

PUBLIC POLICY CHALLENGES IN GHANA

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Abstract

More often than not, those in positions of power believe that, regardless of their likelihood of success, policies should be energetically pursued if they have the support of the majority. Since Ghana's independence, numerous administrations, both previous and current, have developed and put into effect a number of policies that are intended to address the issues that are limiting its progress. Every nation, especially those with emerging economies like Ghana, where I am from, has to implement policies effectively to advance. Despite multiple policies put in place by the successive leadership, Ghana's progress has stagnated. What may be the issue?

Keyword

Public Policy, Technocrat, Democracy, Politics, Africa, Ghana, Foreign Aid.

Introduction

More often people in the helm of affairs are of the view that formulating policies that resonate with the masses, regardless of the feasibility of implementation, are policies that should be vigorously pursued. Right from the attainment of independence, various governments, both erstwhile and incumbent have formulated and implemented a lot of policies which are aimed at solving the problems mitigating the development of Ghana. Effective policy implementation is crucial to the development of every country, especially developing economies like my country, Ghana. The development of Ghana has stagnated despite numerous policies implemented by the various leadership. What could be the problem? I found out that the challenge to effective policy formulation and implementation is a holistic one. Ranging from problem identification, policy formulation, identification of target groups and beneficiaries. Precisely, the challenges to policy implementation in Ghana are, inadequate funds, political interference, lack of technical or institutional competence. This paper discusses the challenges of policy implementation in Ghana, at the various levels of Government - District Assemblies, Ministries and the Presidency.

Funding of state policies & other government initiatives in Ghana

To begin with, the availability of funds is very crucial to every endeavor. Unfortunately, financial competence seems to be the challenge of most developing countries of which Ghana is no exception. Since independence, the country has mainly relied on loans and grants from governments overseas in order to implement some of its policies. In November 2021, the minister of finance and economic planning of Ghana, Honorable Ken Ofori-Atta revealed that, an underwhelming 10% of over 30 million population are documented tax payers. This represents an inactive taxation system and a poor internal income generation model. Against this backdrop, the government always has to go for loans and grants from affluent countries such as the USA, China, UK and organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. For example, the Accra Times, reports that, as of May 2022, Ghana's debt stock stood at Gh¢ 351.8 billion which is equivalent to 80.8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. The leadership of the country always has to borrow in order to implement its flagship policies. This shows the serious problem of debt financing for Government policies in Ghana and most African countries.

Influence of politics on public policies

Moreover, electioneering campaigns, through the politicization of campaign promises by the various political parties have become one of the major policy implementation challenges in Ghana. It is the nature of the average Ghanaian voter to be won by "sugar-coated" election promises. Due to this, politicians no longer do the necessary feasibility studies that would ascertain the appropriateness of an intended policy given the available funds, other resources and the given time frame. Policies are now politicized by almost all the political parties neglecting the actual realities on ground, all in an attempt to secure votes from electorates. Adams & Agomor (2015), reveal that patronage politics and policies matter in winning elections in Ghana. Sadly, the electorates on the other hand have equally not interrogated the promises made to them by politicians during campaigns. Electorates must play their parts by asking probing questions on the promises made to them by politicians. If electorates should subject politicians to questions bothering on availability of funds and the feasibility of such proposed politicizes, political actors would have a rethink about their campaign strategies to consider and formulate policies that are in touch of the realities on ground, aimed at solving the problems identified by the technocrats. Due to the fact that due diligence has been thrown to the dogs pertaining to the appropriate steps involved in public policy making, there are growing number of policy documents at the various ministries in Ghana with no work done after several years of being in power by the respective governments. The issue of politicization of policies is becoming a norm in Ghana and Africa at large, as politicians are now preying on the nature of the African voter to make incredibly good proposals to the voter regardless of the feasibility, human resources or the availability of funds to implement such.

Corruption; the heart of public policy challenges in Ghana

Going forward, it almost seems like corruption is the mother of all problems and inefficiencies in most developing countries, Ghana is no exception. Damoah et al. (2018), correctly note that, corruption influences government failure at two different levels; project management and product phase. Corruption is at the heart of the policy challenges in Ghana. This is solely on government actors and other relevant people in Authority. Sometimes, the problem is not about the funds, feasibility of proposed policies or the availability of the skill set to implement such, the problem could be the actors in charge of the implementation of policies. This situation is never alien to the Ghanaian public service. There are several instances, where development partners, other agencies and foreign governments have made funds available for implementation of policies that aim at poverty elimination and infrastructural improvement in Ghana but these projects and programmes are usually not completed. What could be the problem? Funds are usually embezzled by the actors in charge of implementing policies. Finances made available by developing partners always find their way in ending up in the pockets of people in authority. Nepotism and greed have become the "new normal". This is a major contributor to the problems of policy implementation in Ghana.

limitation of expert powers of technocrats

Political interference in the work of technocrats can also not be overlooked in discussing the challenges to policy implementation in Ghana. Technocrats are better positioned with the skill set and expertise to formulate and implement policies for the various ministries and governments. For some time now in Ghana, this situation has changed. The technocrats at the various ministries and government agencies in the country are no longer at liberty to determine what, when and how a policy would be made due to the interference by political actors. This is due to the fact that, in most situations, policies and projects proposed by these technocrats have been arrived at after a series of consultations and intensive research about the reality on ground and the solutions to address them. Politicians on the other hand have policies that have been inspired by a rigorous election campaign with the sole aim of capturing the votes and support of the electorate. As such, the vision of politicians and that of the technocrats are parallel. In most instances, the technocrats are given two options; give up on their proposed plans and follow that of the politician or resign from their post. This has been the situation in Ghana, especially when there is a change of government. Every change of government is met with a massive resignation of technocrats at the various ministries and government agencies, especially those whose vision and plans do not align with the elected governments. The interference by political actors and resultant resignations by technocrats is also a major impediment to policy implementation in Ghana. There's no continuity culture since new governments always have to start anew with problem identification, policy formulation and implementation. Noteworthy, there's a national development plan that ought to be followed by various governments and political parties, and drawing up manifestos but for political expediency, this national development plan has been neglected in favor of over-ambitious policies aimed at winning elections. At a conference in Accra, December, 2018, the executive secretary of the Civil and Local Government Staff of Ghana (CLOGSAG) noted that, the interference in the work of government agencies have created grounds for abuse of power, improper conduct and poor service delivery. Nkanbonam (2019), adds that, interference in agencies usually result in reduction in productivity, reduced work quality and a derailment in policy modules.

Human resource incompetency and inappropriate educational training of labour force

Lastly, institutional competence on the part of the human resources in most institutions turn to impede the public policy making processes. There are several square pegs in round holes in a lot of government agencies in Ghana. Several reasons account for this. I mentioned earlier that nepotism and corruption are very rife in government agencies. As a result, appointments are made based on association, political affiliations, and connections instead of merit and competence. There are several government appointees who lack the necessary skill set needed for effective policy formulation and implementation. Another reason accounting for institutional incompetence is lack of the appropriate skills and training. The educational system in Ghana trains students theoretically, with little or no practical skills needed for the job market, as a result, the majority of the country's workforce lack the needed skill set for the positions they occupy leading to low productivity and inefficiency. Ghana needs a workforce that is equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge needed for feasible problem identification and practical solutions and strategies needed to address these problems. This menace can practically be addressed by periodic in-service training for the workers at the various ministries and government agencies to equip them with the necessary skill set needed for policy formulation and implementation.