undermines the potential for learning and improvement in future policy design and implementation. The lack of systematic and comprehensive evaluation practices results in insufficient feedback mechanisms, preventing policymakers from understanding the successes and failures of their interventions. This problem is exacerbated by the absence of institutionalised evaluation frameworks and the limited capacity of government agencies to carry out rigorous assessments. As a result, many policies in Nigeria are not properly reviewed to determine their actual impact or to inform necessary adjustments.

Political actors in Nigeria may resist evaluation efforts, especially when they fear that the outcomes could reveal the weaknesses of their policies or threaten their political reputation. Consequently, numerous policies are often implemented without sufficient follow-up mechanisms to assess their effectiveness. This lack of thorough evaluation creates a cycle where ineffective policies are either repeated or maintained without the necessary adjustments. The absence of accountability and comprehensive review contributes to the persistence of policy failures and hinders progress in addressing critical issues (Oyebode, 2020).

Key Players in the Nigerian Public Policy Process

The public policy process in Nigeria involves a diverse range of actors, each with distinct interests, influence, and roles. Understanding the interactions among these key players is essential for analysing the challenges and outcomes of policy-making in the country.

Government Agencies and Political Parties

Government agencies play a crucial role in Nigeria's public policy process, as they are responsible for policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. However, their effectiveness is often compromised by fragmentation, lack of coordination, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Many agencies operate in silos, with minimal communication or collaboration across governmental bodies, leading to redundant efforts and, at times, contradictory policies (Akale & Owan, 2023). This fragmented approach undermines policy coherence and weakens the impact of public initiatives. Moreover, these agencies face considerable resource constraints, such as insufficient funding and a lack

of technical expertise, which hinders their ability to execute their mandates effectively. The frequent turnover in agency leadership also disrupts continuity and long-term strategic planning, further reducing their capacity to achieve successful policy outcomes. These challenges collectively impede the effectiveness of Nigeria's public policy process, contributing to ineffective governance and suboptimal policy implementation.

Politicians and political parties play a central role in Nigeria's public policy process, with their influence often driven by the pursuit of power, securing votes, and fulfilling the demands of their supporters. Consequently, policy decisions are frequently shaped by political considerations rather than objective assessments of the public's best interests. Political interference often involves manipulating policies for personal or party gain, which can take various forms, such as diverting resources to favoured constituencies, obstructing policies that conflict with their interests, or using policies as tools for patronage and reward. Such practices severely undermine the effectiveness of public administration, fostering inefficiencies and corruption (Roger, 2018). The dominance of political interests over evidence-based decision-making results in policies that are frequently misaligned with the broader population's needs, contributing to ineffective governance. This politicisation of the policy process ultimately weakens the capacity for meaningful and equitable development in the country.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in advocating for policies that advance social justice, human rights, and good governance. Acting as watchdogs, they hold governments accountable for their policy decisions and ensure proper implementation. Through monitoring and public scrutiny, these organisations help to expose corruption and inefficiencies in governance. Furthermore, CSOs and NGOs contribute valuable insights during the policy formulation process, often representing the interests and needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations. By amplifying these voices, they help shape policies that are more inclusive and equitable, fostering a more participatory approach to governance.

Despite their critical role, the influence of civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Nigeria is often constrained by their reliance on external funding. This dependence can limit their capacity to challenge the government or adopt independent positions effectively. Moreover, the government frequently views these organisations with suspicion, perceiving them as potential threats to its authority. This scepticism can result in restrictions on their activities and operations (Nwagwu, 2012). Nevertheless, CSOs and NGOs continue to be vital actors in the public policy process, particularly in areas such as human rights advocacy, environmental protection, and anti-corruption initiatives. Their efforts contribute significantly to promoting transparency, accountability, and social equity, making them indispensable in shaping policies that address the needs of the populace and uphold democratic principles.

International Organizations and Donor Agencies

International organisations and donor agencies play a crucial role in Nigeria's public policy process, particularly in sectors such as health, education, and economic development. They provide essential funding, technical assistance, and policy recommendations that significantly influence the direction of government policies in these key areas. By offering resources and expertise, these organisations help to fill gaps in local capacity and facilitate the implementation of critical initiatives. Their involvement often leads to improved policy frameworks and enhanced service delivery. However, the reliance on international support may also create challenges, as local priorities can sometimes be overshadowed by the agendas of external actors. Despite this, the contributions of international organisations and donor agencies are vital for promoting development and addressing pressing societal issues within Nigeria.

While the involvement of international organisations and donors can provide essential resources and expertise, it also raises concerns about external influence and the alignment of such policies with national priorities. There is a risk that policies shaped by donor agendas may not fully reflect the needs and aspirations of the Nigerian populace, potentially creating tensions between domestic and international policy objectives (Nwoke, 2010). Nonetheless, their support is often crucial for the effective implementation of policies, particularly in a context where government capacity is constrained.

Challenges in the Public Policy Process in Nigeria

Nigeria's public policy process faces many challenges that hinder its effectiveness and often lead to suboptimal outcomes. These challenges are deeply rooted in the country's political, economic, and institutional landscape. The complexities, including fragmentation and inefficiencies, are further compounded by the multifaceted nature of policy-making, which often requires balancing conflicting interests (Adeleke & Bamidele, 2022). Key challenges include institutional weaknesses, corruption, political interference, and lack of capacity. Each of these issues significantly impacts the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies in Nigeria.

Institutional Weaknesses

One of the most significant challenges in Nigeria's public policy process is the fragmentation and inefficiency of government institutions. The governance structure in Nigeria is characterised by a multiplicity of agencies, ministries, and departments, often with overlapping responsibilities. This fragmentation results in a lack of coordination and cooperation among government bodies, leading to policy inconsistencies, duplication of efforts, and resource wastage. For instance, the overlapping functions of various environmental agencies, such as the Federal Ministry of Environment, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA), and state environmental protection agencies, have caused confusion and inefficiencies in environmental management. These agencies often operate independently, with little coordination or integration, resulting in conflicting policies and unclear accountability for environmental outcomes (Adedeji & Williams, 2022).

Bureaucratic inefficiencies further exacerbate these issues. Government agencies in Nigeria are often hampered by red tape, slow decision-making processes, and a lack of responsiveness to public needs. These inefficiencies delay policy implementation and diminish the overall effectiveness of government interventions. The cumbersome procedures required to obtain approvals, release funds, or execute projects frequently result in missed opportunities and unfulfilled policy objectives. Moreover, frequent leadership turnover within government agencies disrupts continuity and long-term planning. Newly appointed leaders may abandon ongoing projects or introduce new priorities that do not align with existing policies, leading to a lack of coherence in policy implementation. This instability undermines the effectiveness of government institutions and contributes to the overall weakness of the public policy process in Nigeria (Oluwole & Adebayo, 2023).

Corruption

Corruption is a pervasive issue that significantly undermines the public policy process in Nigeria. Corruption remains a significant barrier to effective policy implementation in Nigeria and affects various stages of the policy process, from formulation to execution, leading to suboptimal outcomes and the diversion of resources meant for public welfare. It manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement of public funds, and the manipulation of policy decisions for personal or political gain. Corruption not only distorts the allocation of resources but also erodes public trust in government institutions and processes (Transparency International, 2021).

The role of corruption in slowing down or redirecting policy outcomes is well-documented. For instance, the management of Nigeria's oil revenues has been marred by corruption, leading to the

misallocation of funds intended for infrastructure development and social services. This not only deprived the government of much-needed resources but also exacerbated public dissatisfaction with the government's handling of the economy. Corruption also plays a significant role in manipulating the policy process by political actors. Politicians often use their influence to secure favourable policy outcomes for themselves or their allies, regardless of the broader public interest. For example, political interference in the allocation of contracts for public projects is common, with contracts being awarded to companies with close ties to political figures, often at inflated prices and with little regard for quality or efficiency (Oluseye, 2024).

The judiciary in Nigeria has faced significant challenges concerning corruption, particularly in the context of electoral reforms. During the "All Eyes on the Judiciary" campaign of 2023, concerns were raised about the judiciary's integrity, especially its role in adjudicating election-related disputes. Allegations of bribery and undue influence have undermined public trust in the judiciary's ability to deliver impartial justice. This erosion of trust perpetuates a cycle of corruption, weakening the enforcement of policies and laws and compromising the credibility of electoral processes in Nigeria (Transparency International, 2023; Royal United Services Institute, 2023).

Political Interference

Political interference is another major challenge in Nigeria's public policy process. The influence of politicians on policy decisions is often driven by power dynamics, patronage, and electoral gain rather than prioritising the needs of the population. As a result, policies are frequently crafted to benefit political elites or specific interest groups, neglecting the broader public interest. This politicisation leads to poorly targeted policies that fail to address the root causes of societal problems, ultimately prioritising the interests of the elite over the nation's most pressing issues (Akinola, 2013). Political interference is particularly evident in the allocation of resources and the implementation of public projects. Politicians may direct resources to their constituencies or use public projects as a means of rewarding loyal supporters. This practice, known as "pork-barrel politics," can result in the misallocation of resources, with projects being initiated in areas where they are not needed or where they are unlikely to have a significant impact (Ojo, 2015).

Moreover, political actors often manipulate the timing and content of policy decisions to maximise their political gains. For example, policies that are likely to be unpopular, such as tax increases or subsidy removals, may be delayed until after elections to avoid alienating voters. Conversely, politicians may push for the rapid implementation of popular policies, even if they are not fully developed or funded, to gain electoral support (Businessday NG, 2022). The influence of political interference extends to the legislative process as well. Legislators in Nigeria often prioritise policies that will benefit their political careers or their party's standing rather than those that address the needs of their constituents. This can lead to the passage of laws that are poorly conceived, or that fail to address the root causes of the problems they are intended to solve (Ihonvbere, 2000).

Lack of Capacity in Government Institutions

The lack of capacity within Nigeria's government institutions poses a significant challenge to the effective formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. This deficiency encompasses shortages in skilled personnel, technical expertise, and financial resources, all of which are critical for executing policy functions efficiently (Okoli & Agu, 2022). The civil service, responsible for implementing government policies, suffers from a shortage of qualified and experienced staff. Many civil servants lack the necessary training and expertise to design and implement complex policies, particularly in specialised sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. These skills gaps

often result in poorly executed policies that fail to achieve their intended outcomes (Nebo & Nnamani, 2015).

The Nigerian government frequently faces significant financial constraints that affect the implementation of policies, leading to delays, cost overruns, and incomplete projects. These financial limitations are evident in the budget allocations, where a large portion of the budget is often directed towards debt servicing rather than critical sectors like infrastructure, education, and health. For instance, in the 2024 budget, 30% was allocated to debt servicing, leaving only 5% for infrastructure and 7.9% for education, which falls short of the recommended levels for effective development. (Udi, 2024). This budgetary allocation underscores the challenges that government agencies face in investing in essential infrastructure, technology, and tools required for effective policy execution. The underfunding of capital expenditure has been a persistent issue, with recurrent expenditures often overshadowing capital projects, further complicating the government's ability to address the infrastructure deficit and implement long-term development projects. Compounding these issues is the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Without proper oversight, it is challenging to assess policy progress, identify areas for improvement, and make necessary adjustments, perpetuating ineffective policies and reducing accountability within government institutions. (Ihejirika, 2022).

Frequent changes in government often result in the abandonment or alteration of policies initiated by previous administrations, disrupting long-term planning and leading to inconsistent policy outcomes. Additionally, the Nigerian bureaucracy is characterised by inefficiency and a lack of accountability, further complicating policy implementation and leading to the mismanagement of resources. These systemic issues significantly undermine the achievement of policy goals and the overall effectiveness of public policy in Nigeria.

Politicking and the Public Policy Process in Nigeria

The intersection of politics and public policy in Nigeria is a complex and often contentious arena, where the pursuit of political gain frequently eclipses the commitment to public service. In this context, politicking refers to the strategic manoeuvring by political actors to shape policies in ways that consolidate their power, safeguard their interests, or maintain their positions. Nigeria's public policy environment is characterised by a range of institutional weaknesses, including fragmented government agencies, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited enforcement capabilities. These weaknesses create fertile ground for political actors to exploit the system to their advantage. The complexity and inefficiency inherent in the policy process often led to political considerations taking precedence over policy effectiveness. One of the primary ways in which political actors gain from a weak policy system is through the manipulation of resource allocation. In a system where transparency and accountability are lacking, politicians can direct public resources toward projects that serve their electoral or personal interests rather than those that address the population's most pressing needs. This practice, often called "pork-barrel politics," allows politicians to build and maintain support within their constituencies, even if the projects they fund are inefficient or unnecessary (Ojo, 2015).

The complexity of the policy process in Nigeria also provides politicians with the ability to delay or obstruct policies that threaten their interests. For example, reforms aimed at promoting transparency or reducing opportunities for patronage frequently encounter resistance from political elites who benefit from maintaining the status quo. These delays are often presented as necessary due to procedural requirements, technical evaluations, or budgetary constraints, yet their underlying purpose is frequently to protect entrenched interests (Ihonvbere, 2000). This manipulation of the policy process allows political actors to avoid reforms that would weaken their control, further perpetuating inefficiency and corruption within the system.

The Paradox of Pain and Gain in Policy-Making in Nigeria

The public policy process in Nigeria reveals a paradox in which the very challenges and inefficiencies that burden the general populace for personal gain. This paradox is deeply ingrained in the country's governance structure, where the interests of a privileged few frequently take precedence over the needs of the majority. This section examines how the inefficiencies in policy-making are leveraged for political advantage, exploring the complex interplay between governance and politicking. By analysing this dynamic, we also consider the broader implications for Nigeria's development, highlighting how systemic failures not only hinder progress but also sustain a political environment that rewards self-interest over public welfare.

Pain in the Process

The challenges and inefficiencies inherent in Nigeria's public policy process have profound and far-reaching consequences for the country's development. These inefficiencies manifest in various forms, including inadequate service delivery, economic stagnation, and social unrest, all of which significantly contribute to the daily struggles faced by ordinary Nigerians.

Poor Service Delivery: One of the most visible consequences of the inefficiencies in Nigeria's policy process is the poor quality of public services. Whether it is healthcare, education, transportation, or infrastructure, the delivery of essential services in Nigeria is often characterised by delays, underfunding, and mismanagement. For example, the healthcare sector, despite numerous policies and initiatives aimed at improving service delivery, continues to suffer from inadequate funding, a lack of trained personnel, and insufficient infrastructure. As a result, many Nigerians, particularly those in rural areas, have limited access to basic healthcare services, leading to high mortality rates and preventable diseases (Nigeria Health Watch, 2022).

Economic Stagnation: The inefficiencies in the policy process also contribute to Nigeria's economic stagnation. Policies intended to stimulate economic growth, attract investment, or create jobs are often delayed or poorly implemented, resulting in missed opportunities and a lack of progress. For instance, the delay in implementing critical reforms in the power sector has had a debilitating effect on the economy, as businesses and households continue to suffer from unreliable electricity supply. This has hindered industrial growth, discouraged foreign investment, and perpetuated a cycle of economic underperformance.

Social Unrest: The pain caused by ineffective policies also manifests in social unrest, as citizens grow increasingly frustrated with the government's inability to address their needs. Protests, strikes, and other forms of civil disobedience are common responses to policy failures, particularly in areas such as fuel subsidies, labour rights, and electoral reforms. For example, the nationwide protests that followed the attempted removal of fuel subsidies in 2012 were a direct result of widespread public dissatisfaction with the government's management of the economy and the perceived injustice of the policy (Akinola, 2013). These episodes of unrest not only disrupt daily life but also create an environment of instability that further undermines development efforts.

Gain in Politicking

While the inefficiencies in the policy process cause significant harm to the public, they also provide opportunities for political actors to advance their interests. This "gain in politicking" is a key feature of Nigeria's governance landscape, where the manipulation of the policy process is a common strategy for consolidating power, diverting resources, and maintaining political dominance.

Consolidating Power: Political actors often use their control over the policy process to consolidate their power and influence. By directing resources to their constituencies, rewarding loyal supporters with government contracts, or obstructing policies that threaten their interests, politicians can strengthen

their position within the political hierarchy. This consolidation of power is often achieved at the expense of broader policy effectiveness, as decisions are made based on political expediency rather than the public good (Ihonvbere, 2000).

Diverting Resources: The inefficiencies in the policy process also provide ample opportunities for the diversion of public resources. Corruption, in its various forms, is facilitated by the lack of transparency and accountability in the policy process. Political actors can manipulate budgetary allocations, inflate contract prices, or siphon off funds intended for public projects, all while maintaining the appearance of compliance with policy procedures. This diversion of resources not only undermines development efforts but also exacerbates inequality, as the benefits of public spending are concentrated in the hands of a few (Transparency International, 2021).

Maintaining Political Dominance: Politicians in Nigeria also use the policy process to maintain their political dominance by strategically timing the implementation of policies or manipulating public perception. For example, popular policies may be introduced or accelerated in the lead-up to elections, while unpopular ones may be delayed until after the election period. This strategic use of policy timing allows political actors to maximise their electoral support and minimise backlash, even if it means compromising the long-term effectiveness of the policies (Ojo, 2015).

Policy Reform in Nigerian Public Process

The public policy process in Nigeria is fraught with challenges that hinder effective governance and equitable development. To address these challenges, a comprehensive set of reforms is necessary, focusing on strengthening institutions, combating corruption, enhancing transparency, and building capacity within the public sector. These reforms are needed and aimed at creating a more efficient, transparent, and accountable policy process in Nigeria.

Strengthening Institutions

The fragmentation and inefficiency of government agencies in Nigeria have significantly impeded the policy process. Strengthening these institutions is critical to improving the coordination, implementation, and monitoring of public policies. Building the capacity of public institutions to implement and monitor policies effectively is essential for improving transparency, reducing corruption and enhancing accountability mechanisms.

1. **Improved Coordination Among Agencies:** One of the primary issues in Nigeria's public policy process is the lack of coordination among government agencies. This fragmentation often leads to overlapping responsibilities, conflicting policies, and inefficiencies in implementation. To address this, there should be a concerted effort to improve inter-agency coordination through the establishment of clear mandates, streamlined processes, and effective communication channels. The creation of inter-ministerial committees or task forces for specific policy areas can also enhance coordination and ensure that policies are implemented in a cohesive manner (Igbuzor, 2006).
2. **Institutional Autonomy:** Enhancing the autonomy of key institutions is essential to insulate the policy process from political interference. Independent regulatory bodies, such as those overseeing elections, anti-corruption efforts, and economic regulation, should be empowered to operate without undue influence from political actors. This can be achieved through legal reforms that guarantee the independence of these institutions and through the appointment of qualified professionals who are insulated from political pressures (Ojo, 2015).
3. **Strengthening Accountability Mechanisms:** Accountability is a cornerstone of effective governance. Strengthening internal and external accountability mechanisms within government

institutions can reduce inefficiencies and ensure that policies are implemented as intended. This includes enhancing the capacity of oversight bodies, such as the National Assembly and the Auditor-General's Office, to effectively monitor and evaluate the performance of government agencies. Additionally, establishing performance-based incentives for public officials can encourage a more results-oriented approach to policy implementation (Nwagwu, 2012).

Anti-Corruption Measures

Corruption is one of the most significant obstacles to effective policy-making in Nigeria. It diverts resources away from public projects, undermines trust in government, and distorts policy outcomes. To combat corruption within the policy process, several measures can be implemented.

1. **Strengthening Anti-Corruption Agencies:** The effectiveness of Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), is crucial to curbing corruption. These agencies need to be better resourced and empowered to investigate and prosecute corruption cases without fear or favour. This includes providing them with adequate funding, technical expertise, and legal tools to pursue complex corruption cases. Additionally, the independence of these agencies should be safeguarded to prevent political interference in their operations (Transparency International, 2021).
2. **Whistleblower Protection:** Encouraging whistleblowing is a powerful tool in the fight against corruption. Nigeria should strengthen its whistleblower protection laws to ensure that individuals who report corruption are protected from retaliation. This can include legal safeguards, financial rewards for information leading to convictions, and the establishment of anonymous reporting mechanisms. A robust whistleblower protection framework can help uncover corruption that might otherwise remain hidden and serve as a deterrent to potential wrongdoers (Ihonvbere, 2000).
3. **Promoting Ethical Standards in Public Service:** Instilling a culture of ethics and integrity in public service is essential for reducing corruption. This can be achieved through the development and enforcement of strict codes of conduct for public officials, regular ethics training, and the establishment of ethics offices within government agencies. Public officials should be held to the highest standards of accountability, and any breaches of ethical conduct should be met with appropriate sanctions (Ojo, 2015).

Enhancing Transparency

Transparency is key to reducing political manipulation in the policy process and ensuring that policies are designed and implemented in the public interest. Enhancing transparency involves making the policy process more open and accessible to the public, as well as increasing the availability of information about government activities.

1. **Open Government Initiatives:** Nigeria should adopt and expand open government initiatives that promote transparency and citizen participation in the policy process. This can include the publication of government budgets, contracts, and procurement processes, as well as the establishment of platforms for public consultation and feedback on policy decisions. Open government initiatives can help to demystify the policy process, reduce opportunities for corruption, and empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable (Nwagwu, 2012).
2. **Freedom of Information Act Enforcement:** Although Nigeria has a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), its implementation has been inconsistent. Strengthening the enforcement of the FOIA is critical to ensuring that citizens and the media have access to information about

government activities. This can be achieved by reducing bureaucratic obstacles to information requests, raising public awareness about the FOIA, and penalising government agencies that fail to comply with the law. A more robust enforcement of the FOIA will enhance transparency and facilitate investigative journalism and civil society oversight (Igbuzor, 2006).

3. **Transparency in Political Financing:** Political financing in Nigeria is often opaque, leading to concerns about the influence of money in politics and the potential for policy decisions to be swayed by special interests. To address this, Nigeria should introduce stricter regulations on political donations and campaign spending, including mandatory disclosure of sources of funding and expenditures. Additionally, the establishment of an independent body to monitor and enforce these regulations can help to ensure that political financing is conducted in a transparent and accountable manner (Transparency International, 2021).

Building Capacity for Public Institutions

Building capacity within the public sector is essential for improving the effectiveness of policy-making in Nigeria. This involves investing in human capital, enhancing technical expertise, and providing the necessary resources for government agencies to fulfil their mandates.

1. **Investment in Human Capital:** Building capacity within public institutions is crucial for improving the quality and effectiveness of public policy in Nigeria. The capability of individuals involved in the policy process directly impacts policy outcomes. To enhance this capability, Nigeria should prioritise the recruitment, training, and retention of skilled professionals within the public sector. This can be achieved by offering competitive salaries, providing continuous professional development opportunities, and establishing a merit-based promotion system. Such investments in human capital ensure that public officials possess the necessary knowledge and skills to design and implement effective policies. By focusing on human capital development, the government can significantly strengthen the public sector's capacity to address complex policy challenges and improve governance outcomes.
2. **Technical Expertise and Research Capacity:** Effective policy-making requires a solid foundation of data and analysis. Nigeria should invest in building the technical expertise and research capacity of its government agencies, particularly in areas such as economic planning, public health, and environmental management. This can involve partnerships with universities and research institutions, the establishment of in-house research units, and the use of technology to improve data collection and analysis. Enhanced technical capacity will enable the government to make more informed policy decisions and respond more effectively to emerging challenges (Nwagwu, 2012). Utilising data and research to inform policy decisions can lead to more effective and targeted interventions. This approach would also help in assessing the impact of policies and making necessary adjustments over time.
3. **Resource Allocation and Management:** Adequate resources are necessary for the successful implementation of policies. Nigeria should improve its budgeting and resource allocation processes to ensure that government agencies have the financial and material resources they need to carry out their functions. This includes adopting performance-based budgeting, reducing wasteful expenditure, and ensuring that resources are allocated in line with policy priorities. Effective resource management is also crucial, requiring strong financial controls, regular audits, and the elimination of leakages (Igbuzor, 2006).

Ensuring Policy Continuity

One of the most pressing challenges in Nigeria's public policy landscape is the frequent disruption of policy initiatives due to changes in government. To address this, it is essential to develop a robust framework for policy continuity that transcends political transitions. Such a framework would help sustain long-term development initiatives, ensuring that policies are not abandoned or drastically altered with each new administration. A key component of this approach could involve the establishment of independent bodies tasked with overseeing the implementation of critical policies, irrespective of changes in government.

These independent bodies would be responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and reporting on the progress of key policy initiatives, ensuring that they remain aligned with national development goals. By insulating policy implementation from political pressures, these bodies could help prevent the politicisation of policy processes, which often leads to inefficiencies and the derailment of initiatives intended to benefit the broader population. Furthermore, these bodies should be staffed with skilled professionals who possess the technical expertise necessary to manage complex policy issues, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of public policies.

The creation of such institutions would require legal backing to guarantee their independence and authority. Legislation should clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and powers of these bodies, ensuring that they can operate without undue interference from political actors. Additionally, mechanisms for public accountability should be established, allowing citizens and civil society organisations to engage with these bodies and hold them accountable for their performance. By implementing a framework for policy continuity, Nigeria can achieve more consistent and sustainable policy outcomes, ultimately fostering long-term national development (Aiyede & Muganda, 2023). This approach not only mitigates the negative impacts of political instability on public policy but also strengthens the overall governance structure of the country.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Nigeria's public policy process is entrenched in a paradox where the same inefficiencies that contribute to widespread societal suffering also provide opportunities for political elites to consolidate power and gain personal benefits. Challenges such as corruption, institutional weaknesses, and political interference are not merely barriers to effective governance; those in power often exploit them to maintain their dominance. Consequently, policies intended to foster economic growth, enhance public services, and address social inequalities are frequently undermined, perpetuating underdevelopment and social unrest. This cycle of manipulation deepens Nigeria's governance crisis and hinders its developmental progress.

Despite these challenges, the potential for meaningful reform in Nigeria remains. Tackling these issues necessitates a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening institutions, enhancing transparency, and building capacity within the public sector. By insulating the policy process from political interference and fostering a culture of accountability, Nigeria can begin to realign its governance structures to serve the public good. Although the path forward will be difficult, sustained commitment to reform can transform Nigeria's public policy landscape into a catalyst for genuine national development. This transformation would ensure that the benefits of governance are equitably distributed among all citizens rather than concentrated in the hands of a few.

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