Applicability and Adaptability of Some Public Policy Models to African Countries

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Abstract

This paper examines the applicability of several models of public policy for ordering public policymaking, implementation, evaluation or assessment and policy research in African countries. In doing so, the paper chronicles some of the ecological specificities of public policymaking in Africa and, on the strength of similarities of social structures and political conditions among African and other Third World countries, queries the applicability of these mostly Western-oriented policy models for understanding and analyzing public policymaking and implementation structures and processes in such countries. On the basis of identified challenges with public policy processes and structures in such countries, the paper makes suggestions for straightening, structuring and strengthening public policymaking and implementation in African and other Third World countries. Specifically, the paper argues the need to advance appropriate analytical frameworks to record, analyze and interpret public policy processes and procedures in African and other Third World countries with similar characteristics. This, it argues, is a means of bridging the gap between public policy theory and practice in such countries.

Key words: Theories; Models; Public Policy; Third World; African Countries.

1. What Models Are

Social researchers generally employ several tools to understand phenomena, isolate the variables to be studied, establish relationships amongst them and predict the outcomes of such relationships or behaviours. Models constitute one of such tools that social researchers use most frequently.   A model is a working intellectual construct through which social or physical situations, whether real or hypothesized, can be represented (Plano, Riggs and Robin, 1982:77). Although "model" is popularly used to refer to an ideal situation or prototype of reality (for instance, a model housing estate, model college, etc), in Political Science and Policy Studies, in general it is an intellectual research tool (or construct) that is used to guide and organize thought and to order research.

Like theories, models are made up of assumptions, categories and postulates that can be used to organize data, establish and understand relationships between variables and to facilitate explanation and prediction (Anderson, 1975; Egonmwan, 1991; Lane, 2000; Anifowoshe, 2001; and Olaoye, 2005). Models attempt to mirror or reproduce elements of the real world that are critical to achieving specific research objectives. Jan-Erik Lane, in particular, argues that:

> …models fulfill the function of integrating knowledge. Models systematize
> knowledge by creating a network between propositions. The implications of models
> are as important as their explicit content. Just as data without models are blind, so
> models without data are empty (Lane, 2000:72 and 73).

Popper (1959; 1963) argues that a good measure of model utility is its ability to faithfully mirror reality. For this reason, a good virtue of models is simplicity. Beyond this, a model must also possess the ability to suggest appropriate approaches or methodologies to a given problem, clarify thinking and provide fruitful insights that can aid solutions to the problem or situation (Plano, Riggs and Robin, 1982; Lane, 2000). When properly constructed, models can provide precise knowledge about interrelationships in a way that no other approaches can (Henry, 2001:311).

Although some writers use theories and models quite interchangeably in the literature, there is a major difference between the two. While theories emphasize testability for confirmation, amendment or repudiation of hypotheses, models emphasize both the ability to mirror or reproduce elements of the real world, as well as the capacity to suggest appropriate means of solving identified problems.

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2. The Significance of Policy Implementation Models

Models are indispensable to the study, analysis, interpretation, implementation and evaluation of public policies. As Mintzberg (1979) argues, "concepts… models or theories enable us to catalogue our data and experience" of reality. They serve as intellectual compasses, or what Egonmwan (1991) termed "intellectual blinkers" that helps the researcher to select, observe and explain phenomena while sensitizing him to a limited range of possibilities. He argues further that:

> As policy-making involves future action and because the future is uncertain, we need general guidelines upon which action and policy can be based. Theories and models contribute in no little measure to the provision of such guidelines for policy making and studying policy making (Egonmwan, 1991:45).

Policy implementation and evaluation cannot be properly done without a thorough understanding of the policy: its sources or origins; the interests involved- both for and against the policy; the problem that necessitated the policy; implementing agency or institution; etc. All of these can best be properly understood and analyzed with the aid of appropriate models.

Scholars have advanced various criteria for model choice and evaluation in public policy analysis. According to Lane (2000), these include empirical confirmation (Scheffler, 1967a; Glymour, 1980); simplicity (Quine, 1960; Goodman, 1965; Quine and Ullian, 1970), aesthetics (Kuhn, 1962; Feyerabend, 1975); deductive power or theoretical coherence (Nagel, 1961; Hempel, 1965) and pattern-type interpretation (Kaplan, 1964). Other suggestions include model falsifiability or otherwise (Popper, 1959, 1963), abstract generalizability and descriptive realism (Krupp, 1966) or predictive ability (Friedman, 1953; Blaug, 1980 and Caldwell, 1984).

Given this wide array of selection criteria, the choice of a theory or model to explain public policy making, implementation or assessment is by no means an easy task. This is more so because each of the models or theories has its utilities and shortcomings. As Mintzberg (1979) argues, "as every theory or model necessarily simplifies, every theory or model distorts the reality". However, scholars sound a note of warning against extremity in the choice of models or theories of policy formulation and implementation. For instance, Anderson (1976) counsels that:

> Overly simple or glib explanations should be avoided, such as the popular Marxist view that public policy in capitalist countries simply reflects the interests of the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, one should not despair of imposing any order or understanding on what is often a complicated and confusing situation. What we need are models or concepts of public policy…which can be used to organize and clarify our thinking…

Therefore, a good survey of public policy implementation models should identify the strengths and weaknesses of each model and ascertain the types of situations under which each of them can be most useful. This is in agreement with most views represented in existing literature (Anderson, 1976; Grindle, 1980; and Lane, 2000).

3. Rational Comprehensive or Rational Decision-Making Model

The rational comprehensive or rational decision-making model was originally developed for individual choice behaviour, but was later applied to public policy making. The model portrays a world of open system of variables in which the problem is defined, alternatives identified and consequences surveyed with the intention of obtaining the most efficient result of maximum net value in any given situation.

One of its exponents, Thomas Dye (1972) argues that "a policy is rational when it is most efficient, that is, if the ratio between the values it achieves and the values it sacrifices is positive and higher than any other policy alternative". In doing so, attention is paid to all the social, political and economic values sacrificed or achieved by a specific public policy.

The rational comprehensive model is built on the following assumptions that are also called the mini-max or mini-regret rules: (i) that the decision-maker is confronted with a given problem that can be separated from others or at least considered meaningfully in comparison with them; (ii) that goals, values, objectives and sub-goals of the decision-maker are clearly specified and ranked according to their importance or translated into evaluation criteria; (iii) that all possible alternatives for dealing with the problem are examined; (iv) that the consequences of each alternative (costs and benefits) can be determined ahead; (v) that all relevant information about costs, benefits and the environment are available; and (vi) that the evaluative criteria can be properly weighted relative to each other so that the decision procedure maximizes goal attainment (Anderson, 1975; Finsterbusch and Motz, 1980; Lane, 2000).

Lindblom (1968) submits further that in making decisions according to the rationalist tradition, the rational decision-maker who is faced with a given problem must: (i) clarify his goals, values or objectives and then rank or otherwise organize them in his mind; (ii) then list all important possible ways or policies for achieving his goals; (iii) investigate all the important consequences that would follow from each of the alternative policies; (iv) compare the consequences of each policy with goals; and finally (v) choose the policy which consequences most closely match his goals.

It is instructive that the above steps are to be taken in a logical order so as to make the best decision possible in terms of set goals. It is expected to be purely efficient, excluding emotional, traditional and political considerations as they interfere with policy formulation to maximize goals.

Therefore, the rational comprehensive or rational decision-making model is ideal for planning the ways by which policy decisions should be made. To that extent, it has exposed several deficiencies of government planning machineries as they strive towards goal optimization. In light of its findings, modern governments can attempt to improve the quality of their policymaking.

Because of the model's elaborate theoretical assumptions, flexibility of action becomes difficult in real-life situations. For this reason, the rational comprehensive model is seen as appropriate mostly in routine or technical decision-making, where actions of executives are prescribed through precise guidance (such as large scale enterprises) and not in situations of conflicting interest groups (McClerry, 1964).

Therefore, Lane (2000) argues that in real-life situations, the rational comprehensive model may be more attractive as a regulative notion than as a tool for the understanding of how policy making actually takes place. This is because it may not have much impact on how public policies are formulated as it is excessively prescriptive and evaluative in intent. It contains many normative pretensions that may hold against reality. It is against this background that the rational comprehensive model of policy formation has become open to several criticisms.

The first of such criticisms is that the model is too narrow to account for what happens in the real world of policy formulation. This is because it neglects certain forces or factors that come into play in the actual course of policy formulation. These include political, social and bureaucratic factors like direct citizen participation in policy formulation through pressure politics, voting and referenda, petitioning, demonstrations, etc by means of which policy gladiators and other enthusiasts express their opinions on contemplated or existing public policy. Organizational decision-making occurs in a politically-charged subterranean system in which individuals, groups, bureaus, agencies and departments jockey for power, control, authority, resources, allies, symbols, and so on through informal influence on public policy making.

Contrary to the assumptions of the rational comprehensive model, bureaucratic politicking involving covert struggles for advantage through factions, lies, sabotage, trickery and opportunism over others characterize policymaking. As Finterbusch and Motz (1980) argue, Weber's image of the apolitical bureaucrat does not hold in real life situations.

Another criticism of the rational comprehensive model of policy formulation is that some of its assumptions cannot be substantiated in real life. Contrary to the rationalist assumption, decision-makers are often not faced with problems that are concrete and clearly defined. Thus, decision and policy makers have to study the symptoms or consequences to determine what the problem is before policies can be made to tackle them. Diagnosing the problem correctly could be quite challenging for the decision-maker in developing countries.

A third criticism is that the rational comprehensive model makes unrealistic demands on the decision maker. It assumes first, that the decision-maker will have all necessary information on the alternatives for dealing with a problem; that he or she will be able to predict the outcomes of each alternative correctly; and that he or she will be able to make cost-benefit comparisons of all the alternatives present. Some of the constraints to the above include lack of time, the difficulty and costs of collecting information and the complexity of calculations.

There is a further problem of uncertainty in public technologies, through which particular ends assumed by rationalism are supposed to be pursued. Several scholars therefore reject the means-end idea of the rational comprehensive model as unrealistic. According to Lane:

> If public policy possessed knowledge about perfect and reliable programmes that result in the desired outcomes, then the technology problem would be solved. … However, there are several sources of uncertainty in public technologies. Knowledge at the present stage may be inadequate for various reasons; meaning that causal relationships may not be known or… randomness implies that programmes cannot be trusted with a high degree of probability. The problem in public policy making is that it may be very difficult to handle uncertainty, whatever its source, by means of a uniform assignment of probabilities. Often, technologies fail to recognize all the interdependencies between ends and means, or the beliefs in causal relationships between the means and the ends may be unrealistic (Lane, 2000:78).

Suggesting a 'triangle of limits' to rationalism, Simon (1957) argued that in such situations as was described above by Lane, the alternative that is finally selected never permits a complete or perfect achievement of objectives, but is merely the best available solution in the circumstances. In its place, Simon constructed what he called the Behaviour Alternatives Model (BAM) that rests on a consideration of *available alternatives* by which the decision-maker lists all alternative strategies, determines the consequences of adopting each of them and then compares the various consequences with one another before making a choice. In such situations, argue Simon and March (1958), "satisficing" is what the decision-maker does, implying that the chosen option or solution may not be the best from a rational perspective.

The rational comprehensive model of policy formulation also has the problems of 'sunk costs'. 'Sunk costs' imply that previous decisions, investments and commitments to existing programmes and policies that involve large costs may discourage the consideration of many otherwise attractive alternatives in the future. This is so in a situation of scarce resources and many competing needs as is evident in Third World countries like those of Africa, parts of Asia and Latin America.

In many Third World countries, change can be so rapid and sometimes so disruptive that crisis decision-making has to be adopted. Such situations include but are not limited to military take-over of power from elected democratic governments like the aborted *coup-de-tat* in Burundi in May, 2015; insurgencies and guerilla campaigns that threaten to disrupt governance; natural disasters like the earthquakes of Nepal in 2015, the volcanic eruptions in Chile in 2015 or the earthquake in central Italy in August 2016. There could even be human catastrophes like sit-tight rulers that ossify governance and development in African democracies. Under such circumstances, there is hardly enough time to go through the decision-making rituals specified by the rational comprehensive model.

If the concept of rationality is troublesome in situations of individual choice, it cannot be better in collective choice situations where so many issues can be in contention. Decision-makers themselves may not be able to distinguish facts from values due to personal, group or corporate interests. By neglecting much of the objective socio-political and economic uncertainties of Third World countries, the model is less applicable to their situations.

(4) Incrementalism (or Muddling Through)

Incrementalism [otherwise called disjointed incrementalism or Successive Limited Comparisons (S.L.C.)] was developed as an alternative to the rational comprehensive model of policy making. It combines external and internal variables to explain the public policy formulation process. Pioneered by Charles Lindblom in 1959 and developed later in 1965 and 1968, incrementalism argues that policy makers start the decision-making process not with some ideal goal in mind but with the idea of securing improvements on current policies. Eventually, only a limited number of policy options are reviewed, with changes being made at the margins (Grant, 2003). It conveys the simple idea that policy is a function of itself in a time perspective.

Most researchers on incrementalism submit that as a model of public policy formulation, it is very satisfactory from a theoretical point of view because of its coherence, simplicity and empirical confirmation. For instance, Sharkansky (1970a and 1970b) detected a great deal of incrementalism in government budgeting because they typically involve only slight percentage changes from one year to another. Also, incrementalism represents the typical decision making process in pluralist societies where decisions and policies are outcomes of mutual consent amongst groups with otherwise irreconcilable differences. In such situations, incremental decisions are politically expedient since they are acceptable, being not of great policy shifts but only modifications of existing programmes.

Incrementalism also reduces the risks and costs of uncertainty that is so prevalent in public policy formulation. It appears realistic by not demanding that all alternatives be examined since policy makers typically lack the time, knowledge and other resources required to make comprehensive analysis of all alternative solutions to problems. Rather, incrementalism aligns itself with Simon's idea of satisficing by seeking something that will work, albeit on a marginal basis. It therefore provides a way of moving society forward gradually rather than allowing it to stagnate.

However, incrementalism has been criticized from several perspectives. First, the model has the problem of the interpretation of the concept of 'increment'. Perhaps due to its simplicity, it does not specify how large a programme change should be to qualify as an increment. Lane (2000) argues this has serious implications for the model's deductive power and degree of confirmation, such as specifying the importance of a stable relationship between the policies of a year and a succeeding one. Without this, Wanat (1974) suggests, non-incremental changes may be concealed by the natural process of summing, expansion and cutbacks.

Also, Dror (1964) points out the model's assumptions of relative social stability may hold for the American and other affluent societies, but not for many developing countries. The model is valid if present policies are satisfactory, if the nature of the problem is generally stable and if the means of dealing with that problem are continuously available. Such conditions of unusual social stability hardly hold for many developing countries:

…Unlike in the industrialized West, the past in many of the developing countries (DCs) is a colonial past which is considered unsatisfactory and undesired. Therefore, a major break with the "irrelevant past" is the desired goal (i.e. 'quantum jump') rather than incremental, step-by-step approach. Post-independent Tanzania with its policy strategy of 'we must run while others walk' represents the high tide of this approach… (Egonmwan, 1991).

Furthermore, the incremental assumption of stability in the nature of the problem and the technology available for dealing with it no longer holds in the Third World. For instance, governments in developing countries have had to cope with greater demands for service delivery and have had to abandon the role of law-and-order state for a more direct involvement in the provision of basic services, infrastructure and establishment of corporations and later, to privatization and commercialization of those entities as a fallout of the globalization movement. Incrementalism cannot explain satisfactorily, many shifts or quantum jumps in policy in Third World countries, including new means and technologies to solve new problems.

Noting these shortcomings of the model in relation to the developing world, including new developments (shift points) in the global scientific, political and economic arena, Lane argued that:

For all its simplicity, maybe incrementalism is too crude in relation to the complexity of the policy process… its general validity is doubtful and its theoretical appeal is decreased by the obvious voluntaristic aspect of action, including collective action (Lane, 2000:76).

Apart from reinforcing conservatism and inertia that is present in all organizations, incrementalism fails to specify any objective basis for deciding what policies are good, and the direction and rate of the incremental changes. By suggesting only that actions be agreed upon by decision makers, policy formulation may perpetuate inequality and oppression in society by sidelining egalitarian principles.

(5) The Garbage-Can Model

The garbage can model was initially developed to describe policy formulation more realistically and concretely than the rational choice model and it has been applied particularly to public sector institutions, especially university decision-making (Trow, 1984). It assumes that the policy value function is ambiguous; knowledge about the choice situation is uncertain; and decision rules are complex and symbolic. These are true of several decision processes in public sector institutions where, for instance, the concrete decision may be to do nothing on an issue; or to make verbal commitments to a project that is not meant to be implemented in a politically symbolic manner.

It therefore suggests without further clarification that an organization's actions are either rational or irrational. However, while 'rational' behaviour may be difficult for public organizations over some matters, not behaving rationally in such circumstances may not be impractical either. For instance, many goals in public policy making are so imprecise and vague that there could be a grey area between rationality and irrationality, which the garbage can model may not be able to explain. For instance, it is argued that:

The garbage can model appears to raise as many questions as it answers…The garbage can model scores high on model simplicity but is weak in terms of deductive power and falsifiability... If organizational choice is ambiguity and foolishness, then how do we change decision-making in the public sector? (Lane, 2000:81).

Hogwood and Peters (1985, cited in Lane, 2000:81) argue that if the model is true of segments of the public sector at different times, then we need additional information to determine and understand when and why organizational behaviour sometimes become pathological. Thus, the model fails to rise above the empirical simplicity of the rational decision model in its assumptions and its utitlity limited.

(6) Contextual Mapping Models

There are newer, alternative models of public policy that depart from traditional public administration paradigms in an effort to capture reality and respond to emergent public sector challenges and situations. These include models that have been labeled as New Public Management (NPM), New Public Service (NPS), New Public Governance (NPG) and New Public Value (NPV), among others. The generally map the context of policy adoption and in particular, policy implementation.

Contextual mapping identifies policy implementation with their specific contexts and takes into consideration the values, institutions and participants involved in a given implementation situation. As such, it undertakes a mapping of the participants and stakeholders, their perspectives, values, situations and strategies. Also, contextual mapping probes into the desired outcomes of the participants, what they do to realize these outcomes and the effect that their activities have on the policy implementation process as a whole. This is because "mapping the context of problems offers the possibility of understanding the multiple dimensions of knowledge, beliefs, power, meaning and values which frame policy making and implementation" (Parsons, 1995:490). By this, they make themselves attractive to African public policy makers. However, they are often imposed from outside on Africa's political leadership and her policy elites.

(7) Linking Policy Models to Africa's Policy Challenges

Although each of the models already considered has its own strengths and weaknesses as noted, public policy making, implementation and evaluation in Africa has a specific social and environmental peculiarity that compounds the task of applying models to policy situations and problems in the continent.

Anangwe (1997) itemizes about four problems of public policy in Africa, some of which are also true of several other Third World societies with social structures like those of Africa. These are that: (i) African policy makers are socially distant from the population, the supposed beneficiaries of policy. The result is wrong policies that cannot solve the problems confronting the people; (ii) African policy makers fail to articulate properly, the political and administrative roles in the policy process. Worse, findings by policy research institutions do not impact positively on the policy process as these are neglected to the frustration of policy researchers; (iii) failure to mobilize adequate resources and to utilize available capacity renders policy making a symbolic exercise. This leads to poor implementation outcomes; and

(iv) policy implementation is over-politicized while there is the task of convincing groups who initially may not be aware of policy or its implications but attempt to thwart implementation once it commences. Often this is due to what Phillips (1999) termed "creating ex-post-facto 'ownership' of imposed policies". Additionally, there are problems with policy feedback mechanisms because African policy makers do not like to hear that their policies are performing poorly. Therefore, lieutenants tell them what they like to hear, making problems to persist since previous mistakes remain undetected and uncorrected. This denies the system the benefits of policy learning.

Joseph R. Ayee has argued that, under circumstances like the above that are widely replicated in Africa:

public policies and programmes have failed to achieve their objectives largely because the saints are few, the demons many, the wizards are inappropriate, the systems are complex and the organizations are weak… public policies and programmes can succeed (with) the right combination of committed politicians and bureaucrats (saints); appropriate policy analysts (wizards); management of hostile and apathetic groups (demons); … insulation of the policy environment from the vagaries of implementation (systems) and "a good governance approach as a prerequisite for the success of public policies and programmes" (Ayee, 2000).

(8) Africa's Public Policy Priorities

Due to the above, any assessment of model applicability or adaptability to the African policy situation has to consider ecological forces affecting public policy making and implementation. Such includes the over-arching importance of African traditional values like kinship ties and family values in policymaking; resource scarcity; the effects of Ekeh's (1973) "two publics" in public resource management and accountability; corruption; governmental instability often manifesting in high regime turnover; importation of foreign ideas without due consideration for local adaptability; extreme politicization that trivializes professional inputs into public policymaking and implementation; as well as other reasons for policy failure in Africa.

Therefore, the question of model domestication with consideration for ecological factors is central to achieving public policy objectives rather than insensitive adoption of policies that may even be experimental in Europe and the Americas, as is often the case. Democratization of the African public policy enterprise and domestication of received or borrowed policy ideas based on critical local realities are therefore recommended as panaceas to public policy failures in the continent. Such approaches will seek to resuscitate, underscore and harmonize the values of African native wisdom and social technology by which African societies thrived before colonialism, with an appropriate mix of domesticated foreign ideas to realize the African dream for sustainable development.

Such an approach will necessarily recognize and prioritize the following: (a) human development as a prerequisite to all other forms of development; (b) the right education for Africa's youths; (c) deliberate discouragement of attractions to excessive physical wealth by few individuals in the midst of poor majorities; (d) a campaign and action to rejuvenate Africa's industrial sector to turn Africa's natural resources into finished or semi-processed goods. This will improve Africa's earnings from global trade and make her a better competitor and economic collaborator with countries from other parts of the world; and finally, (e) African policy elites must device new ways to generate wider inputs from below to discover and turn existing capabilities to strengths in the policy process. This must include Africans in the diaspora. A Yoruba proverb says 'agbajo

owo la fi n so aya, ajeje owo kan o gbe'gba d'ori', literally meaning that no single person or group has all wisdom to do all things right. This underscores the importance of deliberative policymaking and implementation in the network societies (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003:13) of the globalized world.

(9) Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the applicability of several models of public policymaking and implementation to the African situation. It found that the achievements of many African countries since independence are scanty when compared with their human and natural endowments. It attributes this trend partly to the burden of received policy models and distanced and distracted policy elite. It argues that a lot remains to be done to domesticate and democratize African public policy and make it responsive to the needs of African peoples. It also reiterates the need to develop Africa's human and material resources for higher productivity and place the continent and its peoples on a pedestal of growth and development expected given her endowments. To move African public policy forward, it recommends a careful blend of African priorities, values and judgements with received progressive ideas based on the principles of policy domestication and democratization, acceptance and popular ownership and ideas of progress based on African rather than foreign priorities.

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