NAVIGATING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION GAPS IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

This study reviews policy issues and the efficacy of policy implementation through a content analysis approach. In Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, policies have invariably been formulated to cater for the populace in the post-colonial era in order to address previous socio-economic imbalances. From 1991 to 2015 several policies have been developed as reflected in the Framework for Economic Reform, Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) and Letters of Intent to the International Monetary Fund through to the current Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim-Asset) among other blueprints. Findings indicate that policy problems in Zimbabwe are largely due to implementation failure against well thought out intelligible proposals. The paper reveals that implementation gaps reside in the absence of capacity to translate those intelligible proposals into action, poor sequencing of policies, political inaction to account for the failure and lack of resources. This does not appear to be unique to Zimbabwe alone but prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa and many countries across the continent. Alternatives and recommendations are suggested for this phenomenon.

Keywords: Policy implementation, policy issues, public policy, ZIMPREST, Zim-Asset

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Introduction

In principle, the effective implementation of public policies determine, the level of provision of social services, industrialisation, employment opportunities, social security, social or economic inequality, the availability of financial services for economic activities, the availability of health facilities, and the pace of educational development (Ikechukwu and Chukwuemeka ,2013).The public sector is often saddled with the responsibility of policy implementation (Ezeani, 2006). As such, the role of government in development is primarily the role of the public sector (Abah, 2010). This role includes effective implementation of government policies directed towards achieving development goals. According to Obodoechi (2009) and Ikelegbe (2006) in Nigeria the policies are well and brilliantly formulated but ineffectively implemented. As a result, public policies fail to achieve the objectives for which they were designed. Wide gaps are glaring between policy goals and what obtains on the ground due to ineffective implementation in almost all facets of public administration in Nigeria (Ozor, 2004; Makinde, 2005). These observations are not peculiar to Nigeria alone but manifest in most countries in Africa including Zimbabwe.

Imurana, et al (2014) observe that, public policies in Africa have been developed and implemented for years in collaboration with International organizations, in particular the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). But for Grindle (1980) some African countries have done it on their own in a bid to achieve radical and rapid improvement after several years of colonial rule, but these policies have been clouded with politics and implementation bottlenecks. Imurana et al (2014) bemoan politicisation of public policies in Africa by political parties to win political capital coupled with excessive bureaucratic procedures. Zimbabwe may not be an exception.

The success story of policy implementation in Zimbabwe was arguably experienced in the first decade after attaining political independence on the 18th of April 1980 through assistance from development partners. The major policies were Growth with Equity of 1981, Transitional National Development Plan (TNDP) of 1982-1985 and the First Five Year National Development Plan (FFYNDP) of 1986 to 1990.

This study reviews policy thrust in four main documents namely; the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) which was launched in 1998 in the second stage of Zimbabwe's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) of 1991 to 1995, the Zimbabwe Letters of Intent to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1999, 2013, 2015, the Zimbabwe Human Development Report 1998 (ZHDR) and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim-Asset) among other documents. The ZHDR is not necessarily a policy document but

carries commendable policy recommendations. There are however many policies from various government entities that have been made in the last three decades. Many of these policies were incorporated or developed from ZIMPREST (1996 to 2000).

Notably, with the onset of the crisis in the country, the economic blueprints that came after ZIMPREST were stabilisation programmes short term in nature. One example was the Millennium Economic Recovery Programme (MERP) launched in August 2001 for an 18-month period coinciding with the withdrawal of development partners. The Ten Point Plan of 2002 which had emphasis on agriculture was another stabilisation programme and the National Economic Revival Programme (NERP) launched in February 2003 for a 12-month period. Other short term policies were; the Industrial Development Policy, the Macroeconomic Policy Framework (2005-06), Towards Sustained Economic Growth- Monetary Policies (2003-2007) and the National Economic Development Priority Programme (NEDPP) of 2006 to 2007. It is important to note that, all these policy documents were not being implemented wholesale (ZiNEPF, 2009).

Zvobgo (1996) and Munikwa (2011) share the view that education curricula can never remain relevant and perfect for all ages as society changes. Zimbabwe's education system, as a vehicle of social transformation underwent a period of transformation through various curricular reforms in order to suit the prevailing societal needs. However, a number of these curricular reforms experienced still-births (Pedzisai et al, 2014) due to lack of effective implementation mechanisms. In order to move forward, Zimbabwe and all African states expect their policies to be implemented timeously, within budget and to expectations. This occurs if implementation considerations are made to be a fundamental part of all stages of policy development which is the thrust of this paper.

Background

Imurana et al (2014) contend that public policy implementation problems connected in the Third World Countries are intertwined with basic economic and political conditions, mired by weak extractive capacity of the state relative to the economy and by the dissipation of public resources through corruption. This is corroborated by Agyepong and Adjei (2007) who posit that implementation problems in Africa are due to; poor leadership, corruption, lack of consensus, rapidity and politicisation of implementation, lack of participation, poor sense of direction, limited understanding and management of the political challenges, weakened checks and balances and use of short cuts.

African policies usually take place with much difficulty or complete failure due to the desire to perpetuate party interests ahead of the general others.

In other circumstances, new governments that come into office are reluctant to continue with the policies started by the previous opposition government but this does not apply to Zimbabwe which has had one party in power since independence. Makinde (2005) argues that for many governments, it is more about winning of elections than the sustainability or implementation of policies. This implies that policy formulation from that standpoint focuses only on the political and economic variables detached from the social, administrative and other environmental variables.

As observed by Imurana et al (2014), policy makers syphon financial resources to line their pockets and bribe policy implementers to falsify their reports and massage their probing. What suffers in the end is the implementation of a well thought out policy. In Zimbabwe there is also lack of participation in the policy formulation phase by those who are expected to implement hence no sense of ownership or shared vision. Pal (1996:6) aptly puts it, "beyond official or explicitly stated goals are the unstated or hidden ones--but which in practice usually influence policy decisions". These hidden agendas notoriously benefit third parties who are neither government nor the general public. This is summed up by Kay (2010:5) who says;

"Over thirty years of academic research into implementation has revealed the importance of the gap between policy-as-designed and policy-as-executed. The nature and scale of that gap is an important issue for policy-makers and public managers: the long-term durability of any reform depends on what happens tomorrow as much as it relies on what is agreed today in the high profile, showpiece moments."

Mlahleki (1995) laments that; the present African continent is a European creation as a product of the Berlin Conference which was held between 1884 and 1885. A scramble and colonization of Africa including Zimbabwe with colonial policies ensued.

Since independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has been striving to strike a sustained balance of the interests, needs and wants of the broader community through re- distributive public policies in the various socio-economic sectors like health, education, agriculture and mining and manufacturing. The policies have not yielded significant plausible results yet although in the education, agriculture and health sectors there is much to celebrate in terms of infrastructural development and re-distribution.

The land policy of the settlers resulted in the enactment of the Land Appointment Act, 6 of 1930, the Native Land Husbandry Act, 9 of 1951 and the Land Tenure Act, 15 of 1969 (Tindall 1968:215). The land policy was meant to divide the land between the settlers and the indigenous people. This resulted in the indigenous blacks being forced to squeeze in the unproductive dry and sandy areas of the country which the settlers dubbed 'reserves' or tribal trust lands (TTL). An attempt to redress the policy on land

imbalances of the pre-colonial state gave birth to the Fast-Track Land Reform Policy in Zimbabwe.

The Meaning of Policy Implementation

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973: xiii-xvii) have argued that defining the concept implementation is not easy. When viewed as a noun it refers to the state of having achieved the goals of a policy, while as a verb it refers to all that happen in trying to achieve that policy objective. Therefore, if implementation (noun) is not achieved it does not imply that implementation (verb) has not happened. In their seminal book on the subject they further argue that,

"Policies imply theories... Policies become programmes when, by authoritative action, the initial conditions are created... Implementation, then, is the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired result."

Van Meter and Van Horn (1974:447) provide a more specific and comprehensive definition,

"Policy implementation encompasses those actions by public or private individuals (or groups) that are directed at the achievement of objectives set forth in prior policy decisions."

Here, policy implementation refers to the accomplishment of policy objectives through the planning and programming of operations agreed upon. They view implementation as not simply a managerial or administrative problem, but as a political process concerned with who gets what, when, how, where, and from whom. Implementation is evolution if people act to implement a policy then bring a change.

Fox and Meyer (1995) define policy implementation as the execution and steering of policy actions over time whereas, Anderson (2003) describes policy implementation as what happens after a bill becomes law. Dye (1992) a renowned scholar on public policy defined public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do. From that definition governments may choose to act on problems or to let problems continue. These problems have to be approved (Cloete, 1987) and their authenticity justified by legislators or other empowered authorities in order to be executed. Parsons (1995: xv) quotes Dewey who summarizes public policy as "…the public and its problems …" implying that problems and the public are inseparable.

The definitions generally locate the source of public policy in government (Anderson, 2005; Pal, 1989; Dye, 2002). Source as a defining characteristic of public policy makes it different from private policy as aptly put by Pal (1989: 5) that, "what makes a policy a public policy is not its impact but its source." Dye (2002: 12) also underscores this, "a policy does not become a public policy until it is adopted by some government institution". As spelt out from these definitions, public policies are courses of action or inaction taken by states in response to problems. This agrees with Anderson (2005:79) who defined policy

problems as those "conditions or situations that produce dissatisfaction on a wide spectrum of people and for which government redress is sought."

Berman (1978) describes policy implementation as the process of carrying out a government decision. O'Toole (2000) believes that, in defining the concept it is necessary to make the conceptual distinction between the implementation process of policy and policy outcomes although these are interactive in practice. In this regard, the process involves action with respect to policy, whereas policy outcomes refer to the ultimate effect on the policy problem. Ottoson and Green (1987:362) suggest that, "implementation is an iterative process in which ideas, expressed as policy, are transformed into behaviour, expressed as social action."

Review of Policy Implementation Approaches

The top-down and bottom-up schools of thought have emerged in studying and describing implementation. According to Dye (1992) those who subscribe to the top-down approach see policy makers as the central actors who concentrate their effort on factors that can be manipulated at the national level. According to Mazmanian and Sabatier, (1989) this approach is concerned with what can be done in policy development to improve the success of implementation. This approach is not attentive to the power ingrained in the interpretation and other discretion afforded implementers. This inadequacy prompted the emergency of a bottom-up approach which focuses on what Lipsky(1980) calls the "street level bureaucrat" and their discretionary decision-making power (Elmore, 1980). Supporters of bottom-up approach direct their emphasis on target groups and those who discharge service delivery.

Today, most theorists seem to agree that there is some convergence of the two perspectives that exist. Perhaps it explains the positive relationship obtaining between policy implementation and service delivery. Matland (1995) observes that the macro-level variables of the top-down model are tied with the micro-level bottom-uppers.

However, DeGroff and Cargo (2009) point out that, in the 1990s the debate between the top-downers and bottom-uppers was then put to rest as the integrated contingency-based models (Goggin et al, 1990; Matland, 1995) came into play. These models increased attention to the role played by those intergovernmental relationships, the political context, and conflict in moulding the implementation process. Several studies (deLeon, 1997; Dryzek, 2000; Fischer, 2003) began to give prominence to more democratic approaches to public policy, including policy implementation, recognising the broader sense of citizen participation and social consensus.

Warwick (1982) provides an extremely robust model of policy implementation that is equally

applicable to Africa and industrialized societies. The work documents the experiences of eight developing countries in implementing population policies which were influenced by international initiatives and sponsored by international institutions. Warwick defines three main approaches to implementation namely: the machine model which 'assumes that a clearly formulated plan backed by legitimate decision-making authority contains the essential ingredients for its own implementation'; the games model which 'swings from total rationality to virtual irrationality in implementation while it plays down plans and policies and plays up the power of bargaining, and exchange' and the evolutionary model which implies that 'policy is significant not because it sets the exact course of implementation but because it shapes the potential for action.'

Next, he suggests the transaction model of understanding implementation. To Warwick (1982: 181), "the concept of transaction implies deliberate action to achieve a result, conscious dealings between implementers and program environments and, as a particularly critical kind of dealing, negotiation among parties with conflicting or otherwise diverging interests in implementation". The model implies that implementation means transaction though with several assumptions.

Metz et al (2007) view implementation in three stages of completeness which are; paper, process and performance. When the policy is never adopted beyond gaining approval from decision-makers just "on paper" it is paper implementation. In cases where implementation takes place when new structures, schedules, or monitoring schemes are put into place, but staff is not provided with additional training, capacity or resources to support it, it is process implementation. Performance implementation takes place when structural changes are made such that they support the adoption of new practices with strategies aligned at all levels.

Pedzisai et al (2014) note, that there are different ways in which policies can be implemented. These are the direct cut-over, parallel, phased and pilot. The choice of the method largely depends on the type of the policy, the implementation approach whether top-down or bottom-up and nature of the organisation (Honig, 2006). The direct cut-over method is employed where the new policy's dates and time overrides the old system or in cases where a brand new system needs to be implemented. For a parallel method, the new policy runs alongside the old system for a given time. It allows the old policy to run as a back-up process as problems of the new system get fixed (Adams and Chen 1981; Honig, 2006). With respect to the phased method (Honig, 2006; Bishop, 1995) the new system gets implemented stage by stage while the old policy is phased out. According to Bishop (1995) and Honig (2006) the pilot method is put on trial in a particular area before it is implemented on a wide scale.

To Imurana et al (2014) irrespective of the type of approach, public policy implementation thrives only in a politically stable country. This may explain why effective implementation of policies remains a pipe dream in politically unstable African countries. Ghana stands as an example that has enjoyed political stability over the past decade and witnessed effective implementation of many policies though some glitches still persist.

The Policy Implementation in Zimbabwe

Several policies have been developed in Zimbabwe since independence from national, ministerial, departmental down to local levels. The scope of this study is confined to the national policies some of which are reviewed below.

Environmental Policy

Environmental policies are established and approved by parliament through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism. The land policy, the agricultural policy and the forest policy have been developed in order to manage the environment. They have been developed in the form of legislation such as the Forest Act, 12 of 1984, the Natural Resources Act, 9 of 1996 and the Environmental Management Act, 13 of 2002 (EMA*)*.

Mukwindidza (2008:26)) submits that,

"In Zimbabwe, particularly in the Mutasa district, gold panners and some communal and resettled farmers resist the implementation of environmental policy and continue to degrade the environment as they search for gold and carry out stream bank agriculture respectively. Law enforcement agencies such as the police need to assist policy implementers by enforcing environmental laws."

Hanekom (1987) indicates that apart from public managers who are key figures in the implementation of public policies, some public institutions like legislators, the courts of law, the interest-groups, community institutions and government departments should be actively involved in policy implementation. The political office bearers and the law enforcement agencies are particularly important for the process of policy implementation to succeed. Prosecution of people who flout environmental policy can only be enhanced when there is political will to effectively and efficiently implement the policy. Mtisi (2004) argues that, in Zimbabwe politicians usually condone environmental degradation activities during election times because stopping such activities would cost them votes.

Reconciliation Policy

The then Prime Minister Robert Gabriel Mugabe announced a statement immediately after winning elections (Davies et al,1981: 206) in which there is

"space for everyone…a sense of security for both the winners and the losers- forgiveness and forgetting." The policy was made to thaw relations between blacks and former Rhodesian whites, and between major nationalist movements, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Zimbabwe African People's Union Patriotic-Front (PF-ZAPU).Although a Unity Accord was signed in 1987 between ZAPU and ZANU-PF threats to the success of the reconciliation policy remain tinkering. Questions stemming from societal ethnic minority groups such as some sections of the Ndebele around Matabeleland, the Ndau in south-eastern Zimbabwe, and the Tonga in Kariba, continue to haunt the country as these groups appear to have been overlooked in the discourse reconciliation. Muponde as cited in Raftopoulos and Savage (2009) has described the policy of reconciliation as a case of "reconciliation on behalf of the un-consulted majority in 1980" due to mixed feelings from those affected.

Growth with Equity Policy

According to the Zimbabwe's Millennium Development Goals Report (ZMDG, 2009) the country inherited a dual economy. This economy had a relatively well-developed modern sector and a poor rural sector that provided livelihood to about eighty per cent of the country's population. Therefore, spending was directed towards social sectors focussing on the expansion of rural infrastructure while redressing socio- economic inequalities through the land resettlement scheme (Zhou and Zvoushe, 2012). In the urban sector, policies were directed towards areas of indigenization, minimum wages and black affirmative action to raise the living standards. The Growth with Equity policy asserted government's desire to develop the country in the realm of socialist and democratic principles in terms of re- distribution of resources and social benefits. The positive returns were most visible in the education and health sectors (Zhou and Masunungure, 2006) .Sustaining these policies proved a major challenge against a stagnating economy. There was minimal citizen participation with every stage of the policy process in the hands of the bureaucracy.

Education Policy (Education-for-All)

Prior to independence, there was a separatist and dual education policy based on fiscal allocations that were heavily skewed in favour of the whites. According to Riddell as cited in Mandaza (1986) the period 1976-77 state expenditure per African pupil was Z$43.2 and Z$475.2 per European pupil and in 1972-73 it was Z$28.8 per African pupil against Z$377.8 per European pupil. Although the policy of education for all was noble, in the long run provision of free and compulsory primary and secondary education became a huge financial, material and human resources burden

on the state (Zhou and Zvoushe). It was later abandoned and school fees re-introduced.

Health Policy (Health-for-All)

Agere, in Mandaza (1986) observes that, the infant mortality rate among whites was 17 per 1 000 while among blacks it was 120 to 220 per 1 000. Urban hospitals which were better equipped served about fifteen per cent of the population, absorbed about forty-four per cent of the publicly funded services (Sanders, 1990) while twenty-four per cent went to primary and secondary level rural health services. Razemba cited in Agere (1998) found that, life expectancy among Africans was very low across gender: African male, 49.8; African female, 53.3; European male, 66.9; and European female, 74.0. In view of this the policy was to address the anomalies but the challenge, however, was working against meagre resources. The goal of health for all by 2000 turned out to be too ambitious for a nation saddled with nation building issues (ZHDR, *2003*).

Land Policy

Four types of land tenure prevailed at independence (Takavarasha in Rukuni and Eicher ,1994) namely (Large Scale Commercial Farmers (LSCF) and urban areas; Freehold Tenure of Small Scale Commercial Farms (SSCF); Communal Areas and State Land) with 4 000 large-scale white commercial farmers occupying 11,2 million hectares; more than 1 million rural families occupied 16,3 million hectares of dry, less fertile and less productive lands; 10 000 small-scale farmers occupying 1,2 million hectares; 70 000 families were resettled on 2 million hectares, and only 0,5 million hectares were left for state farming. According to Zhou and Zvoushe (2012) financial support would come from donors as pledged for the second resettlement phase only after clear land policy and accompanying mechanisms for transparency and accountability were in place – to which the Government objected. Thus, the land resettlement and reform phase II (LRRP II) was never implemented. Zhou and Zvoushe (2012:218) refer to this scenario as "implement first, formulate and legislate later".

Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Policy

Section 15 of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act has stirred controversy as the Minister establishes a database of people who want indigenous Zimbabweans to acquire shares in their businesses, and of indigenous Zimbabweans who wish to partner with such people. The problem in this Section arises as it gives the Minister much latitude to impose politically acceptable partners on reluctant businesses, which may be based on political merit and not agreement or suitability.

Economic Policies

The government of Zimbabwe's economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) was announced in July 1990. Bhalla et al (1999) note that, it was not the result of an agreement between the World Bank and Zimbabwe, although it contained most of the ingredients of World Bank's structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) seen elsewhere in Africa. These ingredients were; deregulation of prices, trade liberalisation, budget deficit reduction, commercialisation and improved efficiency of parastatals among others. Its implementation impacted negatively on the poor due to inadequate funding and poor design (Bhalla, et al 1999). The Zimbabwe programme for economic and social transformation (ZIMPREST) which succeeded ESAP focussed on social dimensions like poverty, empowerment, land reform and indigenisation but the main thrust was on macroeconomic and structural policies arguably a continuation of ESAP.

Industrial Policy

It appears there has been no direct industrial policy apart from the establishment of the Tariff Commission and the Competition Commission which sought to tackle problems of monopoly. The more important influences on industry have continued to be the side effects of other policies pursued for macroeconomic, trade and other purposes.

Agricultural Policy

Government sought to increase sales from communal farmers and provided several incentives such as relaxation of sales of farm produce to other players. Previously sales of produce like maize grain were restricted to the Grain Marketing Board a parastatal body. Despite these efforts, communal output has remained low as it relies on weather patterns with drought being the worst enemy.

Financial Policy

Although deregulation brought about a sharp rise in nominal rates, liberalisation of entry was a major change that saw a boom in financial institutions. As noted by Bhalla et al (1999) the main weakness in the financial policy has been the failure to introduce and implement adequate legislation to monitor new entrants.

Trade liberalisation

The implementation of trade liberalisation was faster than envisaged in the initial policy document (Bhalla et al, 1999). The liberalisation of imports caused a decline in output and employment in the short run. Further, there was an increase in imports and a growing trade deficit. But it is difficult to ascertain if these adverse effects were attributable to the implementation of trade liberalisation especially when there were severe droughts about that time.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Implementation gaps identified in this paper include lack of capacity, inadequate material resources and lack of continuity in government policies. Debate on international policy shows that implementation requires a sense of local ownership and buy-in. This applies to domestic policy as well. This implies that policy is best implemented if it is owned by those charged with the task of implementation. It is not clear if Zimbabwe has sought buy-in from policy implementers. This is an area which needs further research. This paper has revealed a number of policy sequencing issues whereby implementers have got things wrong. For example, trade liberalisation came before macroeconomic stabilisation and in the financial sector new banks were established way before changes to the regulatory apparatus. In the education and health sectors, cost recovery measures were introduced before measures to cushion the vulnerable groups. Reforms of the public sector though not yet implemented, remain more focussed on reducing numbers and less on quality and efficiency. Sadly, the process of indigenisation has not been carried out properly due to lack of capacity and politics leading to calls for fine-tuning of the policy.

The problem of implementation in Zimbabwe like other countries in Africa is not about poor policy design as such but rather the inability or failure to implement them. The failure can also be attributed to the politics of the country which appear to condone policy implementation failure. More research has to be done to provide solutions to the inadequacies of the political structure. It is hoped that the new constitution that came into effect may provide a launch pad for effective policy implementation although not sufficient on its own. Mechanisms to ensure government sticks to its budget may be required to bring fiscal discipline, reduce high budget deficits and maintain expenditure ceilings. Parliament needs to be capacitated to ensure policy compliance and implementation. Civil service reforms which have failed in the past need to be revisited. Policy statements like Vision 2020 should start showing effects on the ground beyond rhetoric together with the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim- Asset).

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