CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLICY AND PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

The challenge of policy and programme implementation in Nigeria has become deeply entrenched. Arguably, this challenge is replicated at all levels of government in the country with negative implications for service delivery. This paper has isolated the experience of policy and programme implementation in Benue State since its creation in 1976. The paper uses a conceptual and theoretical exploration to interrogate the problematic of policy formulation and programme implementation in the state over the period. Preliminary investigations reveal that a combination of factors has, over time, hindered the effectiveness in the formulation of policies and programmes and the efficiency in their implementation in the state. It argues that the quality of policy formulation and programme implementation is dependent on the quality of strategic approaches deployed by relevant stakeholders. It concludes that since its creation, Benue State has not recorded a significant milestone in its policy formulation and programme implementation as a result of discontinuities, political factors as well as economic forces, among others. It is on the basis of this conclusion that the paper points to the way forward.

Introduction

Benue State is one among the thirty-six federating units that make up the Nigerian federation. Since its creation in 1976, the state has being struggling to advance the cause of growth and development with some levels of successes, failures and challenges. The levels of successes, failures and challenges are functions of a multiplicity of factors. It is plausible to argue that the quality of policy formulation and programme implementation is key to recording growth and development in any organized system. The case of Benue State is certainly not an exception in this context. Therefore, in this discussion, attention is given to the nature and character of policy formulation and programme implementation in Benue State over time. The intention is to enable an objective evaluation of the state's strategic approach to growth and development. Basically, this is the main thrust of this intellectual engagement.

Benue State in Historical and Geographical Contexts

Benue State was created on February 3, 1976. The state, which took its name from River Benue, is geographically located in the Middle Belt of Nigeria with Makurdi as its capital city. The major ethnic groups in the State are Tiv, Idoma and Igede. Other ethnic groups in the state include Akweya, Etulo, Jukun, Nyifon, Ufia, etc. The various ethnic groups are distributed among the 23 Local Government Areas that make up the state.

By 2011, the population of the state was 4,942,100, indicating 3.018% of Nigeria's total population. The projected population growth rate of the state, which is put at +3.05% annually, shows that by 2020 its population had hit 6,474,150. The predominant occupation of the various peoples of the state is farming, which makes agriculture the main activity of the majority of the people. Unfortunately, the agricultural economy of the State has come under heavy threats as a result of recurrent violent attacks on farming population from external invaders, leading to intermittent occupational displacements and cascading refugee crisis. In the face of the security challenges that have confronted the state in the last three decades, the people have shown an unusual resilience to carry on.

Next to agriculture is the civil service. The civil service of the state is an important employer of labour. It also provides the bureaucracy that makes input in policy formulation and also anchors policy and programme implementation in the state.

Map of Benue State Showing the 23 LGAs and their Administrative Headquarters:

Source: www.researchgate.net>

Benue State is bounded on the south by the Cross River, Ebonyi and Enugu States, on the west by Kogi State, on the north by Nassarawa State, and on the northeast by Taraba State. Climatically, the state is found in a sub-humid tropical region with an average annual temperature range of 280 and 380 and is characterized by a distinct dry season between December and March,

and rainy season between April and November. The average annual precipitation of the state is about 1370mm with a bimodal pattern. The state is dominated by the southern guinea savannah vegetation with a vast expanse of secondary forest due mainly to the extensive traditional agricultural activities among the people. There are also park vegetations and pockets of concentrated bushes, shrubs and forests along stretches of isolated river banks across the state. The state can be accessed through land, air and water, which makes it an investment destination.

Arguably, the most striking geographical feature of Benue State is River Benue, which is the second largest in Nigeria. The river rises from the Central Cameroon Mountains, flows west across central Nigeria, and joins the River Niger at Lokoja. Its navigable length is more than 965km during the wet season, mostly between May and September. River Benue is about 1,370km long, which makes it useful for transportation of freight and passengers as well as for tourism, fishing and irrigation farming. Rivers Katsina-Ala, Guma, Dura, Amire-Kiriki, Amire-Tamen, Mkomon, Duru, Loko, Mu, etc. are tributaries of River Benue.

The soil texture of the state varies and much of it consists of appreciable depth of various thin layers of sediments. The soil materials are highly varied ranging from clays to loams, sands, gravels or a combination of these following a particular pattern of sedimentation. The state has a spatial distribution of high and low hills, as well as streams which had served strategic purposes for the people, especially during the early phases of their migrations and settlements. There is huge deposit of limestone, petroleum, iron ore, and other solid minerals in commercial quantities at various locations of the state. This brief historical and geographical background information is intended to provide an insight into the nature and outcomes of policy formulation and programme implementation in Benue State since its creation.

Policy and Programme Implementation in Benue State: Conceptual and Theoretical Foundations

In simple terms, a policy is a plan of action that guides programme implementation for the attainment of specific goals and objectives in an organized system. A programme, on the other hand, is a set of activities that translates a plan of action into practical results. The deliberate activities that translate an official plan of action into practical results are commonly referred to as programme implementation. The concept of Development and the Political Economy Paradigm will drive the conceptual and theoretical foundations of policy and programme implementation in Benue State.

The Concept of Development: even though there may be a common-sense interpretation of development, the concept remains one of those contextually contested concepts without a commonly agreed definition. In any case, some scholars have made

remarkable efforts in providing some penetrating contextual and conceptual interpretations of what development connotes. To M.P. Todaro, for instance, development is a multidimensional process that involves the reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems; and this also involves improvement in incomes and output as well as significant changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as attitudes in customs and belief systems.

During the last century, development mainly referred to economic growth indicating a quantitative rather than a qualitative change in economic performance. However, in the modern sense, development simply implies an improvement in the economic and social conditions of a society. Most specifically, it refers to improvement in the management of society's natural and human resources in the creation of wealth for the improvement of the material condition of the people. It is in this context that development is used interchangeably with progress. Clearly, therefore, development connotes a radical shift away from retrogression to a desirable level of progression; and this must be responsive to the dynamics of emerging realities of society.

It is important to establish the centrality of the state in development. In the first place, the capacity to provide security, raise revenue, assert autonomy, achieve harmony and cause development resides in the nature and character of the state. This capacity is further determined by economic conditions, social mobilization, internal cohesion and the legitimacy of the state itself. It is on this basis that state enjoys the exclusive powers to formulate and implement authoritative public policies that structure the socio-economic conditions that in turn dictate the patterns and dimensions of development. This is the reality that places legitimacy on Benue State as a federating unit within Nigeria's federal structure to formulate policies and implement programmes to cause development in the state.

Political Economy Paradigm: basically, the two theories of political economy are classical political economy and modern political economy. The analysis of classical political economy dwells on the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Karl Marx, etc. while modern political economy analysis derives from the works of John Keynes, Milton Freidman, Claude Ake, etc. The study of political economy is influenced by the game theory, which typically explains the involvement of different groups in a fierce competition for finite resources and power – the two variables that determine policy formulation and programme implementation within a system. One of the important fallouts of political economy analysis is that it explains the interest of individuals and groups who are able to manipulate the system with their power to influence policy. It helps in understanding how influential individuals and groups in government promote their own political and economic interests over and above the larger interest of the state. This is the situation that has encouraged primordial paradigms of ethnicity and religion as the organizing

principles for the conceptualization and promotion of distributive interests in Nigeria. This is counterproductive especially given the fact that the political economy of the Nigerian state is reflective of an over-powering statism that places the state at the centre of power and wealth distribution. The scenario is further complexified by a monolithic economic structure that is anchored on oil revenues with obvious neglect to inter-sector linkages and other sources of income generation. Thus, it has become a common knowledge that the 36 states of the Nigerian federation, the Federal Capital Territory and the 774 local government areas in Nigeria all depend substantially on the Federal Coffers for funding in the name of Federal Revenue Allocation to implement programmes at their various levels. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to achieve minimum fairness in the allocation of revenues to all the parasitic components of the Nigerian federation. Added to this unfortunate reality of a faulty distribution of national resources is the deliberate promotion of laziness and despondency by successive governments through this centralized system of wealth distribution of oil revenues. It is from this centralized pool of federal revenue allocation that Benue State expects and draws a substantial part of its financial resources to implement its programmes.

Trends in Policy and Programme Implementation in Benue State

Since its creation in 1976, the state has been administered by both military and democratically elected governors. It, therefore, means that there have been different policies and programme implementations under the successive administrations in the history of the state. Some of the following factors will serve to explain the changing trends and patterns in policy formulation and programme implementation in Benue State:

a. Regime Type defines the character of policy formulation and implementation. In this context, under successive military administrations, the state witnessed the executive fiat approach in policy and programme implementation with little or no bureaucratic infractions. Under democratic regimes, policy formulation and programme implementation have always taken longer time in the name of due process. This is further compounded by administrative and bureaucratic bottlenecks characteristics of the state civil service.

b. There has been inconsistency in styles and approaches to policy formulation and programme implementation under different democratic regimes in the state. This is partly a function of the idiosyncratic disposition of different executive governors, priority differentials of executive governors, the values of their political parties of affiliation and the disposition of political godfathers and influential political elites under prevailing circumstances. A combination of these factors has caused the prevalence of disarticulation and inconsistency in style and approach to policy and programme implementation in the state.

c. The nature of revenue allocation to Benue State from the Federal Government has affected the trends of policy and programme implementation in the state. This is because shortfalls in federal allocations to the state adversely affect programme implementation while intermittent increases in federal allocation have witnessed relative speed-up in programme implementation in the state.

Frameworks for Policy and Programme Implementation in Benue State

Basically, the major frameworks for policy and programme implementation in Benue State derive from the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, policy documents, the legislature, government panels/ad-hoc committees and other relevant institutions. Fundamentally, it presupposes that development has always remained a key element in policy and programme implementation.

a. Policy and programme implantation in Benue State derive legitimacy from the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This is because, all policies and programmes implemented in the state must not be repugnant to the provisions of the Federal Constitution.

b. Policy documents are blue prints that encapsulate the policy direction and programme contents of each administration. They are articulated by the various administrations to guide their policy formulation and programme implementation in the state.

c. The Legislature is made up of representatives that represent the various state constituents. They are usually elected on various party platforms to legislate quality laws for good governance. The elected representatives are usually expected to make quality inputs in policy formulation and programme implementation in the state.

d. Panels of Inquiry/Ad-Hoc Committees that are sometimes set up by government for specific assignments usually come up with policy recommendations that sometimes guide the process of policy formulation and programme implementation in the state.

e. Other relevant institutions like the traditional/chieftaincy institutions, religious institutions, and educational institutions often play advisory roles and make inputs in the policy and programme implementation of the state as necessitated by circumstances.

Stakeholders in Policy and Programme Implementation in Benue State

The key stakeholders in policy and programme implementation in Benue State are the executive, the citizenry, the state's bureaucracy, the legislature, political elites, the media, etc.

a. The executive includes the Governor, Deputy Governor, state cabinet members and heads of ministerial departments and agencies. They combine to constitute the bulwark of policy formulation and the monitoring/supervision of programme implementation.

b. The citizenry implies the generality of the Benue people – the young and old, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, employed and unemployed, etc. It presupposes that these are the targeted beneficiaries of all government policies and programmes.

c. The state's bureaucracy is the engine room of policy interpretation and programme implementation.

d. The legislature, which is the Benue State House of Assembly, through the instrumentality of oversight functions and the power of appropriation, is expected to play the role of a critical stakeholder in the policy and programme implementation in the state.

e. The Benue political elite is made up of party men, elected and appointed public officers of Benue extraction, youth and women wings of political parties with interest in the affairs of the state.

f. The media naturally play the role of providing information and, sometimes, educating the public on rationality for certain policies and programmes of the state. The media should not function as a government propagandist machine but as a watchdog of society and facility for objective reportage.

Policy and Programme Implementation Performance in Benue State

There is no doubt that Benue State has always had fantastic policies. The problem has always been that of implementation. Thus, policy and programme implementation in Benue State have suffered fundamental setbacks as a result of a multiplicity of factors.

Since its creation in 1976, the state has been administered by both military and democratic elected governors. Thus, there have been different policies and programme implementations under the successive administrations with different levels of successes, failures and challenges. But in all of these, the factors that have remained consistent in frustrating policy and programme implementation in the state are: lack of continuity, unbridled corruption, politicization of bureaucracy, weak bureaucracy, inadequate funding, lack of social cohesion among political elite, general insecurity, etc.

a. Successive administrations in the state hardly continue with the policies and programmes initiated by their predecessors. The Makurdi Sheraton Hotels project initiated by the Aper Aku administration and abandoned by successive administrations in the state vividly illustrates this notion.

b. Corruption has remained the bane of policy and programme implementation in the state since its creation. This manifests in inflated contract sums, kickbacks, political patronage, etc.

c. The bureaucracy has become dangerously over-politicized. The state's civil servants, especially the ones in the senior cadre, do not pretend to be apolitical in their interactions and responsibility discharge. They are openly partisan and loyal to a particular political party in power.

This has often led to inconsistency in policy interpretation and programme implementation when there is change in leadership and shift in party loyalty. Added to this is the fact that the bureaucracy is not adequately motivated and training is irregular.

d. The internal revenue generation base of Benue State is too weak to augment regular shortfalls from federal allocated revenues to the state.

e. The apparent lack of social cohesion among Benue elites has instigated a sustained lack of unity of purpose. Consequently, each administration creates its own clique that prioritizes its policies and programme implementation without taking cognizance of the preferences of the larger picture.

f. In the last two decades, security of challenge has steadily cascaded in Benue State. The consequence of this sad reality readily manifests in disrupted programmes, unhealthy atmosphere that is antithetical to development and general decrease in internally generated revenues. There is no doubt that general insecurity has combined with other factors to adversely affect policy and programme implementation in the state for some time now.

Policy and Programme Implementation: A Comparative Analysis of Benue State and Other States

The basis for a comparative analysis in this context derives, first and foremost, from the consideration that Benue State is one among other federating units of Nigeria. Second, all the federating units draw from the same central pool of resources for their policy and programme implementation. Apart from these, there are other common grounds like general insecurity in the country and widespread corruption.

Benue State was created in 1976 along with Bauchi, Borno, Imo, Niger Ondo, Oyo, Plateau, and Sokoto States together with the Federal Capital Territory. Although the geopolitical structures of these states have since been altered by subsequent state creation exercises, their basic geopolitical identities and historical peculiarities have remained unaltered.

Of all the federating units that were created in 1976, Benue State appears to be the least developed. The take-off of the state from the scratch in 1976 probably didn't show a spectacular promise for development under a military administration that had to harvest a bureaucracy and cabinet from a motley of civil servants working under poor work environment and unsettled atmosphere. In any case, the administration of Col. Abdullahi Shelleng (1976-1979) laid the foundation for a prosperous Benue State. Thus, the return of democracy in 1979 brought the democratic regime of Aper Aku in Benue State and eventually placed the state on a progressive swing of policy formulation and programme implementation in the state between 1979 and 1983. The administration is known to have set a standard of governance through sound policy initiatives and programme implementation that has, so far, remained

unequalled in the annals of the state's history of development. Aku's policies permeated all the critical sectors of Benue's economy – a reality that translated to a rapid socio-economic transformation of the state during the first republic. It was the military interregnum of 1983 to 1999 that grounded the wheel of development in the state to a halt.

Since the return of democracy in 1999, policy and programme implementation in Benue State has consistently fallen short of expectations. This notion becomes valid when the picture of development in infrastructure and other critical sectors are juxtaposed with that of the aforementioned states that were created the same time with Benue State. In other words, if the potency of policy and programme implementation is measured by the quantum of practical development and social transformation within time and space, Benue State has not fared well when compared with the other states that were created in 1976.

Policy and Programme Implementation in Benue State: Options and Strategies

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the machinery of policy and programme implementation in Benue State requires some innovative options and strategies. In this connection, the following will constitute the compass.

First, there is need to emphasize transparency and accountability in the management and application of the internally generated revenues of the state. A sound and properly managed IGR base will augment the intermittent shortfalls in federal revenue allocations and provide the basis for realizing accomplishment for policy and programme implementation in the state.

Second, deliberate steps must be taken to re-orientate the state's bureaucrats towards a culture of apolitical mindedness. It is the politicization of the state's bureaucracy that has created unnecessary party loyalty among civil servants to the neglect of civil service rules in the system. This situation is counter-productive to the mechanics of policy and programme implementation in the state. Closely related to this is the need to reengineer the state civil service with the necessary equipage for optimum service delivery.

Third, the Benue State Government should adopt a holistic ICT-driven policy to digitize its policy formulation process and the monitoring of its programme implementation for effective service delivery.

Fourth, participatory democracy should be considered as a viable option for involving a wider range of opinions across political party lines in policy and programme implementation in Benue State. In this connection, the Benue Diaspora should be given the opening to contribute their quota to policy formulation and implementation in the state.

Fifth, the Benue State Legislature should be more active in its constitutional

responsibility discharge to the Benue citizenry by making laws that are people-oriented and development-driven.

Finally, the Federal Government should demonstrate the courage to deal with the cascading security challenges in Nigeria generally and in Benue State particularly in order that a healthy atmosphere for policy and programme implementation can become realistic.

Conclusion

The formulation of policies has never been a problem in Benue State. The problem has always been with the implementation of programmes derivable from those policies. This notion reflects the larger picture of the Nigerian reality. In any event, the emphasis of this discussion is on the experience of Benue State since its creation. From extant literature, empirical findings and objective interrogation, it is obvious that policy formulation and programme implementation have suffered fundamental drawbacks in Benue State as a result of a multiplicity of challenges. The challenges are surmountable if the options and strategies provided here are faithfully adopted.