

Demystifying **Policy** in Nigeria

Public policy is the foundation of governance and development in any nation. In Nigeria, the formulation and implementation of policies have been marred by inconsistencies, political interference, elite capture, a lack of continuity, inclusion and public participation. To address these gaps, demystifying the policy-making process is important.

Therefore, this policy brief draws insights from The Leading Woman Show – Policy Series. It offers a summary of the key issues and recommendations from the show's guests for a more effective and inclusive policy environment.

Policy Making as an Art and Science

Policymaking is both an art and a science. Good policies cannot be formulated in a vacuum—they require empirical evidence and deep engagement with the communities they intend to serve. It is important for policy makers to demonstrate that they are relying on the evidence that data provides in formulating policy. However, creativity and innovation are also critical given the complex nature of the people's needs and other nuances that apply in the Nigeria context due to the multi-dimensional nature of poverty.

The example from a former State Governor recalled how policymakers initially assumed that access to clean water was the community's most pressing need. However, when the residents were engaged, it was discovered that their primary concern was the absence of a police station due to their proximity to a border. This underscores the importance of citizen's engagement in policy formulation to ensure policies genuinely address community needs.

Policies dictate the direction of a Country's development, shaping economic growth, social welfare, security, and inclusion. However, for policies to have the desired outcome, they must be well-formulated, widely accepted, and effectively implemented with a monitoring and accountability framework in place.

In Nigeria, the inconsistency in policy and constant changes has been a major challenge. Successive administrations often discard existing policies, leading to wasted resources. The lack of synergy between policymakers and citizens also results in policies that do not reflect the people's needs, which diminishes their impact.

The policy-making process in Nigeria

The journey from policy conception to implementation follows a structured but often opaque path. It begins with problem identification, where issues such as economic hardship, security threats, or gender disparities result in a demand for government intervention. However, in Nigeria, this step is frequently rushed or politically motivated, leading to policies that lack a clear understanding of current realities.

Once a problem is identified, it must gain priority status through agenda setting. Political leaders, interest groups, media, and civil society organizations play a role here, though the influence of political interests often outweighs genuine public demands. The next stage is policy formulation, where the relevant government entity drafts proposals.

The policy-making process in Nigeria

In an ideal scenario, expert opinions and public consultations should guide this process, but policymaking in Nigeria is often dominated by bureaucrats and politicians, leaving out critical voices, particularly those of women and other marginalised groups.

In the case where a policy requires legal backing, it moves to the legislative process, which includes readings in the National Assembly, committee reviews, voting, in some cases, adoption at the State assemblies and finally, presidential assent. However, even after going through these stages, implementation remains a major bottleneck.

Government agencies are responsible for implementation, yet weak institutional capacity, corruption, and lack of political will often undermine success. Effective policies also require continuous evaluation and review, but in Nigeria, this step is frequently neglected, leading to policy failures.

The Not Too Young to Run story: A case for Youth-driven change

A practical example of how policy can be influenced successfully through civic engagement is the story of the Not Too Young to Run campaign led by YIAGA Africa. The movement was driven by young Nigerians who understood the importance of influencing policy from the grassroots to the national level.

The campaign started with widespread advocacy, gathering public support before strategically engaging with lawmakers. By ensuring that political actors, civil society organizations, and international organisations were aligned, the movement successfully led to the passage of a constitutional amendment reducing the age requirement for political officeholders in Nigeria.

Gender Mobile: Championing Policy for Gender Justice

Another success story in policy advocacy is Gender Mobile, who are championing the Sexual Harassment in Tertiary Institutions Prohibition Bill, designed to address gender-based violence and create a safer learning environment in Nigeria's higher institutions. Through strategic advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and data-driven research, Gender Mobile ensured that the voices of women and marginalized groups were heard in policy discussions.

Challenges in Policy Making and Implementation in Nigeria

Despite a structured process, policy formation and implementation in Nigeria faces several roadblocks. Political interference often leads to policies being abandoned for partisan reasons, while ethnic and regional biases hinder national unity. The disconnect between policymakers and citizens also results in poor acceptance and ownership, exacerbated by corruption, inadequate resources, and gender exclusion. Many policies are also overly ambitious, promising unrealistic outcomes without the necessary framework for execution.

The role of women in policy making

Women's inclusion in the policy process is crucial for achieving equitable development. There is a link between gender-balanced leadership and inclusive policies. An elected legislator who is one of the very few women in Nigeria's 10th Assembly, revealed that lawmakers must have a proper record of issues affecting their constituencies so that when they get into office, they can effectively address these issues.

However, despite making up half of Nigeria's population, women remain underrepresented in governance and policymaking spaces due to structural barriers, cultural biases, and inadequate political support.



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Addressing these gaps requires legal frameworks promoting gender quotas, capacity-building programs for women leaders, and increased advocacy for gender-responsive policies.

Recommendations for effective policy making and execution

To enhance Nigeria's policy landscape, policy makers must take the following steps:

- **Promote policy continuity:** Successive governments must uphold and improve beneficial policies rather than discard them.
- **Ensure public participation:** Citizens, civil society groups, PWDs, young people and women leaders must have a voice in policy formulation.
- **Strengthen institutions:** Government entities must be equipped with adequate resources and technical expertise.
- **Combat corruption:** Transparent budgeting and accountability mechanisms should be enforced.
- **Gender Inclusion:** More women should be involved in policy decision-making at all levels.
- **Improve Monitoring and Evaluation:** Policies should have clear success metrics and regular assessments to ensure effectiveness.

Call to Action

Nigeria's development hinges on well-thought-out, inclusive, and sustainable policies. Demystifying policy processes and making them accessible to all citizens—especially women—will enhance participation, drive accountability, and ensure policies address societal needs.

This is the first edition in the series of policy briefs – Join us in future editions as we continue to explore the different aspects of policymaking. Let us all take an active role in shaping policies that work for everyone.

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The Leading Woman Show serves as a dynamic platform for discussing multifaceted issues meaningful to national development and women's leadership. The show is brought to you by WILAN Global, a non-profit that inspires a shift towards gender-balanced leadership. It airs on Saturdays at 11:00 AM on NTA (DSTV 251) and YouTube (WILAN Global), at 9:00 PM on AIT (DSTV 253), and on Sundays at 7:30 PM on Channels TV (DSTV 420).



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