

Citizen Involvement in the Formulation of Public Policy

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Abstract: To assist the government in determining its mandate, citizens should be involved as they best know their needs. The significance of citizen engagement in the process of policy formulation is rooted in among others, the fact that public policy outputs and effects affect those to whom the policy is targeted at. This paper identifies areas of contribution of citizen involvement in public policy formulation. Literature illustrates that some governments do not engage citizens sufficiently in the process of public policy formulation. It remains relatively unclear as to why government evades engaging citizens in the formulation of public policy and conduct random and cursory consultations in order to enshroud the lack of consultation. The case of Botswana, illustrates that citizens made adequate efforts in the contribution to the formulation of the country's public policy. This study therefore, shows that citizens are an important stakeholder hence government engages them in a specific domain. This study also discusses selected cases of citizen engagement in Botswana. The study further acknowledges that the failure of policy implementation can be linked to failure on the part of civil servants where they do not follow proper procedure as recommended by the government. To this end, public policy successes require strong involvement of public officials to avoid any policy implementation failure.

Keywords: Citizen Involvement, Formulation, New Public Management, Public Policy

1. Introduction

The discipline of Public Administration has undergone transformations in the management of the public sector from what scholars call the 'traditional model' of public administration into a transition called 'New Public management'. This shift in paradigm led to change in our general understanding of public administration dynamics and ushered into perspective some of the notions that were virtually disregarded under traditional public administration. One such notion is that of citizen involvement. According to Antonini, Hogg, Mannetti, Barbieri, & Wagoner (2015:132), initiatives that promote direct participation by citizens in governmental policies have been in place since the 1950s with the underlying assumption that citizens' direct participation in their government will promote more democratic and effective governance.

The concept of citizen involvement in Botswana can be traced to the pre-independence era where the community was seen as part of the decision making structures where the village leadership sought ideas and advice from locals prior to introducing policies and programs. Lekorwe (1989:217) notes that Botswana has a strong tradition of participation and consultation at all levels of public life from the

village to central government, and this, has strong roots from *Tswana* custom of holding 'town meetings' known as the *Kgotla* which still exists and is part of the local consultative network. Lekorwe (1998:88) contrasts Botswana with other Sub Saharan African countries acknowledging that the country is unique as it adopted a pluralist political system that should naturally support the formulation of policy by interest groups. On a similar note, Maipose (2008:4,39) points out that while planning in Botswana was centrally conceived, there is evidence to show that policies were and continue to be realistically rooted in the tradition of the people and this has broadened participation in policy and planning initiatives.

This paper seeks to demonstrate that while citizen engagement has traditionally been the bedrock of policy formulation in Botswana, there has been a decline in the culture of citizen engagement in policy formulation over a period of time. The paper begins by interrogating the concept of citizen involvement linking it to citizen participation. The paper then provides a theoretical framework to explain the concept under study and then deliberates over a number of experiences that emanated from citizen involvement (as well as from exclusion from same) in policy formulation hence producing unfavourable policy outcomes and effects. This paper also

provides lessons learnt from the study with a view to have readers reflect on citizen involvement processes and practice. To this end all stakeholders should strive to actively foster collaborative participation. Finally, this paper calls for further research in the area of 'policy formulation' in Botswana so that causal linkages could be established between policy formulation and other areas of public policy making process such as policy implementation and evaluation.

2. The Concept of Citizen Involvement

Citizen participation is described as the involvement of citizens in a wide range of activities that relate to the making and implementation of policy including the determination of levels of service, budget priorities, and the acceptability of physical construction projects in order to orient government programmes towards community needs (Fox & Meyer, 1995). For Campbell and Marshall (2000) & Anderson (2015:1), citizen involvement means the public's ability to take part or participate in the nation-states' processes and activities especially concerning preparation of public policy and the critical decision making that affects their day to day lives. According to Obasi & Lekorwe, (2014:2) various scholars are in agreement that citizen engagement refers to ways, activities or processes for involving citizens in the public policy process. Basically citizen involvement entails engagement of citizens as participants in the development of public activities such as public policy formulation.

Occasionally, some scholars utilize the concepts 'citizen involvement' and 'citizen participation' to refer to the same process. It is critical that we make a distinction between the two concepts. Cogan & Sharpe (1986:283) define citizen participation as a process which provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions. Their take is that citizen participation has long been a component of the democratic process. They also trace the roots of citizen participation to ancient Greece and Colonial New England. Before the 1960s, governmental processes and procedures were designed to facilitate 'external' participation. Citizen participation was institutionalized in the mid-1960s with President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs.

Mize (1972) brings to the fore another title – 'public involvement'. In his view, public involvement means to ensure that citizens have a direct voice in public

decisions. He acknowledges that the terms 'citizen' and 'public' as well as 'involvement' and 'participation' are often used interchangeably. The two concepts are generally used to indicate a process through which citizens have a voice in public policy decisions, both have distinctively different meanings and convey little insight into the process they seek to describe. Many agencies or individuals choose to exclude or minimize public participation in planning efforts claiming citizen participation is too expensive and time consuming (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004:58). Yet, many citizen participation programs are initiated in response to public reaction to a proposed project or action. However, there are benefits that can be derived from an effective citizen involvement program (Parker, 2002). Cogan & Sharpe (1986:284) identify five benefits of citizen participation to the planning process namely: information and ideas on public issues; public support for planning decisions; avoidance of protracted conflicts and costly delays; reservoir of good will which can carry over to future decisions; and spirit of cooperation and trust between the agency and the public.

Bryson & Crosby (1993) indicate that public policy formulation is a process that requires various stakeholders and may be a difficult one or result in failure if the citizens are left out of the planning process. Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, (1955:274) place a precondition to citizen involvement to policy formulation stating that in order for citizens to be involved in the policy formulation process, they must first have a reason and interest in politics, concern regarding public issues, a sense that their actions will make a difference and a sense of civic responsibility. They argue further that in addition to this psychological participation in the political process, the availability of certain resources may have profound effect on citizen involvement.

Countries across the world have engaged (through either involvement or participation) citizens in policy formulation. Our view is that a distinction between citizen involvement and citizen participation can be drawn notably since the process of 'involvement' often assumes a top-down approach whilst 'participation' is often instigated by the public itself. We however note that the ultimate goals of the two concepts (citizen involvement and participation) are the same. In either situation, it is critical that citizens are engaged at the initiation of any public policy for purposes of ownership and smooth policy formulation as well as implementation.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Rationale for Public Involvement in Policy Formulation

Involving citizens in the formulation of public policy is necessary for modern-day governments. Whilst a plethora of reasons for citizen involvement in policy formulation have been captured in volumes of literature we mention just a few. Holmes (2011:1) argues that the theory and practice of public administration is increasingly concerned with placing the citizen at the centre of policy makers' considerations, not just as target, but also as agent. This he says, is a very key aspect in policy making because the policies made are for the people therefore they should be made with the people.

Further to this, it should be noted that citizen involvement educates the public and develops a sense of citizenship. Western experts in particular sometimes fail to appreciate that other countries are still in the midst of a historical process of 'state formation'. There is no state formation without equally historical development of the notion of citizenship (International Peace Bundling Advisory Team, 2015:3). Citizen involvement is equally important as it is needed in building commitment and capacity of the government and citizens. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2001:1) recommends that governments invest adequate time, resources and commitment in building robust legal policy and institutional frameworks thereby developing appropriate tools and evaluating their own performance in engaging citizens in policy making.

3.2 Citizen Involvement is a Fundamental Component of the Planning System

Citizens, as well as various groups within societies, often remain in defence of their interests, they can assist in the (ex-ante) analysis of the effects of policies as this assists with putting the right policies into place and putting aside the wrong ones. Marzuki (2015:21) puts it that citizen interest allows involvement in the decision process from an early stage of related planning procedure, this will encourage citizens input in the planning process and present the views of the entire community on specific issues to ensure that the proposed plan mirrors their aspirations. This will consequently affect the citizen's ability to comprehend the decision making process (Marzuki, 2015:22).

A successful citizen participation program must be integral to the planning process. The program should also be focused on its unique needs, designed to function with available resources and responsive to the citizen participates. It is significant to involve citizens in public policy formulation so as to defuse tension and conflict over public decisions (Cogan, 1986:298). Equally, information should be availed to the public in the same way, government expects citizens to usher it with information. Poorly designed and inadequate measures for information, consultation and active participation in policy making can undermine government relations with the citizens (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001:1). The participation of public in policy formulation can be effective only when that decision can have an impact in their community. That policy should have an interest in the community demand otherwise there is a possibility of rejection by the citizens.

3.3 Increased Efficiency and Service

Linked to the discussion above, it is argued that citizen's involvement's efficiency and effectiveness are compromised by the difficulties faced by the citizen when it comes to understanding the technical reports and the complex planning issues (Jenkins, 1993:282). It is imperative that the citizen be more involved in the public policy formulation process and have a better understanding of the same process for instance, a truly responsible government will ensue that citizens understand and actively consider policy choices that are before the society (Graves, 1995:40). This is likely to increase the efficiency of the policy being formulated at implementation stage. According to Sidor (2012:88), the main goal of public authorities aimed at involvement of citizens is to improve the decision making process and the quality of service, therefore public authorities involve citizens in order to achieve better effects in government.

3.4 Opportunity for Citizens to Influence Public Decisions

Citizen involvement in policy formulation accords citizens an opportunity to influence public decisions. We argue that the denial of the public to participate in policy formulation is often linked to how government perceives a 'citizen'. To illustrate this, we derive our position from Abels' (2007) detailed description of a 'citizen' who states that a citizen

constitutes any resident of a certain country or location who may be a client or customer, public administrators, policy makers, public servants, expert stakeholders, public leaders such as chiefs and ministers, from the political stance; the voters, individual youth or elders and so on who receives the services from the government. In other words, the term 'citizen' includes just about anyone within a particular society or community regardless of their gender, social standing, ethnic group, vulnerability state (Gaventa & McGee, 2010) race and religion.

The contentious issue however is that a number of scholars seem to have a shared common shift to reduce a citizen to basically mere 'public members' who expect the government to meet or satisfy their individual basic needs, expectations and interests through the provision of public policy that is citizen inclusive (Innes & Booher, 2004; Berner, Amos & Morse, 2011). This is a thought most governments subscribe to. Innes & Booher (2004) and Berner, Amos & Morse (2011) further observe that despite this notion, some public administrators and academics insist that a citizen is instead the owner of the government and as such, citizens are not just the masses following the elites being the government. They possess power and can certainly control the government. As such, involving citizens at the policy formulation stage provides an opportunity to citizens to have their government make choices informed by their input.

3.5 Promote Good Governance

According to Devas & Grant (2003), in order for the government to correctly choose what to do, the citizens should be involved since they know and are sure of what they want from the government. Public participation is perceived as one of the milestones of democracy and local governance. Public participation in the making and implementation of policy as such is indispensable for sustaining democracy and promoting good local governance and administration (International Peace Bundling Advisory Team, 2015:7). Additionally, citizen participation strengthens government the relations with citizens and is a rigorous investment in better policy-making and a core component of good governance.

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2002:4) emphasises that participation is reflected as one of the marks of democratic government. This is because participatory democracy offers

a mechanism for including people to be involved in the governing procedures of government. Local government is the closest to the public for allowing participatory democracy to show, public participation further promotes democratic principles such as political equality, majority rule, popular sovereignty and popular consultation. Concurring with the above views is Davids (2005:19) who states that public participation denotes an inclusive process aimed at deepening democracy through formal participatory mechanisms. In South Africa, a strong view on public participation is taken into consideration in the local government during the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The local authority must give the community an opportunity to make an input concerning the IDP which is a five-year plan. The local authorities cannot implement any program without getting the community input on the IDP. This is a normal process according to South African legislation, the community should be consulted. The South Africa constitution stipulates that the public or the community is to be encouraged to participate in policy making.

4. International Experiences on Citizen Involvement in the Formulation of Public Policy

In Canada, the country has various forums where communities and citizens can express their views on public policy issues and these include: attending public consultation groups on the policy issues in question; Government initiated referenda; Legislative hearings; Elections; Contacting media; Royal Commissions; Community meetings; Town hall meetings; Surveys and opinion polls; Policy round tables; Petitions, demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns or other advocacy strategies (Tehara, 2010:16; Motsi, 2009:7). In Switzerland, before any decision should be taken government always conducts a referendum, it shows that the people do have a say in any government decision (Trechsel & Sciarini, 1998:110, 111). An enabling advantage for this positive development is that the population of Switzerland is very low.

The Australian experience shows that government ministries and departments engage citizens in the policy formulation process. For instance, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources commits its officers to six aspects of a consultation process in relation to policy formulation and implementation. When developing policy advice, they consult widely; provide reasonable time frames

for its citizens to respond to policy proposals; explain the process; and ensure that the contribution to policies is balanced and relevant to the Government's broader economic and social objectives. After making policy decisions, they provide information to citizens about decisions that affect them; and citizens would then be consulted during the implementation of (Curtain, 2003:6).

In Brazil, despite experiencing challenges in citizen involvement, the municipal health councils are part of a movement that in which civil society and political actors have joined forces to institutionalize political spaces for citizen participation in policy-making (Coelho, Pozzoni & Cifuentes, 2005:182). The Brazilian experience shows that contrary to a widely held view of civil society as separate from the political realm, an emerging trend in Latin America shows that civil society, the state and political parties are closely linked. For example, the expansion of civil society has a significant effect on the political society. Civil society leaders reached out to, and closely worked with politicians to help elect candidates and influence public policy (Wampler, 2004:79,80). Neighborhood leaders and reformist politicians created political alliances based on the idea that citizens should be directly incorporated into the policymaking process (Wampler, 2004:80).

In an empirical study conducted by the Institute for Social Research in America, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected in 14 U.S. cities with populations greater than 100,000 (as of 1996). The objective was to find out the impact of citizen participation upon institutions and the life of those cities, the study revealed that there's a fairly strong relationship between the amount of and quality of citizen participation in these cities and quality of life and quality of decision-making (Markus, 2002:8-11). According to Obasi & Lekorwe (2014:3), in Britain, policy making spaces for citizen engagement involve platforms such as surveys. For instance, a survey of different forms of public participation in 216 local governments revealed that 92% of the local governments used service satisfaction surveys while 86% used complaints/suggestion schemes while in many local governments other forms of public participation are widely used.

4.1 Policy Formulation in Botswana

Consultative mechanisms and procedures for policy formulation in Botswana vary. The state determines

spaces for public involvement and participation. We will demonstrate this by citing examples from different sectors of the country's economy. Within what is evidently a centralised policy set-up, the state contributes to some notions of participation such as building public trust in government, raising the value of democracy and strengthening civic capacity. The state also allows government to tap new sources of policy-relevant ideas, information and resources when making decisions. The case of the Kgotla system in Botswana gives a good example that indicates the significance of citizen involvement in the public policy making process. According to Obasi & Lekorwe (2014:1) the Kgotla system is a consultative and democratic system of governance. The Kgotla system is known for various public activities that allow active citizen participation including open meeting discussions that seek to discuss issues of concern in the community such as criminal and delinquencies of the youth, administration issues relating to allocation of land, marriage or family conflict resolution, a place for informing and educating the public about any matter and the list goes on and on. Further, it is noted that the Kgotla encourages freedom of speech and invited all opinions irrespective of their substance or rational (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997:123).

Siphambe (2003:22) acknowledges the existence of structures available for citizen engagement is meant to allow every Motswana to participate effectively in policy and implementation. These include the Kgotla, Village Development Committees (VDC) and freedom Squares. Members of Parliament, Ministers and Councillors use the Kgotla to provide regular feedback explained by government regarding policies and programs. Siphambe (2003:22) also raises a concern over the fact that the Kgotla system is limited partly because the capacity of some members of the community to understand the policy being proposed by government is very low. This he says, results in a tendency for the chief and government to publicise government proposed policies and programs while the community provides a passive, receptive and helpless audience.

4.2 Contemporary Citizen Involvement Experiences in Botswana

In the field of energy, the use of Kgotla has come to signify the embodiment of good governance measured by popular participation, consultation, accountability, transparency and rule of law. The

Ministry of Infrastructure, Science and Technology planned to construct a radioactive storage facility in Pilikwe village (Tshukudu & Garekwe, 2009). Pilikwe villagers mobilised to oppose this decision and unanimously thwarted the proposal at a Kgotla meeting held in July 2012 (Seretse, 2012). A closer look of the Pilikwe case reveals that those who led the protests were the village elite and professionals who are well informed in environmental issues and, therefore, fully appreciate the implications of the location of such a radioactive storage facility in their village. In their opposition to the facility, international standards stipulating that such facilities should be located where there was a keen host community were invoked. The group was well aware that, for legitimation purposes, they had to seek support of the villagers through the institution of the Kgotla (Molebatsi, 2012:13).

A different case involved land allocation in Tlokweng, a peri-urban settlement east of Gaborone. The Tribal Land Act guides the allocation of land in the country's communal areas such as Tlokweng. The Act provides that any citizen of Botswana can be allocated land anywhere in the country. Citing Keoreng (2012), Molebatsi, (2012:13) provides that Tlokweng village has for some, time been experiencing an inflow of people looking for residential plots as well as rented accommodation due to its proximity to the city of Gaborone. Consequently, land became a scarce commodity in Tlokweng and other peri-urban areas around Gaborone. Among such scarcity, the Tlokweng Land Board advertised 285 residential plots for allocation. Approximately 20,000 people flooded the Land Board offices to collect the application forms, of which 19,000 were submitted to the Land Board for consideration. To deal with the applications, the Tlokweng Land Board decided to use a lottery to pick successful applicants. The Tlokweng community used a kgotla meeting to say their opposition to the lottery system used by the Land Board. In objecting to the Land Board decision, the community in Tlokweng resorted to differentiating between what they termed 'natives' and 'non-natives'. The complaint was that, of the 285 allocations made, only eight were to 'natives' or 'indigenous' residents of Tlokweng. Submitted to the Land Tribunal for decision, the Tribunal ruled that the Tlokweng Land Board should reconsider its decision. In return, the Land Board has appealed the ruling of the Land Tribunal (Morula, 2013:5). While the Tlokweng case is still to be resolved, it has led to proposals on

changes to the land-allocation practice (Lute 2012) and policy and in Botswana. A case in point is the 60/40 percent land allocation quota set by cabinet for areas in the periphery of Gaborone.

In the tourism sector, Mbaiwa (2005:164) argues that lack of initial citizen involvement by the government of Botswana regarding the tourism region of Okavango delta where all the relevant stakeholders had an equal opportunity to derive economic benefits from the resources that surround them brought about domination of foreigners in the market. Massyn (2008) adds that the local people lost trust in the government as the foreign companies dominated the Okavango Delta they lost access of decision making on the way their natural resources ought to be used. The local people indicated that they have since been excluded and their opinions disregarded. As such the economic benefits reaped more by non-citizens rather than the local people who continue to be unemployed and live in extreme poverty while they are in such a rich tourist area.

Mbaiwa (2005:159) further emphasizes that the booming of the tourism industry in the Okavango Delta was envisioned to providing social equity. That is, fairness and equal access by all stakeholders irrespective of gender, age, ethnic background and economic status, distribution of costs, decision making and management that promotes rural development and thus eventually alleviate poverty. The citizens and local people occupy unattractive, low paying and unskilled jobs such as drivers, cleaners, waiters and so on, while the foreigner occupy attractive managerial high salaried jobs. However, the author points out that later when the government realized the importance of the citizen's contribution towards the Okavango region the government tried to fund the local people through the Financial Assistance Policy (FAP).

4.3 Shortfalls and Opportunities for Improvement

An analysis of events shows that citizen involvement in Botswana has often times been relegated to one sided consultation. There have been several incidents where public officials refused to engage citizens at Kgotla meetings following their public address and this negates the intentions of the consultation exercise as communication in this instance was only one way. It is common knowledge

that the more literate members of any community migrate to urban centres in search of employment. Individual citizens remaining in villages often find out that the issues presented before them are much more complex and go beyond their level of understanding, expertise or experience. As Pitkin, (1972:61) and (Michels, 2011:280) observe, the most important challenge of citizen participation is how to ensure that there is an accurate representation of a variety of interests in society. Public consultations as such, are generally not representative and this may twist policy planning in unfavourable directions. To this effect, consulting village residents in rural areas alone and not providing a platform for their relatives in towns and cities on matters of their villages negates the ethos of citizen involvement as government is likely not to get universal views on policy issues under consultation.

Further to this, government ought to allocate sufficient time for consultation. The practice of a 'top down' approach in policy formulation approach results in conception of policies whose outcomes and effects often do not resonate well with the ordinary citizens. While we acknowledge that policy formulation is partially a political process, any analysis of political processes should identify realities and institutional relationships that are reflected in daily events. They need to be identified to assist in understanding where, who and how to lobby to achieve your objectives in policy development or reform (World Health organisation, 2005:7). Spot-announcement of public policy also denies a particular policy the requisite public policy formulation process that is necessary for conceptualising a well-conceived policy. In the past, Botswana has made significant strides in formulating sound public policy through citizen involvement (Obasi & Lekorwe, 2014:4-6) one of key consultation mechanisms used was the Kgotla system. It is imperative upon the government to reinvigorate the use spirit of Kgotla and ensure that it is effectively used as a space for public policy formulation involvement arena as previously practiced. The government should as well, utilise vigorously additional existing government consultative structures in engaging citizens in policy formulation. This will inhibit formulation of public policy that fails at implementation stage or worse, cost government significant amount of money at both inception and cessation. The utilization of existing structures should include where necessary, delegation at local authority level.

4.4 Lessons Learnt

The lessons learnt documented below are derived from various experiences documented in literature used in this study. The lessons are as stated below.

- Looking at citizen involvement, there are prominent challenges of citizen involvement. These include relating to employing multiple techniques of citizen engagement as it can become burdensome and time consuming; it can even cause a lot of delay in reaching a common decision if a wider community is indulged in the policy formulation process (Bryson & Crosby, 1993).
- Furthermore, citizen involvement in the formulation of public policy enhances democratic practice. Public consultation allows and promotes participation, hence managing issues that can arise when the public is excluded from a decision-making process.
- Participation of citizens through consultation improves the quality of policy being developed, making it more practical and relevant, and helping to ensure that services and products are delivered in a more effective and efficient manner. As Holmes (2011: 39) observes, participation by citizens in the governance of their society is the bedrock of democracy.
- There are valuable lessons to be learnt on citizen enrolment from traditional consultative mechanisms such as the Kgotla system of Botswana. The systems provided the framework within which citizen engagement in the policy process was actively promoted, consequently, the engagement of citizens in Botswana has become part and parcel of the public policy making process (Obasi & Lekorwe, 2014:7). However, there should be a reconstruction of new relationships between state and citizens where decision-making is a collaborative process (Gaventa, 2004:25) as citizen participation can legitimize a policy, programme, its plans, actions and leadership Cook (1975).
- Citizen involvement is a much broader issue that is a work in progress, a continuous approach; hence it needs all stakeholders to continuously inform themselves in order to promote modernized, up to date effective participation.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we argue that citizen involvement is imperative to the existence of any democratic system or government. In order to strengthen and maintain good relations amongst the citizen and the government effective 'communicative-involvement' must take place. Additionally, citizen involvement provides a two-way learning process where the government learns from the consultative feedback from citizens and citizens also acquire knowledge on how the government operates. This shared education is critical for both parties in contributing towards high quality public policy formulation as it would minimise unnecessary manipulation and conflict caused by lack of knowledge, accountability and transparency, understanding of one party's needs, circumstances, expectations, and inability of the government to deliberate accordingly without leaving any group unrepresented. This study further concludes that citizen inclusion in policy formulation ensures that the social equalities are addressed. This compels government to strive to bridge such differences through implementing social equity policies and as such, it is vital for the citizen to be part of the public policy formulation and should not be perceived as the mere spectators or targets waiting for the government to deliver the public services to them (Abels, 2007: 106,107). Instead, citizens are an integral part of the government. They are the experts of their own predicament and the government can only access such facts when citizens are actively involved as agents of change in the public policy making process.

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