
The Assessment of the Concept of Public Policy. The case of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

There is a divergence of thoughts regarding public policy among scholars as some view it as essential for states' development. In contrast, others argue that it indirectly fulfils political elites' economic and political motives. The complications also result from the issue of sustainability of public policy interventions. Therefore, this study assesses the concept of public policy, specifically in Zimbabwe. The research uses qualitative methods and adopts a documentary analysis to collect data in articles and scholarly journals. Furthermore, the study employs thematic content analysis to analyze the collected data. The study's findings indicate that Zimbabwe has implemented many policies to foster countries' development, such as the Land Policy and ZimAsset, but attain a few tangible results. Poor execution of policy strategies and lack of coordination prohibits public policy materialization in Zimbabwe and socio-economic development. These outcomes conclude that even though Zimbabwe adopted much public policy, Zimbabwe's economy continues to deteriorate. Regarding the above, the study suggests that public policy requires a combination of professional and political approaches. Otherwise, public policies would be ineffective and unable to initiate and promote socio-political development at the national level.

Keywords: Public Policy; Laws; Development; Zimbabwe

INTRODUCTION

The concept of public policy is related to diverse theories, meanings, and interpretations, from several scholars. According to Schmitt (2012),

public policy involves a wide range of theoretical perspectives such as programs, instruments, decision making, policy implementation, and public policy evaluation. The term "policies" refer to a wide range of processes and agreements typically at the national level, including legislation, regulations, public policy statements, strategies, and programs (International Fund for Agriculture Development, 2015). Public policy is also viewed as a government decision to act or not act to address an issue (Jansson, 2009). In other words, it is a course of action intended to direct a range of intertwined and long-term problems in a specified field and rarely deals with a single issue. For Reimer et al. (2009), the proactive policy is a deliberate effort to strengthen society's facet, such as developing initiatives to enhance a labour force's skills base. The reactive policy is a reaction to a concern or crisis. Noteworthy, public policy drives the governments and keeps people accountable (ibid). Likewise, governments are involved in various activities such as controlling an internal conflict and the mobilization of the society to participate in external conflict. The other government activities are distributing a broad range of symbolic incentives and material services to citizens and revenue collection, usually in the form of taxes.

Most African countries relied on public policy to chart their development path. Different significant historic public policy documents have shaped how policy is formulated today (American University, 2021). Jones (2014) indicates that policies emanate from conflicts and social problems that demanded public administration. Public policy in America is traced back to when political leaders in the early 1900s sought to establish moral order (ibid). McConnell & Hart (2019) suggest that public policy studies emerged in the 1960s due to dissatisfaction with government performance. Therefore, public policy growth is related to the development of politics.

Some works view public policy as a mixed blessing implying both a blessing and a curse (Radaelli, 1999). At the country level, public policy has two significant benefits. Firstly, it assists in the development of an enabling environment for project implementation. Secondly, it has the potential to contribute to rural poverty reduction, agricultural and human development outcomes on a scale that no single project can solve in the face of climate change. (International Fund for Agriculture Development, 2015).

Furthermore, the policies affect any aspect of the institutional and legal environment in which disadvantaged rural people try to make a living. They have an impact on the world they live in and the economic opportunities that are available to them. As a result, supportive policies will go a long way toward creating the conditions necessary for people to rise out of poverty (ibid). According to Hollister (2007), public policy strategy has the advantage of offering clarity. There would be no path in governance in the absence of public policy, impacting any country's economic output. Bach et al. (2012) suggest that the policy provides guidelines for resolving an issue through a formulation process that includes defining the desired target, identifying and evaluating a series of actions that can contribute to promulgation. Subirats (2016) confirms that public policy simplifies interpretation, and discussions make government actions more straightforward. Kanemoto (2011) suggests that public policy is a beneficial tool as it keeps the government's efforts on track and encourages transparency in public servants' operations. According to Reimer et al. (2009), public policy attempts to accomplish goals in the whole population's best interests, often concentrating on particular groups within society. Additionally, the policies that focus on health improve the population's wellbeing and have long-term health benefits while causing little harm to any groups (Pitt et al., 2018).

Despite public policy's intention to direct the ministries and government agencies, some scholars argue that public policy has struggled to defend, among other things, citizens and states (Ghodoosi, 2016). Moreover, public policy is associated with general matters that crash with private legal agreements. According to Jansson (2009), various obstacles can hinder successful policy implementation, as seen in the disagreements over public policy design. As a result, the attainment of expected outcomes remains limited (ibid). A study conducted by Stanimirovi & Vintar (2020) realizes that the policy-making process was highly complex.

Further, Stanimirovi notes that cross-sectoral policy coordination and management are challenging, and vertical and horizontal policy coherence adds complexity. Public assumptions are also often inadequate for successful policy formulation and execution, resulting in improvisations and ad hoc solutions (ibid). The International Fund for Agriculture Development (2015) highlights that the policies that do not generate opportunities may be an

insurmountable obstacle blocking the path out of poverty. The study assesses the notion of public policy precisely in Zimbabwe.

HISTORY OF PUBLIC POLICY

Several documents, including the Magna Carta and the United States Constitution, demonstrate how the world evolved toward modern values. Today, the Magna Carta is one of history's most significant and long-lasting legislation pieces. The Magna Carta, proposed by England's King John I and signed in 1215 CE, was the first document to incorporate the concept of government power checks. Magna's main objective was to encourage the notion that he was not above the law. Furthermore, the Magna Carta has been around for over 800 years(*ibid*). The United States Constitution codified this idea for an enlightened age and a new land 550 years later. The United States of America is built on the belief that people deserved to have a say in the laws that affect public policy and their rights. This is a modern type of government that based policy on the balanced production of statutes rather than aristocratic influence. Citizens were able to nominate public policymakers who would define policies in this representative form of government. Today, the expansion of bureaucracy may be the most fundamental distinction between modern American public policy and its ancient predecessors. While the U.S. president still retains veto power over laws, policy-making is now a much more negotiated process than centuries ago. The U.S. public policy is currently mainly characterized by the expansion of bureaucracy, government, and public services. Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Earl Butz, among others, were at the forefront of significant policy reform (AmericanUniversity, 2021).

Similarly, the public policy was developed in the 1950s in Australia, when political leaders agreed to enact legislation that created capitalism through a public vote, inspired mainly by anti-communist campaigns (Koleth, 2010). The political and municipal leaders primarily formulated public policy to produce public order and regulate society by developing laws and regulations. Kasmad (2016) insists that Indonesia's government also established public policy in 2007 to regulate street sales. The public policy responded to a moral and health hazard caused by street vendors that conduct their business, particularly in Makassar, Indonesia. Therefore, it regulated

street vending, resulting in systemic public health management. Cheyeka (2016) observes that public policy assisted governments in addressing moral dilemmas and establishing order.

Additionally, the leadership declarations, such as former President Fredrick Chiluba's declaration that Zambia was a Christian nation, led to creating a national religious policy. Resultantly was establishing a religious affairs ministry and the enactment of a constitutional provision (ibid). However, (Chizelu 2006) argues that Zambia's declaration of a religious policy was meaningless.

THE CONCEPT OF PUBLIC POLICY

Public policy refers to the government's action to change things, upgrade its people's lives, and solve problems to improve its citizens' lives (Jones, 2014). He insists that public policy is an informed, comprehensive, enforceable, binding, lawful, authoritative, deliberate, and purposeful structure of interaction with political office bearers within the more remarkable substance of the political system. Several methods are employed to execute the public policy. Some of the methods used are rules, knowledge exchange, permits, taxes, alliances, and doing nothing (ibid). Public policy is important at a particular point in time and in a specific area. However, it is not static since it must be continually modified in light of experience, operation field research, and evolving circumstances and needs. Subirats (2016) establishes that public policy is a deliberate or goal-oriented course of action rather than haphazard efforts. Government officials decide to make up a public policy through bargaining and compromise with various interest groups during the policy-making process. Bach et al. (2012) assert that politicians' task is to develop policies that guide government agencies and ministries' operations. Many politicians bring a range of skills to public policy. Bach further claims that politicians have to establish accountability for public spending and decision-making. Furthermore, the law is the foundation of public policy, implying that it has an authoritative and legally coercive quality (ibid).

One of Nigeria's public policies is the monthly sanitation exercise with legal force and attracts a form of discipline for those who violate it (Husted & Blanchard, 2020). Marume (2016) highlights that several factors influence public policy. Some of the elements are economic development, population growth, urbanization, technological

innovations, natural disasters, conflicts, wars, depression, industrial and economic development.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study uses qualitative methods, and it is a systematic method for analyzing electronic and printed non-numerical data to obtain scientific information (Bowen, 2009). The primary purpose of document analysis is to get a deeper understanding, public opinion, and a complete image of a phenomenon under investigation (Bhandari, 2020); Gaille, (2017); Almalki, (2016). The study identifies the documents by combining key terms and word searches related to public policy and no date constraints on the search because the materials' importance in their substantial contribution to the current debate on public policy took precedence, regardless of age. However, the researcher attempts to capture as many recent documents as possible to illustrate the topic's growing importance and currency and omit non-public policy literature. Nevertheless, to avoid missing potentially significant literature, reference lists of selected publications were scanned for similar materials to the subject under consideration (Kawa, 2011).

Additionally, the researcher checks the information such as title and abstract of papers and other publications found during the search. The analysis included materials that met pre-defined inclusion and exclusion requirements and were relevant to the subject of interest. Relevance, currency, and authority were the general inclusion requirements (Wach, 2018). Relevance referred to how the material had contributed to public policy discourse. In contrast, the authority referred to whether it had been published by a credible source or had been peer-reviewed or professionally edited (*ibid*).

On the other hand, currency refers to whether the material is still up to date in the public policy debate, for example, by citations (Cayla et al., 2012). The study finds a total of 1454 references using the initial search criteria. However, using the screening as mentioned earlier and eligibility processes, 63 papers were selected for full-text retrieval, with 45 meetings the final inclusion requirements. The researcher reads the full texts comprehensively to extract the appropriate material and analyzes the pieces of information collected by qualitative content analysis. The collected data were compared to identify patterns, relations, and differences, and places in themes

without coding but with notes (Gumbu, 2021). The summarizing series was manually done and intended to determine the essential findings in each input data's views and eliminate irrelevant data and inconsistencies. The preparation summary also includes noting the reasons for discarding each summary outcome's specific aspects so that their omission would be remembered. Pieces of information gleaned from the summaries were synthesized, interconnected, and paraphrased to make them more condensed, manageable, concise, and coherent while caring not to alter the data's meaning. As a result, a more refined and brief summary of related literature emerged.

THE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN ZIMBABWE

Since independence in 1980 at national, ministerial, departmental, and local levels, several policies have been developed in Zimbabwe to account for the population to resolve previous socio-economic imbalances. Nation-building and economic growth were top priorities at the time. As a result, some concepts such as equity, growth, and transformation become popular guiding policy decision-making in all sectors of the economy (Zhou & Hardlife, 2012). Direct policy formulation and execution in Zimbabwe are governed by the Zimbabwean Constitution, especially sections 299 and 301. These sections give the Zimbabwean Parliament the power to monitor and regulate all commissions, institutions, and government agencies, and government expenditure at all levels. Chiwunze (2018) confirms that public policy ensured that the nation's financial resources were distributed fairly. Some of the popular policies were the First Five Year National Development Plan (FFYNDP) of 1986 to 1990, the framework for Economic Reform, Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST) 1998, and Letters of Intent to the International Monetary Fund 1999, among other blueprints (Chigudu, 2015). This study will focus on three policies: The Reconciliation policy, the Land policy, and the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (Zim-Asset).

RECONCILIATION POLICY

Efforts of Zimbabwean reconciliation dates back from the first decade of independence. For instance, the pre-independence antagonistic ties

between the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe National Union-PF (ZANU-PF) and their traditional rivalry for power caused a lot of conflicts. The two liberation parties' intense rivalry was based on ideological and ethnic factors, causing turbulence in Matabeleland and the Midlands Province. The government dispatched the Fifth Brigade to quell alleged ZAPU dissident disturbances, which resulted in gross human rights violations. This state campaign against civilians became known as Gukurahundi. Before 1980, other black nationalist groups such as the United African National Congress (UANC), headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, and the Zimbabwe African National Union Ndonga (ZANU Ndonga), led by Ndabaningi Aaron Rwodzi, were excluded from ZANU-reconciliation PF's program. Based on the principle of independence, the policy of reconciliation, after a fifteen-year civil war, Zimbabwe's post-colonial reconstruction demanded reconciliation and democracy (Rwodzi, 2017). Simura & Mudimu (2019) indicates that the Matabeleland disturbances and the country's economic difficulties in the last decade of the twentieth century failed to preserve ethnic peace in Zimbabwe. As a result, in the post-2000 period, the reconciliation disintegrated. Black Africans participating in high-intensity land occupations forced Zimbabwe's government to give in to everyday demands and institute the Quick Track Land Reform Program (Mkodzongi & Lawrence, 2019). This healing process will affect both the present and the future, not just the past. Hence, strategies such as amnesties, pardons, and commissions of inquiry, used in the past as instruments for justice and reconciliation, have failed to address Zimbabwe's complicated history of conflict violence. Despite many government efforts to address the problem, Zimbabwean reconciliation remains a recurrent issue. Goredema et al. (2014) reveal that Zimbabwe's reconciliation process is complicated as the individuals and families with various forms of violence in multiple conditions will need different reconciliation strategies. Other countries with similar historical backgrounds to Zimbabwe, on the other hand, have made more progress, such as South Africa (Mhandara, 2020).

THE LAND POLICY OF ZIMBABWE

The majority of people in Zimbabwe who live in rural areas depend on land for their livelihoods. The land is vital not only for food production

and self-sufficiency but also for a sense of belonging and provides raw materials for the manufacturing and industrial sectors. The desire for land was one of the main motivating factors in Zimbabwe's liberation movement, which ultimately led to independence in 1980 (Bluestone, 2001). However, because of the constitutional limitations, the new government could not resolve land inequalities leftover from colonialism at the time of independence. With the demand for land in Zimbabwe following independence, due to various factors, including population growth, the official land policy from 1985 ran counter to the rural population's expectations, criminalizing self-provisioning of land reinforcing the market-based approach inherited in 1980. Resultantly, by 1990 only 15% of Zimbabwe's land owned by Large Scale Commercial Farmers (LSCF) had been shifted to blacks, reaching only 6% of the rural population (Chambati, 2020).

Meanwhile, data from deprived areas indicated a rise in illegal land occupation (ibid). There were several changes to both the constitution and the Land Acquisition Act between 1980 and 2000. Juana, 2006 illustrates that the political pressure was also mounting on the government to keep its promises to the people. The drastic redistribution is desirable and feasible as it aims to distribute land to the landless majority (Thomas, 2003). Zimbabwe's land redistribution was based on social justice and equality values and drew on a brief history of land in Zimbabwe from the first European expulsions to independence. Land resettlement has ushered in an era of dramatic agrarian transition over the past years. However, Chuma (2020) argues that the controversial land reform pushes away investors, with the Zimbabwean economy losing nearly 54 percent of its output capacity between 2000 and 2010. Scoones et al. (2011) emphasise that the Zimbabwean land reform could have been productive if seen as a source of livelihood and redistributed economic wealth rather than a political instrument or a source of patronage.

ZimAsset

The Zimbabwean ruling party, ZANU PF, unveiled its economic policy, ZimAsset, to revive the country's collapsing economy following a landslide victory in the 2013 harmonized elections. ZimAsset is a five-year economic program that began in October 2013 and ended in December 2018. It is a financial strategy aimed to achieve sustainable

development and social justice through indigenization and empowerment. Zimbabwe's economy has been in steady decline since the late 1990s, regardless of its political situation. The prime purpose of ZimAsset was to restore Zimbabwe's economy to its former glory as Africa's breadbasket while also improving the general welfare of its people.

Furthermore, ZimAsset is divided into various clusters for ease of implementation, including food security and nutrition, value addition and beneficiation, social services and poverty eradication, infrastructure, and utilities. Matutu (2018) highlights that the ZimAsset will continue to serve as a framework for various socio-economic interventions of the government and non-state actors who believe in it. Matutu adds that ZimAsset is likely to bring substantial economic growth, but this growth would have a minor and negligible effect on Zimbabweans' daily lives. It is still a long way from being a reality. Chuma (2020) argues that ZimAsset struggled due to a shortage of resources, a lack of capacity, restricted focus, policy inconsistency, a poorly performing public sector, and weak governance. Moreover, a five-year time span was too limited for the policy's full implementation (Chigudu, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the concept of public policy, precisely Zimbabwe. The study results indicate that public policy directs political office bearers' path and encourages transparency to track governments' performance. However, the idea has shifted from protecting citizens. The results show that Zimbabwe adopted several policies after attaining independence, such as the Reconciliation policy, Land policy, and ZimAsset. However, regardless of these policies, few tangible results of socio-economic development as widespread food insecurity and unemployment in both rural and urban have been witnessed. The majority of the public policy implemented in Zimbabwe has failed to address the socio-economic crisis. The challenges are primarily due to failure to enact well-thought-out, understandable proposals. The lack of capacity to translate such policies into effect, bad policy timing, political inaction to account for the loss, and a lack of resources prohibits attaining tangible results. These outcomes conclude that despite implementing several public policies in Zimbabwe, the

Southern African country faces many socio-economic and political challenges.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study suggests that Zimbabwe should follow a holistic and systematic approach to public policies and prioritize their implementation. The creation and execution of public policies are successful only if carried out systematically over the entire policy cycle. If such measures are underrated, the outcomes are less than desirable, even counterproductive in certain situations. More emphasis should be on raising awareness of the value of the public policy cycle and critical factors affecting policy performance, both in public governance research and practice.

There is a need for rigorous policy implementation. Zimbabwe has been long on planning and short on performance with regular changes to the programs, successive administration leading to policy inconsistencies. Zimbabwe's government has to capacitate its programs with enough human capital, funding, and other necessary tools to drive the public policies. Zimbabwe's syndrome has become a syndrome to download responsibilities on lower government institutions levels without capacitating them with adequate financial support. Zimbabwe's government should also reduce its expenditure and ensure fiscal transparency to enable its materialisation results.

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