



INFORMATION POLICIES AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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ABSTRACT

Information policies are pivotal and essential to the sustenance, growth and development of any nation. Over the past decade, Nigeria has been struggling with the problem of development in spite of her huge human, material and natural resources. This paper highlighted some of the challenges of information policies in National development. The work is aimed at enlightening key-players, especially policy makers in Nigeria about the benefits of information policies to National development. The paper concluded that the development of information policies should be based on the information needs of the citizenry and the knowledge custodian for the achievement of national development.

Keywords: Information, Information Polices, National Development, Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Information is an asset to any nation, an integral part to all living organisms and bedrock to national development. Its widespread is the dimensions involved in information access, and use, determinants of prospects for development, growth and rising living standards and serve to provide access and the ability to use information. Its policies streamline the key elements for open access to information and its maintenance.

However, Information policy has come to influence most interactions in society (Jaegar, 2007). Thus, been concerned with identifying, delivering and managing internal and external information resources needed by employees at all levels of the organization to perform their jobs

as competently and efficiently possible in order to meet business objectives (Mutongi & Marume, 2006).

However, information policy is crucial for the effective and efficient operations of nations and crucial for the effective and access to universal information, so as to carryout social, economic and political activities in the course to achieve national development. While information policy is among the most ancient forms of governance, and there have been periodic changes in the extent to which government deliberately, explicitly and consistently control information creating, processing, flows and used to exercise powers. Information policies are not formulated and implemented in vacuum, however, they must align with other public policies.

Roper and Williams, in Mutongi and Marume (2016) explained that policy can mean: prudence in the management of affairs; a definite course and method of action selected from among alternatives; a high level of overall plan that embraces the general goals and acceptable procedures of governance. Ideally, information policy is considered as a fundamental aspect that shapes a particular kind of order.

It is a tacit principle that information policy should serve the needs of government and citizenry. However, the free flow of information, international co-operation and peace are among the driving principle that has been offered to justify information policy. In applying these principles, government treats information as object of policy. That is, information is the subject of policy making (Sharon, 2010).

In this situation, government treats information as an instrument of policy. However, government makes decision on whether and how information are collected, developed, disseminated, analyzed and preserved in the service of selected policy principles (e.g., transparency, accountability, responsibility, or social equity, or to achieve specific goals in several sectors, like in public health, environmental quality, or economic growth and development (Dawes, 2016).

Developing human capacity and ensuring that they provide access to information and knowledge for development is good, but more effort is required to explain and demonstrate the benefits of investing in these resources. This tie is closely related to information policies. Since, information grows primarily through co-operative research, analysis, combination and synthesis. Thus, an information policy is not formulated in vacuum; it has to be aligned with other policies. Roper and William (1999) cited in Mutongi and Marume (2016) explained that policy can mean prudence in management of affairs, a definite method of action selected from among alternatives; a high level plan that embraces general goals and acceptable procedures.

More so, information policy is considered as a fundamental aspect that shapes a particular kind of order and serves the needs of the government and her citizenry. However, the free flow of information, international cooperation, and peace are among the driving principles that have been offered to justify information policy.

Hence, it propel varied decisions about whether and how to collect, develop, disseminate, analyze and preserve information in the provision and service of specific policy direction and principles like transparency, clearness, comprehensively, accountability, or social equity, or to achieve particular goals in public health, environmental quality or economic development is most significant (Dawes, 2016). It encompasses regulations that regulate the creation, use, store, access, communicate and disseminate information effectively.

To this end, Orna (2008) suggests that the development of information policy be co-ordinated by an advisory committee representative of private sector, local government,

academicians and professional related to library and information science. Hence, in order to enhance National development, information policies must be stabilized knowing its full potential in the growth of any national resources.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Information as a concept is a victim of definitional pluralism and an inter-disciplinary commodity. Therefore, how we use and function with information determines the understanding to it and how it will evolve within us. However Braman (2011) affirm that information is data that has been transformed into a meaningful and useful form for specific human beings and the meaning that humans assign to data by means of the known conventions used in its representations.

Wherefore, Information is a conveyor, a reinforcement of ideas, and opinions, an enhancer and pace-setter which serve as proactive link in defining and re-defining resolutions. More so, information can be seen as a resource, commodity, and perception of pattern, an agent and basin of possibility. Being a constructive force in the society, to Madden (2014), it also implies the meaning content: the ideas, assertion, or propositions that the content conveys.

The message is seen as intangible. It can reside on a physical medium but also in peoples mind. Hence, it is often particularized as message communicated to someone. To Kiran (2016), information reduces uncertainty and it is communicable which leads to confirmation. In essence, it is said to be derived from data, but only become information when they are somehow concentrated and improved.

Therefore, information can be seen as component of policies gained, evidence and also an outcome of it, since proving of evidence can confirm information previously open to doubt. McCreadle and Rice (1999) cited in Madden (2014) affirm the concept in a summarized form to include: Information as representation of knowledge: when information is processed and internalized and stored it becomes knowledge. Traditionally, the storage medium has been books, but increasingly electronic media are becoming important.

Information as Data in Environment

Information can be obtained from a range of environmental stimuli and phenomena not all of which are intended to ‘convey’ a message but which can be informative when appropriately interpreted. Information as part of the communication process: meanings are in people rather than in words or data.

Timing and social factors play a significant role in the processing and interpretation of information. Information as a resource or commodity: information is transmitted in a message for sender to receiver. The receiver interprets message as intended by the sender. There may be added value as the information is disseminated or exchange.

Policy

Policy is directives intended to shape decisions and actions of individuals, organizations and government agencies (McClure & Jaeger, 2008). Hence, being central and a revolving activity of both government and non-governmental institutions. To Ozor (2004), policy options made by

individuals of private institution is known as private policy, while the one made by government or its institution is called public policy.

Literally, policies are presumed to follow a logical pattern of which its guiding principles must be understood by the initiators and potential public. Thus, Rubin (2010) affirm that policy typically refers to political laws or regulations yet can also mean a rule or practice followed more locally. However, Ezeani (2006) assert that it is a proposed course of action which government intends to implement in respect of a given problem or situation confronting it.

Ikelegbe (2006) in a more elaborate form defines policy as the integrated course and programmes of action that government has set and the framework or guide it has designed to direct action and practices in certain problem area. Therefore, policy must provide a blueprint for direction; serve as a roadmap and highlighted factor for government to trade.

Some among the major policies include the following: National policy for information technology approved and established in March 2001, basically to achieve the implementation of the national ICT policy in collaboration with the Nigerian communication commission (NCC) and to develop, regulate and promote IT in national development. Thus, to take advantage of telecommunication and computer technologies such as fiber optic networks to enhance access to quality education, eradicate poverty, create jobs and investment opportunities and enhance the nation's capacity to compete globally (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2006).

The National mass communication policy in Nigeria of November, 2004 (Reviewed), which major objectives is to preserve national cultural identity, promote the national cultural patrimony and enhance the development of cultural and artistic capabilities and institutions for public communication. Also, to promote productive community, national, regional and international interchange (Uwom & Alao, 2013).

The National Policy on Education was formulated in 1997, to achieve the objective of creating educational standards and learning achievements, equipment of individual, skills and competence, development of practice oriented and to contribute to development of science and technology and Nigerian society (Odukoya, Bolwale & Okunlola, 2018). The Poverty Alleviation policy of Obasanjo's government, which has as its basic objective the reduction of poverty through the provision of welfare packages to the poor and the unemployed in Nigeria. Also, seeking to eliminate poverty at the grass root level (Ozor, 2004).

The National youth policy of the federal government of Nigeria under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo fashioned and created Ministry of Youth Development in 2006. This development gave push for the revision of National Youth Policy, which has as its basic objective the promotion of drug control strategies aimed at reducing drug abuse among young people in the country and the creation of opportunities and strategies for addressing the challenges facing young men and women, etc.

Information Policy

Information policies are specific guideline for planned actions to establish access to universal information to carry out social, economic and political activities through a comprehensive process to achieve the goals of national development (Maxwell, 2003). They are comprised laws, regulations, doctrinal positions and other decisions making and practices which society widely accepted to constitute effects that involve information creation, processing, flows, access and use (Braman, 2011).

Hence, making the boundaries of the domain with information creation, processing, flows, access and use provides a synthetic and succinct heuristic that meets important evaluative criteria. Also, information policy analysis must include, formal and informal decisions, decision making procedures and the entities of both private and public sector entities of governance; and the cultural habits and predispositions of govern mentality that sustain and enable both governance and government (Keya & Egonmwan, 1991, Ikelegbe, 2006).

Therefore, the value of information policy in society depends on how persistently it is spread and understood throughout society, and upon the institutions for implementing and expanding her horizon. Perhaps, its functions would include: to introduce continuity of actions and decisions among the participants, act as an automatic decision maker by formalizing worldwide answers to previously made decisions about how particular questions and problems are resolved, offer a pre-determined answer to routine issues. Afford a mechanism for insulating information leaders from hasty and ill-considered requests for a policy change. Serve as a major communication link to the various global constituents. Therefore, information policy should provide an overall direction to the present day and future endeavors. Thus, been a base-line for action. Importantly: (1) it must be evaluated, (2) must provide guidelines for the implementation of strategies, (3) should be written to assist with solving specific problems, (4) should be a stimulator in improving the quality of reliability, accessibility and timely delivery systems, (5) be a blue-print for information technology. Development is both a physical reality and a state of mind in which society has secured the means of obtaining a better life (Todaro & Smith, 2006).

It implies improvement in well-being of citizens, not most powerful and rich alone. Hence, the combination of social, economic and institutional processes as the means to acquire better living conditions. Osokoya (2008) affirm this when he insist that development is a multi-faceted concept, thus, we talk of economic, social, human development, etc. Therefore, it seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances. Shelly (2017) stated clearly that social and human development requires a concerted approach, integrating the economic and social components in plans, policies and programmes for people's betterment.

The writer added that the purpose of development in any setting should be to develop man and not just to end with developing things. Hence, Shelly advised that its (development) goal should be focused and vigorously pursued. Similarly, Swanepoel and De Beer (2006) agree that poverty is a suffering from ill-being and development is well-being which encompasses material, bodily and social well-being on the one hand, and security and freedom of choice on the other. This means that development is about people.

Holtz cited in Soares Jr. and Quintella (2008) argued that the discussion of individual well-being simply talk of human development, which is directed towards the individual's quality of life; health and happiness. Therefore, people are the basic units of development, and they should therefore lead the transformation of their societies. Obviously, it is reasonable to note that development is not only an economic exercise, but also involves both social and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal and National aspect of life (Lawal & Oluwatoyin, 2011).

This becomes pertinent to understand that development has to do with the increase in percentage of the living condition of the people in the society. More so, Naomi (1995) explains further, that development is often to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life.

The landmark for the explanation of the term ‘development’ was the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly during the proclamation of the Second United Nations Development Decade on January 1, 1971 (UN, 1971) cited in The UN declared the following elements are basic of development (1) a minimum standard of living compatible with human dignity, (2) underpinned improvement of the well-being of the individual, (3) sharing of benefits by society at large, (4) more equitable distribution of wealth and income and wealth (5) a greater degree of income security, and (6) the safeguard of the environment.

Hence, a condition of well-being of the society as a whole and the changing of traditional society to a modern one. National development is a collection of people who identify themselves as a social community with language and culture: they might live in a particular geographical location, but for historical reasons might scatter across the countries (Mbagwu & Igbegiri, 2019). National development embraces several elements that cut across the improvement of information, military, economic, social, religious, education, political, etc., national development is concerned with the well-being, welfare and growth of the living condition of citizens in a society. The foregoing argues that the ultimate aim of national development is to bring about sustained improvement in the well-being of the individual and bestow benefits to all self-reliance and mobilization of domestic resources; the transformation of the structure of rural production; the development of small-scale industries and the acquisition of technological, informational and scientific skills.

Hence, a nation shared common identity, affinity, culture, common interest and developmental goals. Therefore, a strategized policy that attain to such goals as full employment, price, stability and economic growth, equilibrium in the balance of payment, equitable distribution of income, educational development, social security, political stability and so on. Therefore, the term national implies affairs that concerns the people and based on peoples oriented programme and a spring forth of national objectives.

Challenges of Information Policies towards National Development

A well-articulated but unimplemented information policy on any institution, government, organization or society is decidedly less valuable than the paper on which it is written. Despite the perceived gains of information policy, the implementation process is facing enormous challenges. This is because the critical elements in both the internal and external environments and the implementation process account for the gap between goals and achievements. Hence, some of the impediments are discussed: Policy instability: it is observed that erratic policies are dysfunctional to growth, while policy stability tends to promote and engender planning as well as proper and effective implementation. There must be continuity for stability to take effect.

However; instability generates results opposite to the ones initially envisaged. Also, it induces a tendency for continuous increase in public deformity; many of the desirable features of automatic stabilizers are almost impossible to replicate by discretionary reactions of policy makers; the public may increasingly react to by declining rather than consumption of the slated policies.

Hence, when stability is in doubt, expansionary measures and even automatic stabilizers may not have the desirable effect on output as people adjust their behavior. Corruption; it must be noted that corruption goes with power and therefore must be located first within the ranks of the powerful (Egonmwan, 1991). Corruption manifests in all facets of governmental and non-

governmental activities.

Hence, corruption is a function of inequality in wealth distribution, knowledge sharing, and weakness of governmental enforcement mechanisms, among others. As Gray and Kaufmann (1998) posited that where there is systemic corruption, the institution values, policies and norms of behavior already adapted to a corruption modus operandi and with bureaucratic and other agents follow their principle in the political arena.

Thus, corruption becomes an impediment to information policy implementation. Information infrastructure: basically, the information infrastructure contains four components: software, hardware, physical/human resources and data/information/knowledge. Unfortunately, some developing countries lack one or more of these components. If the priority of infrastructure investment is in human capital then the people as workers, become realistic as consumers and as citizens can be met with the same investment.

More so, to build infrastructures is a challenging endeavor for several reasons: thus, information infrastructure expand through integrating previously separate systems. However, integration is not only a technical concern of achieving interoperability, rather, a process of embedding political and institutional interests which need to be dealt with.

Lack of continuity: the initiators of information policy in Nigeria do not take into cognizance how policies work in Nigeria, which depends so much on the political survival of the initiator (i.e. individual, groups, organization, and institutions). No sooner, the initiator leaves office then the policies and programmes begin to collapse. Information policies seem not to have any serious workings.

Unfortunately, information policies have been irrevocable due to continuity constraints. This is more so in extreme cases of such political control in Nigeria, the initiator are not even allowed to take decisions or actions on basic routine administrative matters without consultation for the consent of relevant political authorities. Hence, the effort and time is being hampered and wasted.

Consequently, the policies of preceding administrations are rarely pursued by succeeding persons and their personality and styles of administrations help to explain why little attention is paid to the issues of maintenance of projects or programmes created or initiated by preceding regimes. Financial resources: fund has been a great impediment in hindering the full implementation of certain policies.

However, even the government that has seen policy as a priority is being selective in implementation due to difficulty in the procurement of funds. More so, governments do not budget adequately to enable the implementation of formulated policies. Indeed, to effectively implement policies, the implementing agency needs resources in adequate and in timely manner. This explains, in part, the cause of the failure of certain public policies to achieve desirable goals (Nweke, 2006).

Prospect of Information Policies in National Development

One, it is a meta-policy, because it affects virtually everything else, and it has increasingly dominated by information and communication technologies. Additionally, other types of policies have a range of definable impacts, and information reaches everything in the system. It is expected that information processes in Nigeria will aid and hasten the coming into existence of other policies and such policies that can be effectively gained and implemented.

Two, many other areas of policy are dependent on information policy and those policy choices are framed by information policy choices. Economic growth, political deliberations, technological innovation, civic engagement, development, and urban planning, are driven in no small part by information policy decisions. Significantly, it allow for the proper use of allocated fund for implementing policies.

Third, information policy governs tremendous range of institutions , including not only those in which information is central to their existence such as libraries, schools, archives, and museums, but also government agencies, corporations, and non-profits, dictating the management , collection, sharing and other aspects of their information usage. Such will indeed allow for more effective functioning of the policies.

Fourth, information policy decision creates perfect advantages and disadvantages across society, and a huge range of groups and organizations are directly affected by every information policy decision. This is necessary because, even though government and her initiators come and go, her policies remains and should continue the implementation of existing policies unless fundamental developments render their continued implementation impossible or unnecessary.

Indeed, if every leader that comes into position put aside the ones in place before their tenure, Nigeria will never reach its desired peak. Fifth, although information is theoretically unlimited, its availability over the long term can vary due to a number of issues, such as information storage and retrieval, the media on which information is captured, and other factors (Jaegar, Gorham, Taylor & Bertot, 2008).

CONCLUSION

The notion of every nation is to bring about growth in the standard of living of its citizens and development generally. Being aware of this fact entails not only the formulation of policies, but creating strategies to strengthen on its lapses for a sustained development. Given the number of policies that have been formulated in Nigeria since independence, the nation is supposed to have stabilized policies in varied sectors, especially the information policy.

The concept of information has a positive effect on status-raising concept used by professionals, institutions and organizations, primarily working with documents. However, this positive effect has had very unfortunate side effects in raising a level of confusion in policy domain. In essence, there has been a wide gap between the growth and development of information policies and its implementation.

To close this ever widening gap, the development of information policies should be on the information needs of the citizenry, and the knowledge custodians as the key players. It is expected that such workable information policies could become the veritable instrument for development.

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