

EMERGING ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

The development of policy, in many ways, arises out of the necessity to address the issues and problems arising from the inevitable changes that are currently taking place within the political and economic development agenda. The agenda for development itself suggests that appropriate and meaningful ways be determined in response to the challenges and changes, some of which have no precedents, and which would serve as reference points. Corkery states that "Current development thinking suggests that policy framework is critical in determining the performance of firms, farmers' households, public sector bodies and other economic units. By extension, therefore, the economic development of a country depends on the quality of this policy framework, decisions taken and the processes involved in formulating each decision".¹⁸ The development of public policy assumes in some respects, that the performance of public organisation and state machinery, in particular, be measured and made publicly accountable to the public they serve and from whom they derive their legitimacy and authority.

The achievement of objectives by public organisations and individuals has become critical in the complexity of the structural changes being experienced in the reform of the public sector. The need for the achievement of set goals, calls for proper management systems to be put in place in order to facilitate the measurements of the results as well as to review that policy if it is dysfunctional. "Performance management approaches ensure that strategic directions are set for the achievement of desired results. Better planning, measuring and reporting is promoted".¹⁹

Policy development therefore includes all issues and aspects of the machinery and its human resources in the endeavour to respond to the needs of a changing society. Policy development and its management, in practice, is influenced by many factors which include the social and political environment; the state apparatus; the capacity of their institutions to implement policy once it is formulated; the relationship between elected and appointed officials (political and civil servants); performance measures; and key actors in the policy development process.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The social environment within which policy develops, includes the legal, ideological and type of administration. Any administration has its own unique organisation culture which is adopted over many years in implementing policies. The norms and values which guide the behaviour patterns of the human resources in work-places contribute to the way the policy is interpreted and meaningfully applied by the technocrats. The social environment, on which civil society organisations have a direct impact on policy development, is also influenced in its perception and analysis of the nature of the problem and the type of action appropriate for solution.

Experience has shown that laws can be passed by parliament only to be rejected by the civil society. It is also possible for Cabinet to formulate policies which may never be implemented and which may also be inconsistent with the value premises of society. Such policies are less likely to be implemented because of their non-conformity to the prevailing values and traditions of the community which is supposed to be the beneficiary of the services. The environment also takes into account the different political and economic philosophies expounded by the leading or ruling party which, in turn, is also influenced by international organisations within the context of global political economy.

The way the government is structured in readiness for policy development affects the pace and quality of policy formulation. While government may have genuine intentions about solving a particular problem through policy intervention strategies, the state machinery may be slow to implement perhaps because of its own cumbersome procedures, precedents, rules and regulations. Governments often complain about the slow pace at which development is taking place after policies have been formulated. In Zimbabwe, for example, President Robert Mugabe criticised some of his ministers, describing them as weak and slow to implement decisions and supervise their staff effectively. He said, "Finance Ministry is being accused of running a kind of a funeral parlour. I do not know what makes the Ministry resist implementation of decisions".²⁰ The criticism about his own government ministry was made in Botswana, a neighbouring country, in a brainstorming meeting between government leaders and private sector representatives attending the first Southern African International Dialogue 1997 on Smart Partnership in Kasane. The statement clearly shows that there are certain policies which are being resisted and therefore not being implemented by the civil service.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE/STATE APPARATUS

Organisational structures in the public service tend to follow the customary or traditional vertical, pyramidal and hierarchical models with numerous grade levels based on seniority and length of service. Such models are functionally inappropriate to the requirements arising from decentralisation process, from the interest in starting up networks and promoting participation, and from the need to develop appropriate management styles. The style of management must suit the administrative changes, which include both vertical and lateral co-operation and collaboration with other agencies, in an attempt to make the new policy analysis framework function.

Among the problems created by the traditional bureaucratic structure, are that staff at senior levels tend to close in on themselves, turn routines into targets, develop serious resistance to the participation of other agents external to the structure, such as other possible partners and the recipient communities themselves, and can be extremely rigid in reacting to change.

The organisational structures should be re-organised to take into account the change imperatives on the organisation. Progress should be made towards more open, flexible and participatory structures. The design of organisational structures is not an end in itself, but a means to facilitating the achievement of objectives.

The re-organised structure should be underpinned by a management culture which respects the views of those junior to them, tolerates opposing views, is honest and reliable, has integrity and is free of corrupt and dictatorial tendencies. Top officials should not live in an ivory tower but should make themselves available and accessible to those who have direct contact with the client communities. The style and culture of management should aim to move towards the social reality and to react to change in the process of introducing new systems and instruments in the organisation.

In Britain, Plowden has acknowledged that there would always be tension between permanent officials and transient ministers in the implementation of policy decisions. He also noted that some governments were very suspicious of civil servants and consequently did not trust them.

Such complaints have, in some cases resulted in conflict between elected and appointed officials; between public and private sectors; between ministries and public enterprises; and between government and non-government organisations. The organisations and the administration of the state machinery are also critical in policy development, an issue which is often ignored in the whole policy management process (formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

While the infrastructure may have its own unique problems in policy development, the capacity of ministries, departments, public enterprises and individuals, may be questionable. An institution, for example, may not have the capacity to execute a policy programme because it does not have the capacity as exhibited by the lack of funding, resources, skills, knowledge and appropriate attitudes which are necessary to implement the policy.

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Institutional capacity has been identified by a number of international organisations, as being a critical factor to the whole process of policy development and management. This is particularly pertinent to situations in which nationals, with appropriate skills have left the country or have left the civil service. The flight of skills from the public sector depletes its resources and capacity to address the policy changes.

One of the key development challenges facing post-colonial Africa is the evolution of development policies and strategies which can adapt to a changing regional and global economy based on market liberalisation, technological change and rapid

geo-political reconfiguration. Studies of the causes of Africa's slow growth and its economic marginalisation conclude that developing suitable human resource capacities to manage development, particularly policy formulation, is the critical requirement of future economic development and democratisation.²¹

The infrastructural and institutional incapacity in policy development and management has led some governments to rely very heavily on expatriates who may not be familiar with peculiarities of the development process of a particular country. A further problem associated with expatriates is that their contribution is purely technical and is not vested with the current thinking within the political and economic environment, resulting in a contradiction with the dominant values of civil society.

POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

The poor division of functions and responsibilities between politicians and civil servants has contributed to confusion and silent conflict in the development of public policy. In many cases, political and administrative boundaries are not made explicitly clear to allow the incumbents of positions to know where their role begins and ends. The conflict between officials is often caused by a lack of clear boundaries leading to competition on the same resources and often resulting in accusations and counter-accusations between politicians and civil servants when policies are not being implemented. A clearly defined policy is necessary to assist the appropriate distribution of power and responsibilities in the management of resources.

In the United Kingdom, the newly elected Prime Minister, Tony Blair, defined the role of a politician. He said, "The people are the masters. We are the servants of the people. We will never forget that and, if we ever do, the people will very soon show that what the electorate gives the electorate can take away".²²

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The demands and expectations of civil society on the need to improve policy development and delivery have brought pressure to bear on the state to seek and maintain issues of equity, quality, quantity and coverage of the policy management. The characteristics sought of an effective and comprehensive service are defined as four measures of performance:

- Quantity – provides a comprehensive service.
- Quality – has a clarity of purpose, inherent logic, accuracy, range of options, adequate consultation and practicality of implementations.
- Time – meeting the reporting deadlines for projects.
- Cost – performed within agreed budgets.²³

These performance policy measures are generally demanded by the consumers who are no longer passive but active in the policy development and management. Governments are therefore, expected to develop a policy which is relevant to its priorities of high quality and efficiently produced. In essence, the consumers expect value for money.

It should be realised that a meaningful and appropriate policy development depends on effective policy research and analysis, policy dialogue and above all training and the sharing of information amongst institutional policy centres, associations and individuals. The development of such a policy should ensure that the wider public is involved so as to develop an informed policy negotiation and choices.

KEY ACTORS IN STRATEGIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The social, political and economic environment within which policy development takes place is critical to the type and nature of the policy formulated. The environment is both the source and the recipient of the policy that is developed. Within the social environment are various competing, conflicting and collaborative institutions, individuals, and both formal and informal structures with an interest and a role in policy formation.

Within the formal structures are ministries, departments, public enterprises, parliament and Cabinet with its various committees responsible for many areas of government activity. While inter-ministerial committees are recognised, formal structures through which government policies are conceptualised, prepared and presented to Cabinet, they are by no means the best method of information-gathering in preparation for formal decision-making. The reason is that they do not, by the nature of their composition, have relevant expertise and skills in a particular discipline. Although they are representatives of interested ministries and departments, their composition in terms of level of authority fluctuates. In any one inter-ministerial committee, for example, the members attending may not be regular and, as a result, unfamiliar with the details of the previous discussions where briefing may not have been possible. The variation in attendance, therefore, does not contribute to consistency and continuity of policy ideas. However, the committees are necessary for consensus-building and the well-sought-after co-operation of ministries in the implementation process.

In order to enrich cabinet policy decisions, some countries, such as Zambia, Tanzania etc. have created Policy Analysis Review Units, whose purposes are to create and maintain data and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of policy functionaries within Ministries or within the co-ordinating agencies of government.

Civil society, in current thinking, is expected to contribute to policy development because of the economic and political liberalised policies adopted by many

governments. Many functionaries would ask what is this civil society all about which is associated with the liberalisation of the economy and multi-party democracy. In general, "Civil society refers to organisations which are outside government but which find expression in their relationship to the state. Civil society denotes patterns of association, for example, single interest groups, professional associations and membership organisations. Organs of civil society are therefore heterogeneous. Their purposes, constitution and envisaged duration vary. All are, in one way or another, interest groups that may, for example, represent a particular sectoral interest (farmers, chambers of commerce, trade unions) or a particular policy point view (pressure groups). Together they constitute the mechanism by which a diverse range of views are directed at public policy-makers and absorbed into the consultative process. They provide an opportunity to influence the direction of government policy without necessarily seeking political office. They constitute a link between the individual and the state.²⁴

Civil society as part of the informal structure, therefore, contributes to policy formation. Many governments have found it essential to involve civil society as a way of developing a national consensus in anticipation of acceptance or approval of policy outcome. Accountability by the government and acceptance of policy by civil society is a guarantee that the policy is solid, comprehensive and all-embracing.

The external pressures and actors, consisting of international and regional organisations, non-government organisations and significant others contribute to policy formation through their own influences; the provision of information and data; the supply of technical assistance; and the spread of philosophies and success stories. Amongst the most influential, external sources of government policies are the donors, through their expertise, technology and aid. This is especially the case in circumstances where there is poor policy infrastructural and institutional capacity, an absence of local and national expertise and a lack of a well-organised civil society.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The process of formulating a policy varies from one country to the other and does not necessarily follow the same path to final decision-taking. However, in general, there are essential steps that are recognised and usually followed by policy analysts and public managers in varying propositions, depending on unique circumstances.

The first step is to identify an issue or a problem that has to be addressed or solved. The way in which the problem has been conceptualised, the identified group experiencing the problem, the people who have identified the problem, their interests and the social environment within which the issue has been identified, are all critical factors that facilitate the identification and conceptualisation of the

problem. The nature of the policy formulated depends on a number of factors, including the pressures for change; stakes involved in change; level of decision-makers involved; existence of precedents; interests of external forces; the degree of change; the threats to the status quo; the method of identification and the time within which it is conceptualised. The process therefore addresses questions of who, when, what, why and how.

The institutional environment from which the policy issues may arise does affect the way the issue is conceptualised and articulated. Their response, for example, to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme has depended on the type of environment in which it is introduced. In some countries, there has been resistance, while in others it has been regarded as an inevitable change with the support of influential groups in society.

The second step is related to the setting up of clearly defined goals and objectives for addressing an issue or for solving a particular identified problem. The process of stating the goals equally involves a lot of other stakeholders who may either lose or benefit from such a change. The defined objectives are influenced by the political economic and social environment in which they are prioritised and for which funding for solutions of the problem is made available.

Experience has shown that for policy formulation to be meaningful the goals have to be clearly identified so that action-oriented strategies for solution become appropriate. This will avoid the danger of formulating a policy which does not address the real problem and issues. In making goals explicit, it is possible to determine the resources needed, the time-frame, the technology and the skills required, the methodology of investigation and the data required.

The third step is the formulation of alternative courses of action and making choices out of the options. The making of choices is one of the difficult steps in the whole process of policy development. Due care and thorough consideration is necessary as experience has shown that the solution of one problem can create another unanticipated problem. The choices can also be made complicated by the existence of many actors in the policy formulation process since different people perceive issues differently and place different interpretations on policy outcome. In making choices, the policy analysts would argue that the advantages and disadvantages of each option should be spelt out to assist policy-makers. Policy decisions are therefore made after the ideological and methodological issues have been examined and the statistical data provided.

The fourth step is the designing of the implementation stage once the policy decision has been made. Some legal and administrative instruments would have to be put in place so that the information can be disseminated to the public and the target groups. In designing the strategies, consideration has to be given to the instruments that implement the change, the financial and human resources that facilitated the process would have to be made explicit so that roles can be clearly

delineated. Often, policies are formulated but funding is not made available or there are no skilled people to perform the required functions.

The last stage relates to the monitoring of the policy while it is being implemented for purposes of finding out what needs to be done to ensure that the policy remains on track and is meeting the target clientele. The monitoring process is followed by a review of the policy after a certain period in the implementation process.