

## **PUBLIC POLICY DISCONTINUITY AND POVERTY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

**Chuks Cletus EGUGBO**

Department of Public Administration  
Olabisi Onabanjo University  
Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.  
*egugbo@yahoo.com*

**Abstract:** *This paper examined the effects of public policy discontinuity on the well-being of the citizens. To a very large extent, public policy discontinuity has a great potential to lead to poverty amongst the citizenry which invariably undermines development. Development can hardly be achieved in the midst of acute poverty in the country. The citizens are more likely disposed to contribute to national development when they live above the poverty line and the reverse would be the case when they live below the poverty line. Secondary method of data collection was adopted in this paper in the sense that data for the paper were sourced from documented and archival materials and data gathered were analyzed with the use of historical method. The paper found out that the high level of poverty and low level of citizens well-being is partly as a result of public policy discontinuity and this condition has also greatly undermined national development. The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is the systems theory. The paper recommended among other things that proper planning and analysis should precede public policy-making and implementation to ensure that government make policies they have the capacity in all its ramification to implement so that the citizens can derive the benefits of such policies in order for their well-being to be assured and guaranteed.*

**Keywords:** *Public policy, Development, Poverty, Citizens, Government.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The rate of poverty with its concomitant effect on development no doubt has reached an alarming and unprecedented level in Nigeria in recent times. According to Akinnaso citing The World Poverty Clock, "Nigeria not only has a very large number of poor people, it also has the largest number of extreme poor people in a single country in the world. Specifically, about 70percent of the population is said to be poor, the majority of them being categorized as extremely poor". No wonder Nigeria has been said to be the extreme poverty capital of the world. This situation has necessitated the need to interrogate public policy-making and implementation in Nigeria. This becomes necessary because public policy based on the nature of its implementation has the capacity to extricate Nigeria from the yoke of poverty and underdevelopment. The government has serious responsibility to provide the citizens with essential services. This no doubt is the reasons for the existence of government. Section 14 (2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic Nigeria (as amended) states that the security and the welfare needs of the citizens is the primary responsibility of the government.

In order to do this, the government formulates policies and these policies are expected to address the needs of the citizens. When the needs of the citizens are addressed and attended to, it will improve the state of their being thereby making them to be extricated from the yoke of poverty. It is apt to state that no citizen would desire to be poor and as such cannot ask government to make policies that would impoverish them. The political

system theory of Easton made us to understand that there is input and output in the policy-making process. The input consists of demand and support. Demand has to do with the request of the citizens to the government in terms of their needs, wants and desires and these are expected to guide the government in making policies that are meant to address the citizens' desires, wants and needs.

When the policies are made and implemented to address the demand of the citizens, government is most likely to receive the support of the citizens in form of payment of taxes, obedience to law and order and performance of other civic responsibilities. This will in turn provide the government with necessary wherewithal to be able to further provide necessary and essential services to the citizens. The above scenario is what is needed to banish poverty and underdevelopment.

A situation where government discontinues a policy or makes policies that do not have bearing on the well-being of the citizens because they are not carried along in the public policy-making process engenders poverty and where there is mass poverty in a country that country can hardly develop. This can be said to be the situation in Nigeria. Mass poverty in Nigeria gave rise to a situation where many citizens refused to comply with the lockdown order of the government and the resultant effect is the community transmission of Covid-19 Virus. There is little or no connection between the citizens and the government in Nigeria and this explains why most government policies are elitist in the sense that government officials make policies that benefit them to the detriment of the masses. This explains the wide gap between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. For example both federal and state governments in Nigeria have been steadily and gradually increasing tuition fees in tertiary institutions and this explains why the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) has been fighting the government to ensure that governments stop making tertiary education to be only for the rich because in the long run it will have negative effect on the entire country. Politicians take advantage of mass poverty in Nigeria by giving stipends to the poor to buy their votes and recruit some with a token to serve as thugs during elections.

The high level of poverty in Nigeria is manifesting in the form of banditry, robbery, kidnapping, terrorism, oil bunkering, prostitution, thuggery, vote buying and selling, etc. These conditions no doubt cannot contribute to the development of the country and the lack of development of Nigeria is also worsening the already bad situation.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

At this juncture, major concepts in this paper are to be lucidly clarified. This is important and necessary for ease of understanding of the paper. The concepts to be so clarified are: Public Policy, Public Policy Discontinuity, Poverty, and Development. The centrality of the concept of public policy in governmental affairs has made it to attract a plethora of definitions by scholars across the globe. Public policy is prevalent and predominant in the public sector. This explains why Dye (1981:1) put it in relation to governments when he said "a policy is whatever governments choose to do or not to do". In governmental domain, policies are made to respond to citizens' demand. Public policy can be said to be a guide to governmental actions and activities. It is a compass that shows the focus and direction of government and obviously, it is meant to solve societal problems and ensure development. Public policy can be said to be a statement by the government

based on what it wants to do and what it decides not to do. Public policy enables us to know the direction and focus of government.

Ikelegbe (1996:4) is of the view that “public policy is simply governmental actions or course of actions, or proposed actions or course of proposed actions directed at achieving certain goals. In a similar vein, Carl Friedrich defines it as the proposed course of action of the government or one of its divisions. Mlekwa cited in Ikelegbe (1996:4) defines public policy as “official statements determining the plan of action or what the governments want to do”. Barret and Fudge (1981:5) opined that we talk of ‘public policy’ when a policy:

*Emanates from the ‘public sector’ including both institutions of central and local government and state created agencies such as water or health authorities, commissions and corporations – it may be implemented through and directed at a wide variety of individuals and organizations which may or may not be part of the state apparatus, and which may be to a greater or lesser degree independent of state influence or control.*

Lineberry cited in Sapru (2006:5) says that public policy is “what governments do and fail to do- to and for their citizens”. Public policy made can only achieve its intended result when they are effectively implemented and monitored. This brings us to the concept of “follow-up and follow-through” which means that public policies made should not only be implemented but must be seen to be effectively and efficiently implemented. There must be constant and consistent monitoring to the end because it is the only way to make public policies to achieve their intended goals. When public policies are abandoned or discontinued, they cannot achieve their intended goals. This brings us to public policy discontinuity. What is public policy discontinuity? Public policy discontinuity can be said to be a condition where public policy made are abandoned or stopped midway without achieving their intended goals. Public policies are useful and meaningful when they are made, implemented, evaluated and supported to the end. This condition is what makes public policies to achieve their goals. But the reverse is the case when they are discontinued. According to Essien-Udo cited in Eminue (2009:304):

*Policies and priorities are changed at whim and dizzying frequency. Ministries have been split and merged and then split again only to be merged next time around. Projects have been cancelled, varied, then cancelled only to be re-varied and cancelled again. Institutions have been created higgledy-piggledy. All these have occurred not so much for efficiency reasons but largely for political and personal reasons. The whole approach to government business has been a stoppage approach, or a circular approach, or else one of progress through retrogression, that is, one step forward, and two steps backward.*

The above statement shows clearly that public policies discontinuity leads to retrogression, poverty and underdevelopment. The next concept to be clarified is poverty. Issues of poverty have dominated not only national discourse but that of the world. This stems from the negative effects poverty has in the life of men, nations and the world at large. This explains why countries and international organizations have been so much interested in looking for ways to tackle poverty. Poverty is a multi-dimensional concept and as such does not have a definite definition. It has been defined in several ways by different scholars and organizations. This explains why Danaan (2018:20) opines that “poverty is complex, multidimensional and multifaceted with manifestations in the economic, social, political, environmental and every realm of human existence. The conceptualization of poverty over the years is changing with emerging perspectives in different contexts”. According to Naanen (2015:49) poverty is “a state of abject want, the absence of the basic needs of life. Manifestation of poverty includes lack of money, hunger and malnutrition, illiteracy and ignorance, lack of decent clothing and housing”. This view was corroborated by Townsend cited in Thomas (2000:12-13) when he asserted that

“individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the types of diets, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary or at least widely accepted and approved in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are, in effect, excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities”. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2002 describes the poor as those who live on less than \$1 per day. The issues of income inequalities, gender imbalance and rural-urban divide where those who produce wealth are deprived from reaping its benefits have attracted the attention of the international community. Women, rural dwellers and other vulnerable groups who produce the bulk of the world’s food get incommensurable rewards for their labour (Abimuku, 2006).

According to Reinert (2006:3-5), there are five dimensions and measures of poverty and they are income, health, education, empowerment and working conditions.

- Income: According to Reinert, the most common measure of poverty is known as income poverty. To him, poverty is viewed as a lack of goods consumption due to a lack of necessary income. There is no gainsaying the fact that the level of goods consumption as well as the quality of goods consumed is dependent on the level of income.
- Health: Apart from income poverty, poor health is now recognized as perhaps the most central aspect of poverty. According to Reinert, health deprivation characterizing poverty can be assessed in terms of life expectancies, infant and child mortality, and a number of other health-related measures.
- Education: This dimension of poverty can be assessed in terms of literacy rates, average years of schooling, or enrollment rates.
- Empowerment: Lack of what is sometimes called “empowerment” is a fourth important dimension of poverty.
- Working Conditions: This is another dimension of poverty. It reveals the condition in which people work especially in consideration to forced labour, health and safety. It is important to add that the dimensions and measures of poverty identified above are interrelated and interconnected in the sense that one dimension can lead as well as affect the others.

Development is another concept that is multi-dimensional and multi-faceted and as such has been given different definitions by different scholars as well as some international organizations. Development as a concept has defied definite definition particularly because of its multi-faceted and multi-dimensional nature. We have different aspects of development which include: economic development, political development, social and cultural development, technological development, etc. This explains why Todaro (1982) said that development should be perceived as a multi-dimensional process involving the re-organization and re-orientation of entire economic and social systems. Besides, improvement in incomes and outputs, development typically involves radical changes in institutional, social, and administrative structures as well as popular attitude and even in customs and beliefs. Rodney categorized development levels into individual, social and economic. At the individual level, development implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. In terms of social groups, the concept is expressive of increasing capacity to regulate both internal

and external relationships. The tools with which men work and the manner in which they organize their labour are important indices of social development. At the level of economic development, a society is said to develop economically when its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment.

According to Egonmwan (2014:207), development is “a dialectical phenomenon which, far from being static, is dynamic and therefore assumes a continuous transformation process and movement towards better and improved conditions, locally and in relation to the international economic order”. Development can be said to be a condition of progress and improvement in all aspects of human and national life which ultimately leads to the improvement in the standard of living of the citizens. Every citizen as well as country desires development. This explains why Sen cited in Todaro and Smith (2004) enthused that development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. He argued that to make any sense of the concept of human well-being in general and poverty in particular, we need to think beyond the availability of commodities and consider their use and freedom to use; what he calls functioning and capabilities. Functioning refers to commodities of given characteristics. And capabilities referring to the freedom the person have in terms of the choice of functions given his personal features and command over commodities.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework adopted in this paper is systems theory. David Easton is the proponent of the systems theory. Easton (1965) opines that a political system is “that system of interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocations are made”. In this vein, Irhue (2016:71) asserted that “public policy is the response of the political system to forces brought to bear on it from the environment”. The systems theory shows and exposes not only the processes and institutions involved in public policy-making and implementation but also highlights the relationship between the political system and the environment in the policy process. Demand inputs which the political system is to work on is generated from the environment and the political system also needs the support input from the environment to be in a stable and better position to perform the functions it is meant to perform. According to Irhue (2016:71), “certain key concepts are central to the understanding of public policy from the systems theoretical framework. First is the concept of system which implies an identifiable set of institutions and activities in society that functions to transform demands into authoritative decisions requiring the support of the whole society. A crucial property of a system is the interrelatedness of its parts or elements. Second, is the concept of inputs, which refers to the forces generated from the environment that affect the political system”.

According to the systems theory, there are inputs and outputs. Inputs consist of demands and supports. Demands are the claims for action that individuals and groups make to satisfy their interests and values. Support is rendered when groups and individuals abide by election-results, pay taxes, obey laws, and otherwise accept the decisions and actions undertaken by the political system in response to demands. Outputs of the political system include laws, judicial decisions. Good public policies made and effectively and efficiently implemented have the capacity to lift the citizens and the country out of poverty and

engender development but the reverse would be the case when public policies made are abandoned or discontinued.

### **CAUSES OF PUBLIC POLICY DISCONTINUITY IN NIGERIA**

Many public policies have been discontinued in Nigeria overtime. A discontinued policy cannot achieve its intended goals. Many factors account for public policy discontinuity in Nigeria and they include but not limited to following:

- **Change of Government:** Nigeria practices constitutional democracy whereby there is a constitutionally backed-up change of terms of office for democratically elected leaders. Each government in power comes with its own policy. Experience has shown that not all policies of a particular government are continued by successive administrations. Nigeria's fourth republic commenced since May 29, 1999 and since then the country has had four presidents namely; Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Umar Musa Yar'adua, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, and General Mohammedu Buhari (rtd.), and some of the policies initiated by them had been discontinued by successive administrations.
- **Lack of Proper Planning and Analysis:** According to Dimock et al (1983:141), Planning is "thinking before acting, establishing goals before setting-out and appreciating the limitations of planning as well as the essential need for it". Some government policies failed because of lack of planning and analysis before they are initiated and as such necessary ingredients for its success were absent. Lack of ingredients for the success of a policy leads to its failure.
- **Lack of Finance:** The place of finance in the success of public policy cannot be over-emphasized. Finance is needed for the formulation and implementation of public policies. Some public policies failed to achieve its intended goals because of lack of finance. In the absence of inadequate finance; public policies are discontinued.
- **Corruption:** Nigeria is a country that is faced with the problem of corruption. The establishment of anti-corruption agencies like the EFCC and ICPC has not really contributed significantly to the reduction of corruption in Nigeria. There have been reported cases of embezzlement of public fund earmarked for the implementation of certain policies of government.
- **Resistance and Protests by the Citizens:** Some policies that do not go down well with the people are resisted by them. And most of those policies never emanated from the people but rather imposed on them by the government. The subsidy removal protest in January 2012 is a typical example of citizens' resistance to government policy. The protest led the Jonathan's Administration to discontinue the subsidy removal policy.
- **Lack of Skilled Manpower:** There is no gainsaying the fact that most policies require skilled manpower to bring about their effective implementation and as such those policies would not achieve their intended goals when there is absence of skilled manpower and hence may be discontinued. This view was corroborated by Nnamdi (2001) when he notes that: "development policies has, in contemporary times, assumed complex and sophisticated dimension that require highly skilled and experienced bureaucrats for their effective implementation".

## **EFFECTS OF PUBLIC POLICY DISCONTINUITY ON POVERTY AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

The high level of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria has reached an alarming and disturbing dimension to the extent that government is under intense pressure to seek effective public policies to reverse the ugly situation and trend. Public policies have the capacity to lift the country out of poverty and underdevelopment that can only be possible if the policies are diligently and effectively formulated and implemented. But when public policies are discontinued, it would have adverse effect on poverty and development. In fact, the discontinuity of public policies would worsen the poverty situation of the country as well as its development. This explains why Ikechukwu and Chukwuemeka (2013) observed that “over the years in Nigeria, numerous brilliant public policies have been formulated and implemented. Yet, there is no apparent and significant development as evidenced by the fact that Nigeria has continued to remain in the category of the least developed countries of the world”. The National Council on Development Planning (NCDP) recognized the lack of stability and continuity in programmes by succeeding governments as the bane of Nigeria’s development.

Government policies discontinuity, no doubt, adversely affects foreign direct investment because of the uncertainty it engenders. When there is inconsistency and discontinuity in policies, investors would not have the confidence to invest in such country. Lack of investment in a country contributes to poverty and underdevelopment. It brings about shortage of job opportunities as well as revenue for the citizens and government. Public policies discontinuity leads to waste of the countries resources particularly in financial terms. This is because money is involved in making and implementing public policies. After formulating and implementing policies half-way the money involved is automatically wasted. This situation worsens the situation of poverty as well as the country’s development. The Ajaokuta steel factory after many years of establishment has failed to produce any steel after about \$8billion has been spent on it.

Public policies are also meant to improve on the human resources of the society. Human resources on the other hand are needed in formulating and implementing policies as well as other useful economic activities needed to extricate the individuals and the state from the yoke of poverty. A discontinued public policy cannot bring about human capital development with its attendant consequences.

When policies are discontinued it makes citizens to be disenchanted and disillusioned thereby killing patriotic zeal in them. When the citizens are not happy with the government due to policy discontinuity there is the tendency that they would not see any reason to support government. This situation has often led to increased crime rate such as robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, tax evasion and so on and so forth. A country where these incidences are the order of the day can hardly develop and this further worsens the poor condition.

Public policy discontinuity no doubt engenders underdevelopment. This is because not only would it lead to waste of the country’s resources. The country would not be taken seriously by the comity of nations. Underdevelopment of a country adversely affects the citizen because there would be lack of job opportunities.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public policy can bring about poverty reduction and development in any country if properly conceived and implemented. A discontinued policy apart from not being able to achieve its intended goals also is an avenue for the wastage of the country's resources. This explains why government should not just rush into making policies without considering the availability of the factors that can make policies to achieve their desired and intended results.

Government should try as much as possible to involve the masses in the process of policy formulation and implementation. Involving the citizens means that when they are carried along in the process they are likely to support the policies and therefore help in the actualization of its intentions.

Public policies require some ingredients that would enable it to work. In making public policies, government should consider the availability of the ingredients that would make the policies to work. Ingredients such as manpower and finance are very important for the success of policies. Government should also strengthen the anti-corruption agencies to tackle corruption more effectively. When resources or money meant for the implementation of policies are embezzled it would lead to the discontinuity of such policies with its attendant consequences.

There must be constant monitoring and evaluation of public policies to ensure they achieve the desired results. It is not enough to make policies; there is the need to follow-up and follow-through policies from the beginning to the end. Proper training should be given to those government officials saddled with the responsibility of implementing government policies. This would enable them to be in a better position to effectively implement the policies.

## References

1. Abimuku, A.C. (2006) Review of Concept of Measurement of Poverty. *Journal of Contemporary Issues on Poverty*, 1(1)
2. Akinnaso, N. (2019) Poverty and the 2019 Elections. *The Punch*, January 15.
3. Barret, S. and Fudge, C. (1981) Examining the Policy-Action Relationship. In Barret, S. and Fudge, C. (eds.), *Policy and Action: Essays on the Implementation of Public Policy*. London and New York: Methuen
4. Danaan, V.V. (2018) Analyzing Poverty in Nigeria through Theoretical Lenses. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 11(1)
5. Dimock, M.E. et al (1983) *Public Administration*. New York: Saunders College Publishing
6. Dye, T. (1981) *Understanding Public Policy* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). London: Prentice Hall International Inc.
7. Easton, D. (1965) *A System Analysis of Political Life*. New York: Wiley
8. Egonmwan, J.A. (2014) *Public Policy Analysis: Concepts and Applications*. Benin City: Resyin Nigeria Company.
9. Eminue, O.E. (2009) *Public Policy Analysis and Decision-Making*. Lagos: Concept Publication Ltd.
10. Ikechukwu, B.U. and Chukwemeka, E.O. (2013) The Obstacles to Effective Policy Implementation by the Public Bureaucracy in Developing Nations: The Case of Nigeria. *Singaporean Journal of Business, Economics and Management Studies*, (8)
11. Ikelegbe, A.O. (1996) *Public Policy-Making and Analysis*. Benin City: Uri Publishing Ltd.



12. Irhue, Y.K. (2016) Policy Implementation and its Challenges for National Development: *The State of Osun Education Policy. Annals of Social Science*, 3(1&2)
13. Naanen, B.B. (2015) Prosperity and Poverty of Nations: Using Global Models to Explain and Mitigate Underdevelopment in Nigeria. Inaugural Lecture. Guardian, June 19
14. Nnamdi, H. (2001) *Comparative Public Administration*. Benin City: Trust Publications
15. Reinert, K.G. (2006) *Globalization for Development*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
16. Sapru, R.K. (2006) *Public Policy: Formulation, Implementation and Evaluation*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Ltd.
17. Thomas, A. (2000) Poverty and the 'End of Development'. In Allen, T. and Thomas, A. (eds.), *Poverty and Development into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
18. Todaro, M.P. (1982) *Economies of a Developing World*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
19. Todaro, M.P. and Smith, S.C. (2004) *Economic Development*. Singapore: Pearson Education Ltd.



This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution - Non Commercial - No Derivatives 4.0 International License.