DYNAMIC MULTI DISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF NIGERIA

Published in 2022

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RETHINKING POLICY RESEARCH SPHERE: THE STUDY OF CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

One major identifiable lacuna with the public policy-making process particularly, in developing nations, has been linked to the inability of the policy-making elites to establish the necessary frameworks capable of engaging the citizens in the making of policies which are also meant for the well-being of citizens. To this end, policies which ought to have the citizens as their primary focus, most times end up being at variance with the needs and the expectations of the citizens and thereby, creating vacuums for public outcry and discontentment. The absence of a platform for citizens' engagement has in many ways, rendered the relevance of policy research meaningless. This paper is literature-based and therefore, attempts to interrogate the place of policy research as a veritable tool in enhancing citizens' participation and engagement towards evolving citizen-focused policy-making processes with the overall objective of promoting good governance, accountability and participatory

democratic culture in the conduct and the affairs of states in the much of developing nations.

INTRODUCTION

The place of policy research has been identified as one key essential element to policy making process particularly, in the evolvement of pragmatic and action-oriented outputs for resolving social problems. Perhaps, as part of the major obstacles to policy-making process, the inability of policymakers to establish the nexus between what the government wants to achieve and what the desires of the people are, has generally impacted negatively on the quality of governance at large.

In the much of developing countries, policies which ought to have the citizens at their centre of focus, most times are usually at variance with the desires of the people or are not even within those expected needs of the citizens. Thus, public policy, in most situations does not reflect the demands of the masses but rather the prevailing values of the policy makers. The argument of the inevitability of policy research could, however, be premised also on the argument that, for the evolvement of qualitatively sound policies within the policymaking environment, there is also a necessity for an ambience of effective and participatory interactions. Many policies fail, as noted, not only because they lack the necessary support or inputs of the citizens but largely, out of that required research driven inputs that could facilitate the accurate realization of policy objectives of the government. De Vries (2007) asserts that there is need for a thorough public debate on policy making with the necessity for policy makers to interact with the policy environment. The absence of such, he avers, explains why most policies fail.

One of the critical aspects of policy research is to formulate the problem as clearly as possible since much of the fundamental factors associated with policy failure can be linked to the absence of effective problem formulating paradigms. There is a contending argument that in most African countries, policy problems are formulated in response to singular or isolated concerns which are usually driven by vested interests of the policy elites, and due to the general absence of democratic responsiveness, the citizens are usually not in a position to articulate their demands on the state (Juma and Clark: 1995). As argued previously, the effect of this is that, policy choices are not often in tandem with the needs of the citizens or at best, such policy choices are inspired by external concerns without necessarily considering the peculiar needs or the possible adverse effects of those choices on the citizens.

Looking at the nature and the character of the African politics, the dominance of policy-making elites in the affairs of the state and particularly, in the agenda setting mandate has been brought under scrutiny. The prevailing conditions of limited public accountability have stimulated the unchecked activities of political and bureaucratic elites in policy making processes. Public policies are often tailored towards the narrowed political interests of the political elites which are also made possible through policy technocrats loyal to the political class. This could however, have its underlining factors in some other primordial conditions by which the policy technocrats and those who are saddled with the implementation of public policies are recruited within the pieces of machinery of the state in most of the African countries. It could be argued further that, with the prevailing conditions of the African political system, evolving a more balanced policy agenda setting within the framework of policy research sphere could be herculean unless, there is a genuine commitment to the reforms of the entire political systems and by extension, the policy reform agenda. This argument is apposite in view of the prevailing

crises of governance and political representation bedevilling most countries on the African continent.

The need for other interventions in policy processes is not only necessary or expedient. Enlarging the sphere of policy landscape and making it more participatory has been in tandem with the necessity for the enhancement of the governance profile of any democratic state. This argument is also plausible, looking at this from the prism of non-restrictive approach to policy making processes within the confines of the bureaucratic machinery of the state, rather through the engagement of critical stakeholders outside the state bureaucracy. However, under such participatory policy making conditions, public policies are not only exposed to critical evaluation and review as necessary but in their further comparative evaluations for the possible evolvement of people-oriented policies.

POLICY RESEARCH, CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION AND THE POLITICAL CULTURE

Culture is defined as the entire pattern of social life and the inherited modes of living and conducts that the individual assimilates from his immediate social environment through the process of established socialization. Across the multidisciplinary orientation of the social sciences, it is agreed that culture remains one of the many factors which shape and influences man's social action. In this context, however, our focus is primarily with the political culture which also explains a set of commonly held values, beliefs, and attitudes which the people have concerning governmental policies and actions and some of the implications and significance of this culture for policy formation (Basu, 2012: 439).

The above explication could also justify our earlier argument on the need for cross-country and comparative evaluation of policies and partly, on the very

basis of political and cultural disparities. Taking some empirical overview of the comparative analysis of policies around the world, Basu (2012) also posits that social welfare policies are much older and being widely implemented in Western European nations, even before the adoption of such mass-oriented state welfarist policies in the United States of America, due to the fact that the Western European people had long relied on that as part of their enduring state policies for promoting social equilibrium and the system of egalitarianism. Similarly, policies as deregulation, commercialization, and privatization as part of the economic strategies of divesting government ownership of businesses and industrial concerns are more prevalent in Britain than in the United States because of the level of citizens' dispositions to these policies. Karl Deustch's opinion on the time orientation of the people holds some relevance here, with the argument that the relative importance of the past, present and the future of the people could have implications for policy formation (cited by Basu: 2012). Invariably, and in another comparative perspective, a political culture more oriented to the past than to the future, may validate the age-long customs and traditional practices in the much of the African nations than in the Western societies, whose cultural orientation and practices are more future-oriented, adaptable and innovative.

In our further theoretical exploration of the implications of political culture for policy research agenda and the need for citizens' engagement, we can also make some copious references to the works of Almond and Verba (1963) in their painstaking explanation of political culture from a tripodal analytical point. To Almond and Verba, political culture as one of the major determining factors for policy orientation can be categorized between parochial, subject and participant political cultures. In the case of parochial political culture, citizens are assumed to have little awareness of, or orientation towards, either the political system as a whole or that the citizens as political participants.

Parochial political culture explains a situation of citizens' level of apathy to the political phenomena in their immediate political environment, even to the point of showing little or no interest in the affairs of the society. For subject political culture, the citizen could have the right orientation towards the political system but lacks the awareness of himself as a participant. Under such condition, the citizen may be well acquainted and relates with the political development of the society, but with passive interest. The subject political culture could find a better expression in situations within most African political systems where citizens have only been subjected to passive roles in the affairs of their societies.

Almond and Verba (1963) have however, related the participant political culture with a situation largely obtainable in the developed societies, where citizens have a high level of political awareness and strong orientation towards the political system with the active engagement of the citizens in the affairs of the society. As part of the many positive implications for the participant political culture, individuals and groups also have a very strong orientation toward influencing government decision-making. The citizens are well aware of their necessary inputs and contribute immeasurably in same direction to the policy machinery by availing themselves of the available feedback mechanism channels of the government.

Going by the implications of the fore going theoretical explications of the typology of political cultures on policy formulation, it could be concluded however, that given the situation of a parochial political culture, citizens participation and inputs in policy formulation will most likely to be at its lowest with government being very conscious of this fact, and taking little or no concern for citizens' relevance in policy or decision making. On the plane of a subject political culture, the citizens have the passive notion of their inability to

influence the public policy of the government, but because of the little consciousness on the part of the citizens of their rights from the government, the likelihood of frictions and sometimes civil disturbances might be very high as the only possible means of displaying public displeasures. In a typical subject political culture situation, the activities of the preponderant non state actors such as the civil society groups and organizations are more rife and common, serving as the formidable organs for mobilizing and galvanizing the citizens towards becoming more conscious of both their civic obligations and rights. The level of citizen's inputs in policy decisions are usually, of late being much greatly influenced by these non state actors and much of such is also achieved by means of public demonstrations and protests. Arguably, the situations of parochial and subject political cultures are more prevalent in the developing societies of Africa where, due to the nature of the political system and their uninspiring trajectories of political history which have tilted towards the autocratic regimes and self rules, typifying the periods of the obnoxious colonial rules and the long interregnum of military authoritarianism.

On the contrary, the participant political culture which finds many expressions in the Western societies as a result of the high level of consciousness and the orientation of the citizens towards the affairs of the state also prepares the citizens for active engagement in all matters of public concerns. Here, citizens are prone to the spontaneity of actions and not necessarily motivated by the activities of the non state actors in pressing home their demands from the government, as individuals can easily organize themselves into groups, in seeking demands from the government. Similarly, under the situation of a participant political culture, public policies are malleable and as such, government becomes more controllable by citizens. The participatory nature of governance in a participant political culture emboldens the citizens further to make more demands from the government, as and when necessary. The

citizenry is aware of both the inputs and outputs of the government, while also believing in the ability to influence their government and manifesting attitudes of personal competencies (Babawale, 2008). The major thrust of a participant political culture, as could be found in most of the countries where such is practiced, is the existence of a strong institutional mechanism for policy feedback which does not only support the operation of an open and accountable government, but the establishment of enduring and in-built bureaucratic structures for feeling the pulse of the citizens as well as for the provisions of necessary citizens inputs in the policy making process of the government.

Though, in the manner of what Duncan Clarke (2010) describes as the calculated adjustment to modern pretensions, some countries which were earlier categorized under parochial and subject political cultures most especially, developing nations like Nigeria, do maintain similar institutional mechanisms for citizens' feedback in government policy making machinery such as the defunct MAMSER (The Directorate for Mass Mobilization) and the National Orientation Agency (NOA). These institutions had been established as part of democratic agencies in the protracted transition to civil rule agenda of the then military government of General Ibrahim Babangida, and also in the efforts to instil the right democratic value and patterns in the citizens, through their social and behavioural change communication strategies in the new democratic environment in Nigeria.

Another salient point of note in this context is the fact that, the establishment of such an institutional feedback mechanism as the NOA became compelling given the departing military government's resolve to bequeath a semblance of a participant political culture and to prepare the Nigerian state as a model of good governance though, in what later became a watershed of political history in the African political development. Essentially, political culture remains an important tool in shaping political behaviour and it equally explains the

dynamics of societal norms and attitudes particularly, as a pointer also to the collective actions of the citizenry on one hand, and the policy actions of the government on the other.

POLICY RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND VALUE SYSTEM

If the value system is conceived as the set of norms, beliefs, attributes, and habits, which help to define the societal ethical standards, then, as we have previously highlighted, the essential symbiosis of political culture with policy making process in general, it could also be imperative to relate the central place of the societal level of development vis-à-vis the value system with our thematic discourse on policy research as a whole.

Arguably, policy sciences dating back from Harold Lasswell's pioneering and groundbreaking seminal article titled 'The Policy Orientation" published in 1951 gave a much of insight into the emerging discipline as a multidisciplinary academic endeavour with its scope spanning the major disciplines of the social sciences such as sociology, political science, economics, as well as other allied disciplines in the humanities as philosophy, history and law. The rationale for this could however, is partly located in the centrality of development as being the major articulating focus of attention in policy studies as a whole. Importantly, other pioneering scholars of policy sciences as Herbert Simon, Charles Lindblom, David Easton and Y. Dror had equally relied on the utility of the multidisciplinary approach as a tool of analysis particularly, with their works drawing extensively from the field of sociology and their emphases on society and development.

In this context, studies on development in its multidisciplinary outlook have had the intellectual imprints of early sociologists such as Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Max Weber among others with their unanimity of submissions

on the argument of development as the end product of fundamental transformation, induced by the "value system" (Onuah, 2007). Our point of departure here is on the emphasis on the relationship between policy research as well as development and value system.

Concerning Durkheim (1984), development entails the organization of the society, starting from the traditional stage through the organic stage in the movement from the individualistic level of societal relations to the organic and more complex organization based on the division of labour. By this, the societal value system witnessed the movement in its development with the introduction of division of labour which ultimately brings about prosperity, increased demands and production and improved the welfare of the people (Webster, 1984).

Max Weber (1971) also advocated the rational ethos of the spirit of capitalism which emphasizes a new value system that replaces the old, rigid and unquestioned conventions of the past and their negative implications for society growth, increased productivity, consumer satisfaction and development at large. For Talcott Parsons (1951), he bears his mind on the circulation or the movement of the societal value system in what he referred to as opposing or dichotomous variables that is, from particular to universal values, from ascription to achievement values, from self-orientation to collective orientation, and from specific to diffuse functional values (cited in Onuah, op.cit). The sociological explications here also mark the inextricable connection between societal values and the socio-economic and political transition in the social experiences in bringing about the over all development. The implications of these for policy research and citizens' participation are quite obvious and enormous. While it is also evident that the transition witnessed by the society in all of these movements had the involvement of the groups in the society, the resultant changes with the phases of transition in

themselves were also reflective of the import of how various groups in the society organize themselves in achieving the overall objectives of the society through policy change and transition.

Similarly, in the contention of the modernization theories, the central place of the value system has been identified to exist in the process of evolving impactful socio-economic and political development in society. Onuah (Ibid.) further argues that, in the sphere of political development, value system plays dominant role in explaining and providing the needed structures for democracy in terms of stability and orderly change, equality and political plurality, all of which are also indispensable to achieving any meaningful economic development.

However, because of the sustained argument and the fact of the value system of the society is inextricably tied to the character and quality of leadership, and the nature of the state, this also reinforces the contention of those conditions are very prevalent in most in countries in Africa. For instance, the character of leadership in most African countries reflects much of an autocratic and dictatorial system with little or no regard for the rule of law. Such tendencies have made politics in Africa to be susceptible to all forms of manipulation where the winners take all and with the assured consequences of political crisis and instability. Looking further into the nature and the character of African politics, Ake (2000) observed that leadership in Africa has been able to sustain these tendencies by ensuring the total control of the state and its apparatuses with the attendant consequences for the state's inability to maintain cohesion among groups within the society.

Consequently, under the prevailing conditions of the uninspiring and poor leadership profile and the nature of the state in much of the African countries,

policy-making process and the efforts in such direction appear to be at variance due to these embedded contradictions. And as noted elsewhere, policy actions of the state tend to reflect the desires and the aspirations of the dominant political class rather than the interests of the general public. State policies continue to ensure the sustenance of the status quo order while public resources meant for the socio-economic well being of the citizens are in most cases diverted into the personal accounts of the political leaders due to the defective mechanisms for checking leadership actions and activities.

Similar to our discourse on the impact of value system on policy making process aside the challenges of growing social indiscipline and the defective mechanism for moderating the activities of the policy makers and political leaders, is that of policy environment. The policy environment as an integral determining factor in policy making, explains the ecological indices by which sometimes public policies are determined. Sambo (2008) asserts the peculiarities of the policy environment in developing countries and the ways those peculiarities affect the discharge of the policy making function in these countries. And in the context of our further analysis of the efficacy of public policies, Sambo (Ibid) also clarifies that the question of the objective realities which confront policy makers in the course of seeking policy choices.

Imperatively, these questions have been premised on Claude Ake's theoretical assumptions of human beings (including the policy makers) as being largely products of their environment; and by the compelling factor of such given realities, they cannot act in a vacuum. It is also assumed that, within the given situations, the environment will continue to have an influence in shaping their values, preferences, attitudes and behaviour (Ake, 1981: 22, 23). Many empirical policy actions abound particularly, in Nigeria to validate the above theoretical assumptions most especially, given the dynamics of the Nigerian

political system and the peculiar primordial conditions with which the Nigerian political actors are sometimes predisposed.

CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY RESEARCH

Relying on David Easton theoretical models of *" The System Theory"* (1953) and *''Analysis of Political System"* (1965), the necessity of citizens' engagement can be better understood within the framework of policy making environment, given the realities of the system theory as a dominant paradigm in the policy analysis literature. Easton sees the society as a political system where there is a system of interaction through which binding and authoritative allocations are made. Public policy therefore, is the response of the political system to demands brought to request on it from the environment. The very assumption of the political system responding to its environment coupled with the forces generated from the environment are pointers to the germane issues of citizens engagement and its implications for policy making process. The forces generated from the environment are specifically referring to those demands and the supports usually made on the government by individuals and groups seeking authoritative allocations of values from the government. In terms of demands, these could also be about the specific needs and desires of individuals and groups in the society from the government while, support comprises of those actions rendered in the form of civic duties and obligations to the government.

Further to our interrogation of the imperative of citizens' engagement in policy research sphere, the need to establish the nexus of connectivity of such in line with the concept of good governance is not only imperative for our robust intellectual examination in this context. And quite also in line with the concept

of good governance, enhancing the scope of citizens' engagement and as argued previously, on the pivotal place of value system on policy making, the primary focus of the concept of good governance is also on the inculcation of new ethics and values which in all, guarantee a much more open and accountable government.

For instance, in a more far reaching position on the necessity of promoting good governance and enhancing popular participation of citizens in all democratic systems, the World Bank submits that:

> "governance is a continuum and not necessarily unidirectional: it does not automatically improve overtime. It is a plant that needs constant tending. Citizens need to demand good governance. Their ability to do so is enhanced by literacy, education and employment opportunities. Governments need to prove responsive to those demands. Neither of these can be taken for granted. Change occurs sometimes in response to external or internal threats. It also occurs through pressures from different interest groups, some of which may be in the form of populist demands. Although lenders and aids agencies and other outsiders can contribute resources and ideas to improve governance, for change to be effective it must be rooted firmly in the societies concerned and cannot be imposed from the outside" (World Bank, 1992).

One significant point of reference that could be drawn from the above is that, there is changing paradigm to governance and the way governments must be constructed as attested to even by the growing global concerns. The concerns of the international donor agencies and development partners on the methodologies of construction so to say, on how contemporary governance system should be built centre on the emergence of a pluralist society and a democratic order. Basu (2012) further suggests that, the other connotations of "governance" can be seen in the widening the scope of public administration to include informal, non state actors and other civil society groups. The importance of such informal and non state actors has also opened up and enlarged the scope of governance, policy making and other state activities that

serve the public interests without necessarily involving the governmental bureaucracy. The height of this development could also be identified with the scales of the activities of the non state actors in the recent times whereby, with the support of the international donor agencies and development partners, there seems to be an increased level of awareness and participation of the citizenry in all matters of public interest and concern. Non state actors such as the civil society organizations for instance, have greatly impacted in their continuous engagements of the citizenry towards improving the political landscape and enhancing the governance profile of the Nigerian fledgling democratic project. The civil society groups have been actively engaging the citizens through mass mobilization and awareness on issues such as voters' education, freedom of information with particular emphasis on popularizing the FOI Act 2011, the service delivery charter (SERVICOM) as a new public service philosophy of improving on the delivery of public goods and services, the power sector reforms and its associated regulatory failures and other critical issues relating to participatory governance and civic obligations and duties in Nigeria.

However, given the political trajectories of the Nigerian state as a post authoritarian nation and its chequered history of a long period of military interregnum, the policy making system therefore, has been marked by those ecological and political dynamics which have also in many ways, altered the level of citizens' interest and participation in public issues. Before the current democratic rule in 1999, the Nigerian state was under the control of the military dictatorship, where policies and actions of the government were dictated by military fiat and decrees. The absence of an elected legislative organ of the state equally provided an unfettered ground for the successive military governments through what could be likened to "elite circulation" of its officers in constituting themselves into the law making, law implementing and even sometimes law interpreting organs of the government. Military decrees were enacted, interpreted and enforced at will without any regard for the institution

of the judiciary. The highpoint of these and their implications for policy making in Nigeria also witnessed a somewhat of impositions of policies usually at variance with public desires. These were explainable on the same ground of the very nature and the character of the military autocratic rule as one with little or no regard for the dignity of the citizens.

By the advent of the democratic rule in 1999, the policy making environment however witnessed a new lease of life because of the structural changes brought upon by the new political configuration of the civil rule. There are elected legislative bodies across the three tiers of government complimenting the policy making procedures and thereby, giving the semblance of participatory governance. By implications too, the citizenry feels more engaged and continually have their pulses felt in government policies. The period also had the high involvement of several non state actors such as the rights advocacy groups who had become deeply active at the turn of the return to civil rule and the demilitarization projects in the country. The rights advocacy groups not only became active but they serve as policy agenda-setting organs whereby, citizens' interests are galvanized towards the policies of the government.

Similarly, the existence of elected legislative bodies across the tiers of government could also be seen as a critical pathway to democratizing and enhancing citizens' participation in policy-making processes. The avenues of public hearings and the submissions of memoranda by groups and individuals on the floors of the legislative bodies are a reflection of such positive measures in building an open and accountable government. Aside the fact of the representative doctrine which sees the legislative organs as the symbol of a representative democracy, the avenues of public hearings have also become an integral component of the legislative system, providing the channel through

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which the necessary policy inputs of the citizens could be aggregated and utilized as guides in government's policy direction. The unique dimension to the legislative avenues for policy making processes is the establishment of legislators' constituencies' liaison offices which also serve as meeting points between the citizens and their elected legislators. The constituencies' liaison offices, if properly put to use, could serve in the direction of promoting the engagement of the citizens in policy and decision making system of the government. Though, regrettably, the legislative constituencies' liaison offices have turned into mere political meeting points where the citizens only engage and relate with their elected representatives on the basis of existential demands as against the intended objective of serving as meeting points on all matters of public interests. Admittedly, this had also been patterned on the prevailing logic of the peculiar Nigerian prebendal politics and its culture of patrimonialism.

On the concept of E-governance and the increasing waves of the new media in social relations, it is apposite to argue here that the relationships between the citizens and the government have continued to be greatly impacted with changes that could also have some implications not only on the government-citizens interactions but primarily, on government policy actions and their effects on the citizens. Aside the growing influence of the international political system via globalization on domestic policy making machinery, the upsurge in the deployment and the usage of the information and communication technology (ICT) is one tool which has revolutionized governance and significantly promoted citizens' participation in policy and decision making. There is also no doubt that, the new media in particular has played a significant role in facilitating communication and social interactions among the people across the world even despite the restrictive geographical boundaries and physical divides. In the recent times, local political uprisings

and unrests within domestic polities have triggered crises of international dimensions snowballing into serious political impasse as a result of the growing effects of the social media. The Arab Spring which began in Egypt on 18th December, 2010 and the #ENDSARS# (the metaphoric nationwide citizens' protests against bad governance in Nigeria which took place in October, 2020), brought into focus some of the possible effects of the new media in shaping the policy directions, including change of governments in some countries across the world. Corroborating the foregoing assertions, Olukotun (2007) citing Eickelman (2000: 16) offers that:

> "Increasingly, discussions in newspapers, on the internet, on smuggled cassettes, and on television cut cross and overlap, contributing to a common public space. New and accessible modes of communication have made these contests increasingly global, so that even local issues take on international dimensions".

The high point of the new media revolution and its effects on global public policy could not be overemphasized here. The capacity of the new media as a component of globalization and mobilization has proven beyond its utility as a mere tool of social interactions. The increasing consciousness and the level of awareness created by the new media within domestic polities have also no doubt, created a new vista for the globalization of policies and the way those policies are influenced and shaped by the opinions of the citizens occupying the cyberspace.

The emergence of the new media offers bountiful opportunities for citizens' participation and engagement in modern governance. There are however, other ancillary benefits that the new media can provide most especially in terms of feeling the pulse of the citizens on pressing issues of national interest. The increasing usage of online polls as measures of articulating citizens' opinions

on some specific policies of the government has added much impetus to the E-governance efforts. Interestingly, government across tiers and their agencies saddled with the responsibilities of feedback assessment are also embracing the many opportunities offered by the new media in meeting up with such mandates. Much as expected too, the concept of E-government as widely embraced across the world has become inevitable mode of interaction between government and the citizens. It offers a window similar to Eastonian model of feedback mechanism whereby, citizens' responses can be articulated almost instantly, for government's policy actions. The very import of participatory policy making in any country could be corroborated further by Sapru (2012) that the first decade of the 21st century had witnessed much attention being given to public participation in the policy process. This assumption is also predicated according to Sapru (Ibid), on the Lasswellian goal of "policy sciences of democracy".

Imperatively, citizens' participation in governance entails the active involvement and inclusion of the general masses and other critical stakeholders in the various stages of policy making. Modern democratic governance, going by Karl Deutsch time orientation postulation, also validates the argument of the necessity of inclusiveness and openness as the key component in the construction of any modern government. The level at which the citizens are involved in the policy making process could also determine the level of the openness and inclusiveness at which such government operates to the benefit and interest of the people. Supporting this argument further, Ikpe (2008) while making some allusions to the Citizens' Theory of democracy, also posits that the ordinary citizens are the objects of political participation, and that no overt or covert attempts should be made to restrict their level of and range of participation. Examining this further, Dennis Thompson (1970), citizenship refers to the present and future capacity for influencing politics; it

hinges directly on active involvement in political life. However, the emphasis on the term "politics" should be taken beyond its prima facie meaning and such should also add the active involvement of the citizens in all matters which border on public interests including public policy making process.

Often times too, because of the overbearing effects of government policies on the activities of sectoral interest groups, the need for articulating such sectoral interests could be very necessary for the formulation of government policies generally. Sectoral interest groups such as the manufacturers' associations, the chambers of commerce and industry, the agricultural and agro allied associations and even the professional associations such as the engineering, legal, medical and allied fields professionals, the academia and such other relevant professional bodies have been known to have had meaningful impacts in the formulation of government policies and particularly, in their far reaching implications for the concerned sectors and the interest groups and the nation in general.

On the contrary too, particularly under an unfriendly political environment, government policies have not only suffered setbacks in meeting with their targeted objectives but also in getting the necessary supportive environment for their successes on the account of the absence of such sectoral and interest groups supports. With reference to the IMF loan debate which ultimately culminated in the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) under General Ibrahim Babangida military government, the import of extending the level of citizens' engagement beyond the involvement of the ordinary citizens became a vital prism through which government policies and their formulation could be well accentuated. Aside from the general uprisings which trailed the IMF loan debate and that of the adoption of SAP at the time, the greater inputs of the key sectoral interests and professional groups provided much relevance to the utility of policy engagement beyond the ordinary citizenry. The necessary

inputs of such relevant professional -interest groups have equally provided the needed expertise and the informed opinions required in the formulation and implementation of government policies. In fact, a noticeable gap which has served as the major impediment to the successes of policy making and implementation mostly in Nigeria could be located in the improper engagement of critical stakeholders at the very point of conceiving policies generally. However, one factor which may be responsible for such improper consultation particularly in countries like Nigeria could be much linked sometimes, to the usual hostilities that exist between the government and some of these professional-interest groups.

The environment of hostilities between policy makers and the critical stakeholders has come to define the nature of policy making process in most countries particularly in African where there is still much of the primacy of authoritarian tendencies in the running of the affairs of the state. Critical stakeholders are often bypassed and sometimes deliberately ignored at the inception of policy making process. This scenario therefore, creates an undemocratic situation of the unilateral imposition of policy-decision outcomes on the critical stakeholders even on subject matters of vital interest to the affected stakeholder groups. Looking at some of the policy-decisions of the present civilian administration of President Muhammadu Buhari just as with those of the successive governments, one could also identify such dispositions in terms of lack of consultation even on policies which could have adverse effects on the activities and operations of such interest groups or stakeholders. For instance, many critical stakeholders including some members of the Nigerian Manufacturers Association (MAN) had frowned at the decisions of the federal government on the closure of the Nigerian land borders without adequate consultation on the possible consequences of such unilateral policy-actions on the organized private sector of the Nigerian economy whose

products are mostly exported into the neighbouring countries of the West African sub-region.

However, irrespective of the political posture of any government and its democratic credentials, the need to continually engage with the various segments of the society particularly on all matters of policy making and in the general affairs of the state. This also becomes an expedient task of the government in the desire to earn the necessary credibility required even in its recognition within the comity of civilized nations. Beside this, the measure of responsiveness of any government to the yearnings and aspirations of its citizens as earlier reiterated, typifies to a greater extent, the possible acceptability of any policy decision of such a government to its citizens.

CONCLUSION

Having identified the absence of consultation and most significantly, the engagement of the citizens and other critical stakeholders as the major lacunae to policy making process particularly, in the developing democracies, the search for a new focus in that context should however, be the primary focus of any policy research agenda. In doing this, the motivating factor for policy research agenda should also be predicated on some of the highlighted issues earlier raised in this paper. Needless to remark here that the political trajectories of many countries in the much of the African continent had not been quite in alignment with the required democratic criteria even in the wake of the wind of democracy and the post cold war unipolar international system of the 1990s. Such hostile and unfavourable political situations could however, not inspire the right environment for citizens' engagement in the affairs of the state. Political systems akin to authoritarian and personal rules of the formative and post-independent years still remain dominant despite the new democratic

credentials of most African countries, where people voices do not count in government policy actions. Elections as democratic processes equally remain highly contentious with some African countries still enmeshed in the web of political quagmires and undemocratic practices. Incidences of sit-tight leadership syndrome, stifling of the opposition parties and their candidates during and after elections with other unwholesome electoral practices such as rigging and alterations of election results in the favour of ruling parties, and resort to violence during elections assuming a dimension of political norm in some of the countries in Africa.

Arguably, the prevailing economic conditions of the African countries in the 1990s brought to the fore, the compelling need for some forms of structural adjustment in the socio-political and economic policies of some of these countries thereby, calling for the attention of the Western capitalist consortium with their interventionist policies. Aside the conditional economic interventions of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and such other policies aimed at deemphasizing the state ownership of public utilities and divestment of government stakes in those critical sectors of the economy, the interventions of the Western capitalist consortium and their donor agencies equally provoked some radical political measures with the inspiration of multiparty democracy and in some other cases too, programmes of transition to civil rules in countries previously dominated by military autocracy, one-party system and elongated personal rules across Africa. But good as some of these Western donors' intervention measures appeared, there were also discontents arising from lack or inadequate consultations with the large segments of the population as regards most of the policy prescriptions particularly, the widely imposed Structural adjustment Programmes (SAP) across Africa.
In the aftermath of some of these discontents, several social uprisings and politically motivated crises crystallizing in either military putsches and

counter coups were witnessed in most countries of Africa as well, validating the argument of the necessity of engaging the citizens in the affairs of the states and in the policy making process. It is also argued that African countries have shown little or no interest in exploiting their own capacity to formulate and implement policies or improving their analytical capacity to doing so. Rather, they rely on policy prescriptions of the Western donor agencies as occasioned by crises; given the lack of necessary inputs within the capacity of the government, and thereby, prompting donor agencies to come up with prescriptive measures based on their own understanding of the prevailing situations. In the long run, such policy prescriptions either run contrary or fail to achieve their intended objectives as a result of the obvious lack of local inputs in their formulation and implementation (Steedman, 1990: 6).

From the foregoing, it could also be viewed that the bane of policy research agenda in Africa has a lot to do, and as earlier noted, with what appears much like a deliberate action on the part of most African governments in their usual hostile dispositions with the relevant stakeholders as regard policy formulation. Policy formulations which ought to have been backed by the indigenous research and informed intellectual inputs have become susceptible to the vagaries of the dominant Western dictates and consequently, creating a wider gulf between the intended objectives and their implications for the wellbeing of the citizenry. The need for African governments to tap into the preponderant of the available stocks of expertise in all areas of human endeavours is necessary to overcoming the plethora of challenges of governance and the many crises of African underdevelopment. The reservoirs of African intellectuals at the disposal of governments in various local universities and research centres can be better mobilized and deployed for generating indigenous solution-based policy research agenda.

In the alternative too, the need to reinvent Africa's homegrown agenda of socio-economic and political development as symbolized by the NEPAD initiative (New Partnership for African Development) and its accompanied mechanism of peer review (APRM) otherwise known as the African Peer Review Mechanism, might become very necessary as a wholesome continental approach to promoting transparency and good governance. The NEPAD initiative, as rightly conceived, is premised on the assumption that democracy, respect for human rights, peace and good governance are conditions for development. For instance, Article 83 of the NEPAD document of actions stipulates as part of its thematic focus the need by the member-nations of the African Union (AU) to ensure the promotion of participatory decision-making (Oche, 2004). The rationale for this could not also be far-fetched from the very uninspiring governance profiles of many African countries particularly, with regard to some of the problems earlier identified in this paper including the challenges of inclusiveness in policy making process. As a pathway to enhancing participatory policy making and policy research endeavour in Africa, the platform of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) could provide the impetus for African countries towards strengthening their domestic polities as well as promoting participatory policy making processes.

The place of bureaucratic mechanisms in the formulation and implementation of government policies and their pivotal roles as links between the government and the citizens has also called for some scrutiny. Bureaucratic pieces of machinery such as the Public Complaint Commission (PCC), otherwise known as the Ombudsman, the National Orientation Agency (NOA in Nigeria and its variants in other African countries), and the government owned media organizations as well as other citizen-focused agencies of the governments must also be challenged to live up to their tasks of agenda setting and feedback

mechanism mandates. Part of the identified failures of these bureaucratic agencies of the government could be located most essentially, in their inability to discharge their primary mandates and possibly as occasioned by some compelling institutional challenges peculiar with most state institutions in Africa. The challenges of funding and other related institutional bottlenecks have handicapped many of these bureaucratic agencies to effectively deliver on their mandates as essential links between the government and the citizens. Resultantly, the accessibility of the citizens to these agencies is limited thereby, creating a further disconnection between the citizens and the government. It is however expedient that as part of the need to enhance participatory governance and policy making process, there is also the need to ensure adequate budgetary allocations to these critical government agencies so as to enable them to perform effectively, their feedback mechanism and agenda setting mandates in the society.

The civil society organizations as agents of mobilization must also live up to their mandate of not only engaging the citizenry but as the voice of the voiceless in the society. The need to reawaken the consciousness of the people most especially at the grassroots level of the society should be taken beyond the façade of political participation. Participatory governance however, should be seen as a more encompassing civic obligation of the citizens. The necessity of articulating citizens' opinions should serve not only in the interests of the political class but in the overall wellbeing of the society. Hyden (1997) argues that active citizens' participation is necessary for the organization and functioning of development activities while communication of information and ideas is needed to encourage participation and to guard against the abuses of state power. Part of such abuses of state power, is the situation in which policies are designed to suit the interests of the ruling elites as against the interests of the entire citizenry (Adewunmi: 2007). If policy research has been

identified as a means of measuring the impacts of government policies on the citizenry, then, it could also be inferred that the level at which the citizens are also engaged in the process of formulating and implementing such should also be of premium priority to government. This is not only a necessary paradigm to achieving inclusiveness within the political space but a further step towards promoting transparency and good governance.

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