THE BUREAUCRACY AND THE CHALLENGES OF POLICY-FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

Onyekwehu, Rose Ugo.  
Department of Public Administration, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus

Okpalibekwe ,Uche Nora  
Department of Public Administration, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus

Dike, Ego Evangeline  
Department of Public Administration, Anambra State University, Igbariam Campus

Abstract

The state bureaucracy grew out of the need to rationally and efficiently tackle and accomplish societal goals. This is so, because it stands for the needed institutions and legal framework of a functional state. However, the bureaucracy in Nigeria has not lived to its expectations. It is characterized by dismal performance. This poor performance can be attributed to so many factors, among which are the politicization of the state bureaucracy, corruption, deviation from stated norms and guidelines; the spoil system of recruitment and structural defects. Thus, the state bureaucracy operates below expectation especially in its role in public policy formulation and implementation. This paper highlights the challenges of the state bureaucracy in policy-formulation and implementation in Nigeria. The study also offers suggestions for repositioning the system to overcome the challenges.

Introduction

The public bureaucracy is a major organizational structure within which public policy making, implementation and evaluation-takes place. So vital is the concept (especially in developing countries, where the government is faced with numerous problems and challenges, resulting from the ever increasing range of activities undertaken by modern government) that it not only stand out as the major machinery of government for the formulation and implementation of public policies but also its input in the policy process have become glaringly crucial. It is through public bureaucracy and its proper functioning that the political will of a country is translated into concrete policy measures and executed for the achievement of national goals. The adequacy and efficiency of the public bureaucracy is therefore very important to all areas of development process. It has become a truism that no process of democratization or economic development can proceed or succeed without the supporting operations of a functional public bureaucracy. Whatever system of government operated in a state, the public bureaucracy is designated to be the prime mover of all aspects of life in a country. Within the context of policy formulation and implementation which are integral parts of the policy process, the bureaucracy more appropriately belongs to the policy implementation system, but is also active in the area of policy formulation through their expertise, skills and role in policy recommendation and advice. The place of the bureaucracy in the policy process becomes more expedient
considering the complex and extensive role of government in a developing country like Nigeria as it is expected to properly define, design and discharge these crucial responsibilities for the good of all. Its efficiency or otherwise determines to a large extent, the quality of service delivery and the regulating capacity to ensure order and stability, particularly in developing nations.

However, the ability of the Nigeria public bureaucracy to effectively formulate and implement public policies had always been questioned as it seemed divorced from the system which it is expected to serve and sustain. This paper therefore sets out to examine the Bureaucracy and the challenges of policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria. Accordingly, the paper will look at the policy process and the challenges that undermine the bureaucracy in policy formulation and implementation. Suggestions will be made on the necessary improvement required to make the state bureaucracy efficient and responsive to its responsibilities.

Conceptual Explanations

Bureaucracy

According to Eme and Edeh (2007), there are two main contending views on the study of bureaucracy; the Weberian and Marxian. Marx Weber, a German sociologist who popularized the term used the term to describe a rationalistic and efficient organization of government, administration and industry. Bureaucracy is viewed as a large-scale, complex, hierarchical and specialized organization designed to attain rational objectives in the most efficient and effective manner. The realization of such rational goals and objectives is maximized through the bureaucratic qualities of formalism and impersonality in the application of rules and regulations in the operation and management of organizations.

The classical bureaucracy of Weber is anchored on certain qualities such as, hierarchy, division of labour anchored on specialization, policy of promotion and recruitment based on merit, in addition to impersonality in the conduct of official duties, security of tenure and strict observance of rules and regulations in the operation of functions, etc (Eme and Edeh 2007). This kind of organization (with these features ensured) in Weber's opinion is the technically most efficient form of administration. He argues that the extent to which the above features are embedded in the organization determine the extent to which the organization approach an ideal type bureaucracy. Weber’s concept of bureaucracy however, remains an ideal type which in real life does not exist. This is because no bureaucratic organization exhibits discernable features as postulated by Weber. This explains why Weber’s ideal type of bureaucracy has remained a subject of criticism and controversies by many scholars. It must however be noted that Weber's concept of bureaucracy did not include a lot of red tape and inefficiency as bureaucracy is usually viewed, rather his aim was to develop a set of rules and procedures to ensure economic, administrative and co-operative efficiency.

Karl Marx, on the other hand, viewed bureaucracy as an instrument of oppression, exploitation and domination in the hands of the dominant class who control and manipulate the state and its apparatus in the society. Marx conceived the bureaucracy as an instrument usually employed by the ruling class to accumulate wealth and maintain their domination and control of the state. Thus, the basic driving force of bureaucracy is usually concealed by both the dominant class and the bureaucrats, as efforts are constantly made to project the bureaucracy as a neutral and development agency working for the interest of everybody in the society. To a large extent, therefore, the interest and the future of bureaucracy are closely interlinked with those of the ruling class and state. Marx identified four major features of bureaucracy. These are; the process of alienation, incompetence, bureaucratic imperialism, domination and oppression and sordid
materialism (Muozelis1967). To him, it is by the process of alienation that bureaucracy becomes an independent and oppressive force which is felt by the majority of the people as a mysterious and distant entity that regulates their activities. In the area of incompetence, Marx stressed the lack of initiatives and imagination by the bureaucrats who are always scared of taking any kind of responsibility. The bureaucrats is not intimidated by this problem rather believes it is capable of doing anything. Consequently, it continues to expand its area of functions and domain in order to consolidate its position and prerogative (Nnadozie, 2007).

With the various conceptualizations of bureaucracy, we cannot but define the state bureaucracy as that machinery of government designed to execute the decisions and policies of political office holders. By definition and within the context of this paper, public bureaucracy is used to refer to the administrative machinery – the civil service, personnel of government at the various tiers of government and the body of rules and regulations that govern the behaviours of these personnel in government.

The State Bureaucracy and Public Policy-Formulation and Implementation.

Public policy to Carl (1975) is the proposed course of action of the government or one of its division. Public policy is what government chooses to do or not to do. It is the integrated courses and program of action that government has set, and the frame work or guide it has designed to direct actions and practices in certain problem areas. Generally, public policies are meant to solve societal problems particularly those considered to require public or collective action (Ikelegbe, 2006).

The policy process is a sequential pattern of action, a complex web of structure, activities and interaction relating to techniques, strategies, resources, costs, benefits and policy goods and services among persons, groups and agencies. It consists of several activities and interactions between the environment which generates demands, the political system or more accurately the conversion process which converts and translates demands and preferences into policy output and the implementation system which consists of implementing agencies and activities (Larkey,1979). This results in output and performance which interacts with the environment in the form of impact. This again is capable of generating further demands and preferences which makes the entire process interactive. The policy process could therefore be said to consist of six key aspects: policy generation, problem identification, policy formulation policy adoption, policy implementation, policy evaluation and policy impact.

Within the context of policy formulation and implementation, the state bureaucracy more appropriately belongs to policy implementation system but they are also active in the area of policy formulation through their expertise, skills and role in policy recommendation and advice. The state bureaucracy or the civil service is known to be an integral part of the executive branch of government. It is the institution charged with the function of formulating and implementing policies and programmes of government. It therefore becomes the agency through which the activities of the government are realized. The public bureaucracy possesses the expertise, skills competence and experiences. It has in its rank, experts in various fields possessing skills and training and who have accumulated enormous administrative, technical, professional and management experience and competence in government activities.

As administrators they are strategically placed to perform the the policy generation task. According to Ikelegbe (2006),they come in daily contact (in the course of carrying out government activities),with the needs, problems, aspiration and interest of the citizenry and their environment, thus, possessing firsthand knowledge of the short comings, inadequacies and problems of present policy. These contacts provide the bureaucrats the challenges and ideas to formulate new policy responses. They therefore, because of their position in the scheme of public policy-making-generates and initiate a large chunk of public policy. Rourke (1976) noted that:

*the policy making power of bureaucracies is also inherent in her being the*
administrative organization for implementing policy. The implementing function enables bureaucratic policy influence in two ways. First, it sets the range within which policies could be made. The bureaucratic abilities, experiences and orientations sets, restricts or facilitates policy choices. Political leaders make policies that their bureaucracies have abilities to implement. Second, political leaders also know that implementation success will be facilitated, if the appropriate bureaucratic agencies are well disposed towards policy.

Bureaucratic policy making finds a strong source in the exercise of discretion in the implementation process. Administrative officials make decisions in the process of implementing a policy because they have to fill in details, interpret the policy and apply it to specific cases and situations. Sometimes such discretionary action constitutes new policy thrusts, or forms the basis for new policy actions. The importance of administrative discretion according to Rourke (1976) is that

without administrative discretion, effective government would be impossible in the infinitely varied and rapidly changing environment. But the exercise of judgment involves choice and choice means the formulation of policy. Hence the high development of administrative discretion in modern society, necessarily projects bureaucrats into the center of the political process.

Another source of bureaucratic influence in policy making is the secrecy with which it operates and the inattention which, society often gives most policy issues. The secrecy in policy deliberations precludes society from giving adequate attention to bureaucratic policy activity.

Bureaucratic reaction to policy choice may not always be that of -neutrality, subservient support and acquiescence. Just as their recommendations and support disposes government policy outcomes, so does bureaucratic opposition to policy recommendations thwart or even preclude certain policy options, or slow down and sabotage their execution. Rourke (1976) rightly noted that,

when administrators cannot achieve their own goal; they may be able to prevent others from achieving goals to which they are opposed. It is as a veto group or perhaps through its ability to keep certain matters from coming to decision at all that an executive agency may actually exercise its formidable influence.

At the level of policy implementation, the bureaucracy is the most crucial actor. It constitutes the administrative machinery for executing policy and it has the structure, processes and personnel for effectuating public policies. Bureaucrats are responsible for co-coordinating, monitoring and enforcing implementation activities. The capabilities of the state bureaucracy in terms of expertise, ability, orientation and experience determine to a large extent the success of implementation (Ikelegbe 2006).

Also the capacity of the bureaucracy also determines to a large extent which policies can be well implemented. Where abilities exist, policies could be confidently positioned for implementation. Thus, the vitality, leadership, discipline, skills and expertise of the bureaucracy may further or mar implementation. In the same vein, the disposition of bureaucratic leadership and staff determines implementation success. Positive attitudes may underlie enthusiastic implementation while the contrary may mean that implementation may be resisted, thwarted and even sabotaged.

The bureaucracy may also implement policies according to its interests.
and values. The direction and target of implementation could thus be deviated by selfishly motivated modifications, reorientations and perversions of standards and methods. Where polices are not congruent with bureaucratic interest numerous problems may be orchestrated to create the impression that the policy changes or alternative actions are infeasible. Rourke (1976), thus noted that administration of the law, may become in fact nullification of the law, or as some would put it, sabotage of its intent.

The Nigeria Public bureaucracy and the Challenges of Policy Formulation and Implementation.

As a term loosely signifying public Administration, the public bureaucracy has acquired a number of unpleasant connotations. Bureaucrats are thought to be lazy, arrogant, inflexible and, short sighted. It is associated with inefficiency, lack of initiative, unintelligent rigidity in the approach to human problems, undue fussiness and bossiness on the part of officials and downright stubbornness (Adebayo 1995). Oyedele (2008) noted that the Nigerian bureaucracy has remained a Colonial relic needing overhauling to rid it from the problems of poor organization, planlessness, indiscipline, corruption and favoritism. The rots and decay in services rendered by the public bureaucracy over the years is evidenced in the speech made by the former President Obasanjo while launching initiative to reform public bureaucracy service delivery in which he said, "Nigerians have for too long been short changed by the quality of public service. . . we shall ensure they get what is better.

Without doubt the performance of the Nigerian bureaucracy in virtually all aspects over the years has remained very dismal. According to Eme and Edeh (2007), the problems besetting the state bureaucracy could be discussed in three thematic formats: structural administrative attitude and behavior, political and economic respectively. Nnoli (1980) Adebayo (2001) and Yusufu (1992) classified the structural problems besetting the bureaucracy in Nigeria into four basic categories, namely personnel regulations, personnel qualifications, organizational structure, and work environment. Each, according to Eme and Eneh (2007) plays its role in diminishing the administrative capacity in public bureaucracy.

The state bureaucracy is expected to be the instrument through which policy is executed, however, the bureaucracy cannot avoid some policy making responsibility. Much of the policy making responsibility on the part of the bureaucracy takes place in the course of the application of administrative processes. The administrator has to weigh and consider conflicting demands and interests and to reconcile them. In the process he makes consultations and tries to balance the conflicting demands. His task therefore, is to assist in policy formulation by generally advising on policy matters. This he does by supplying his political boss with all the information necessary for coming to a right decision as he must place before the political boss all argument the fully and fairly. Numerous problems can arise at this stage. For example, some problems may be magnified for selfish reasons. The consequence of this is that government policy may be over bloated in structure, activity and funding. In the same way, some problems may be suppressed from policy makers’ attention because of selfish interests. It could be that such suppression favors bureaucrats and certain groups. For instance bureaucratic officials may suppress problems to cover up their inadequacies. In such a case, the problem may only receive little government attention and feeble response. Some problems tend to be poorly or wrongly presented.

Bureaucrats in their role as policy implementers and agenda setters have the ability to influence various decisions in their own interests. A crucial examination of policy making and implementation in Nigeria shows that at the implementation stage, public policies becomes grave
yard of policies where the intention of the policy designers often get undermined by an assembly of powerful forces of politics and administration.

There is political and administrative undue interference in the policy process. This affects very seriously the final outcome of a policy. It is obvious that the bureaucracy is not given a free hand when it comes to their role in initiating and implementing public policies. There are situations when the political executives come with overbearing political power to redirect the course of a public policy especially in undemocratic regimes.

In most cases, the bureaucracy is handicapped by lack of fiscal and material resources not made readily available. The implication is that such policies will not be effectively implemented. To a large extent, extra political and administrative force impairs the effectiveness of the state bureaucracy in initiating, and implementing public policy.

Also, bureaucratic capacity determines which policies will be effectively implemented. Such variables as bureaucratic vitality, leadership, discipline, skills, experiences and very significantly the disposition of bureaucratic leadership and staff determines the successful outcome of the policy process.

It is observed that where policies are not congruent with bureaucratic interests, numerous problems may be feigned as to show that the policy option is not feasible. The political neutrality of the state bureaucracy implies that bureaucrats must put their politics in their pocket. The practice is not so. The bureaucracy is very large and engrossed in deep bureaucratic politicking. The policy making process is filled with a lot of political intrigues as the supposed non-political bureaucracy is needed not apolitical as such. Thus, in most cases, implementation is usually undermined by the constellation of powerful forces of politics and administration.

The fact that communication, resources and positive disposition are put in place does not guarantee implementation success. If there is no efficient bureaucracy structure, the bureaucracy will be handicapped in the performance of its responsibility in policy making process especially when dealing with complex policies. Where there is organizational fragmentation, it may hinder the coordination that is necessary to successfully initiate and implement public policies. It may also result in the waste of scarce resources, inhibit change, create confusion, lead to policies working at cross purposes and result in important functions being overlooked.

A process of adverse selection, largely fueled by inferior public sector salaries and political interference constitutes to the poor quality of the bureaucracy. Political heavy weight have entrenched themselves in many regulating, procurement and project contracting agencies, thus government offices are staffed by relatively unqualified personnel who got employed through political intercession. The Nigeria public bureaucracy is bloated, thus yet inefficient.

**Conclusion.**

The bureaucracy’s role in the policy making process is an important role. It is in charge of formulating (initiating) and implementing public policies. Being a part of the executive and responsible to the incumbent government, it can assist in policy formulation and monitoring. The state bureaucracy therefore impacts on policy –making. Building on the Nigerian experience, the negative perception about bureaucracies is a valid criticism. The bureaucracy is staffed with self serving and self interested individuals who push all the political decisions in the course that
advance and protect their interests or the interest of the agencies in which they are employed. This has grievous implication for effective public policy making and implementation in a development hungry society like Nigeria.

REFERENCES


