

# Bridging the Gap between Policy Intent and Implementation

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## Abstract

The paper is about bridging the gap between policy intent and implementation. The gap is due to the lack of a link between policymakers and implementers and the absence of a clear policy goal. Policy implementation is the subsequent activity after the policy is made; it is the process in which ideas are translated into actions however most of the time attention had never been paid to such an important stage, at the same time as most attention is paid to the policy formulation stage. There are appropriate and nicely-formulated policies but ineffectively carried out, as a result, lead to a wide gap between policy intent and implementation. The study was conducted based on selected reviewed works of literature on policy implementation aim at describing the gap between policy intent and implementation and policy recommendation. The study found out that policymakers and implementers carry out a significant role in implementing policy also the frontline workers provide information to the policymakers at the top and ascertain whether the policy can be applied or not with the available resources. The paper recommends linkage between policymakers and implementers and engagement of the people and community in policy formulation and implementation..

**Keywords:** Policy Implementation, Policy Gap, Policy Intent

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## ■ 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The high level of complexity of the policy-making processes, such as the process of implementation concerning the growing numbers of involved actors and the conflict between them made the implementation process of public policy important. Policymaking is understood to include the complete policy process along with formulation and implementation processes. There is a need for a better understanding of the reasons why there may be an implementation gap between policy expectations and outcomes. Implementation is what will happen after a policy has been introduced. It is most of the time the most important part of the lifecycle of policy, as ideas are to be converted into actions to improve results. While the most attention is paid to policymaking, it has been proved that it is the most complicated stage of the policy lifecycle to implement policy as intended by policymakers (Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980).

Studies indicated that policy implementation is difficult to achieve because policy tries to address social problems which are difficult to reconcile due to inherent tensions. Policy implementation also involves different layers of governments, institutions, and individuals and requires an understanding of differences and reconciling them with policy intents. Studies suggest that many policies are not implemented based on policymakers' intents (Chigudu, 2016). Policy implementation gaps are the mismatch between policy expectations and the outcome. Makinde (2017) identified some implementation gaps which are lack of materials and human resources, government policy continuity, and corruption, these lead to the gap between policy intent and implementation, which is widening the gap between achieved stated policy goals and implementation.

Policy implementation studies are available, since the 1970s which mainly focus on identifying and bridging the gap between policy intent and implementation (May 2014). The first generation studies of policy implementation described implementation failure by adopting a top-down approach that identified those factors that promote implementation gap from the perspective of the central government policymakers, examples unclear policy, lack of enough resources, lack of compliance by the implementers, policy opposition by the communities and unfavorable social and economic conditions (O'Toole, 2000). The second generation of policy implementation researchers emerged in the 1980s they are referred to as the bottom-uppers who concern on local implementers, street-level bureaucrat and emphasized on the nature of social problems that a policy intended to solve. The third generation of policy research emerge in the latter half of the 1980s which sought to reconcile the top and bottom-up approaches by developing synthesized models and frameworks (Cairney et al., 2013).

Policy implementation is problematic since implementers misinterpret or contest against the policy and fail to implement it based on the intent of policymakers. Policy implementation is focusing on the challenge of translating intention into desired changes (Cairney et al., 2013). Studies suggest that implementers of policy have discretionary power in the implementation of policy which most of the time leads to different outputs of the policymakers' intents (Tummers and Bekkers, 2014). Many societal problems required evidence-based knowledge acted by frontline workers with political measures been implemented by agencies of the government. However, there has been limited linkage between policy implementers or practitioners and policy formulators. In light of this, the purpose of this article is to explain the link between policy formulators and implementers, and proper solution to the gap. The paper tries to answer the question of why policymaking and implementation take place independently without connecting.

## ■ 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### ■ 2.1 Policy Implementation

Policy Implementation researchers have described the term from different perspectives. Implementation is an essential stage of the policy-making process (Khan, 2016). Implementation means the carry out of the policies in which diverse organizations, stakeholders, procedures, and techniques work together to put policies into effect to achieve policy goals. The key future of most implementation concepts is the difference between policy purpose and performance. (May et al., 2016; Yapa and Bärnighausen, 2018; Adam et al., 2019; Bonner et al., 2019). Implementing experiments demonstrate the perception of public policy performance or failure by analyzing the conditions that impact it (Khan, 2016). This definition of implementation encourages an analysis of the mechanisms impacting public decision-makers and implementers and the outcomes (Bridwell-Mitchell and Sherer, 2017).

Efficient implementation of public policy influences the extent of social care delivery, industrialization, job growth, social security, environmental conservation, modernization of urban infrastructures, reduced unemployment rates, health services access and speed of progress of education (Ugwuanyi and Chukwuemeka, 2013; Adam et al., 2019). Imurana et al., (2014).; Yapa and Bärnighausen, (2018) have noted, that developing countries develop and apply their policy in collaboration with international organizations, especially the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) for years.

A majority of the African and Asian developing countries developed and adopted a strategy of their own to dramatically change quickly after years of colonial rule, but these policies were fraught with bureaucracy and bottlenecks in their execution (Imurana et al. 2014). Global politics and political parties' false campaign promises that if they win elections an along with needless bureaucratic processes prohibit policies from being enforced. The policies in developing countries have been rightly conceived, beautifully, and ineffectively applied according to Ikelegbe, (2006); Chigudu, (2016); the public policy has struggled to accomplish its targets. There is a wide disparity in policy goals and what is done on the ground due to the poor execution of the strategies they have been planned for. The relation between those who devise the strategy at the top level and the executors at the bottom level is not vertical.

### ■ 2.2 The Link Between Policy Makers and Implementers

Policies' aims are to be achieved through successful implementation but hardly been achieved due to the lack

of a link between policy intents and implementation. Lack of connection between policymakers at the top and the implementers at the bottom is the main reason for implementation failure. Therefore, an effective link between policymakers and implementers will result in effective policy implementation. Connecting and linking policymakers and implementers is seen as important to prevent implementation failure. Policies are always being made from the top but the quality of the policy depends on the information generated from the bottom. Furthermore, policymakers need information on how implementers think about policy and whether or not the policy can be applied with the available resources. Adam *et al.*, (2019) indicated that governmental structure is complex with a different implementing body that are involved in the implementation of policies and, which involved policy coordination.

There are little or no major studies about the link between policymakers and implementers Nakamura and Smallwood, (1980) propose a model that connects policy implementers with formulators the model recommended five types of framework and links between policymakers and implementers. the frameworks symbolize the different methods of implementation as follows:-

#### **Capitalist Technocracy.**

This model suggests that municipal officials obey the directives and instructions from the higher authority in compliance with the legislation. Therefore, it is a hierarchical and linear implementation method. This compliance framework is found in policies that involve experience in the execution of the policy. Implementers support the objectives of policymakers and technical devices to achieve these objectives. Functional errors, however, typically lead to errors in execution.

#### **The delegation was instructed.**

This model assumes the maximum authority, governed by officials at the highest level at the local level, to create policy guidelines and regulations. A variety of strategic administration and negotiating responsibilities are delegated to decision-makers with discretion. The delegation instructed produces its essence from the conventional implementation approach which assumes that the policy is essential to specific goals and objectives. Implementers help policymakers' goals and coordinate institutional means with them to accomplish objectives.

The agreement this model indicates that the decision-makers do not necessarily respect the policymakers' priorities and objectives. Therefore, in comparison to the two frameworks on which politicians and managers decide fairly on the implementation process, the negotiators incorporate bargaining in the framework of policy enforcement. This model measures the success or failure of execution of the program through the allocation of power and capital. A disparity on either side will cause either the policy to be authoritarian or the policy to be gone. Implementers negotiate with policymakers' objectives and/or means to achieve objectives. This model of linkage is much more likely to lead to policy failures during the implementation process. In the application on the field, for instance, a lack of technological knowledge may fail. Failure to compromise can, however, also allow the regulation process to be stopped and decision-makers can then override the policies and implement the policies according to their wishes.

#### **Experimenters of choice.**

This model is somewhat close to the negotiation system as implementers have limited discretionary powers to enhance their execution goals and techniques. It sets strategic priorities and means for policymakers. This control management is made because top-level officials are unable to devise the legislation or lack technological skills. The frameworks for implementing this model that fail for many reasons: inadequate coordination of technical specifications, the uncertainty of execution as far as priorities and means are concerned, and simplistic policy enforcement without adjustments in the local procedure.

#### **Entrepreneurship of administration.**

With support from implementers and fully endorsed by policymakers, priorities and strategies are established within this type of implementation framework. Implementers can provide information, to battle bureaucracy, and the expertise of entrepreneurs to enforce the conventional approach. A full control transfer to implementers leads to optimistic policy results.

The structural models alluded to above can be daunting and efficient. Unless the aims and objectives of the program originally defined are not carried out to resolve the issue, the lack of either of them may also occur. The policy failure will, however, come from either failure to enforce or failure to implement. Failure to enforce the policy means because the policy is not implemented as a policymaker intended. After all, the parties involved have

become uncooperative and/or ineffective in its execution, or that their best attempts have not resolved any barriers that they have little to no control over to successful implementation (Hogwood, B.W. & Gunn, 1984). Failure to enforce this strategy, however, ensures that the desired outcomes or desirable effects cannot be obtained by external influences, even though the strategy is completely enforced (Hunter et al, 2002). Failure of Policy can also arise due to poor implementation, poor policy, or bad luck.

McLaughlin, M., (1987) described three different types of potential interactions among policymakers and implementers as mutual adaptation, co-optation, and non-implementation, in more detail those are described as:

(a) Mutual adaptation described projects which have been implemented successfully. It involved both project design modifications as well as changes in the setting of local institutions and personnel in charge of implementation.

(b) Co-opting included modifying the project concept, but without altering the local workers or the administrative climate. In this way, project approaches were simply updated to adhere to standard practices which creativity would replace either because of opposition to change or due to insufficient assistance to implementers.

(c) Failure to implement described the experience of projects which either broke up or were just ignored by the participants in the project. Those who are responsible for the implementation of the policy due to their reason pursue different goals and priorities to hold on power (Sayer, 1998; Huy, 2002).

The above links between policymakers and implementers have shown the relationships between policy formulation and implementation. Policymakers and implementers have increasingly recognized the need for cooperation to formulate and implement policy to reduce the gap between policy intents and implementation. There are still evidence that there exists a gap between policy intents and implementation the adoption of the framework of the link between policy intent and implementation by (Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980) suggest five links between policymakers and implementers the Bureaucratic entrepreneurship model which implementers formulate policy objectives and means for achieving goals and persuade policy-makers to accept their objectives if adopted will close the gap between policy intents and implementation. The Advocacy coalition framework (ACF) theory shows the relationship between a large number of non-governmental and governmental actors (desire driven by translating their belief into policy) at multiple levels as policy changes over ten or more years (Sabatier, 1986). The framework can close the gaps between policy intents and implementation when a huge number of governmental and non-governmental policy actors are involving in the formulation and implementation of policies.

Based on the above-mentioned models the gap between policy-making and implementation is a result of the centralization of policy formulation which prevents implementers at the bottom to participate in the policymaking process. The policy formulated from the center is not clear to the implementers and therefore, discretionary power leads to a different outcome of implementation which may differ from policymakers' intend. The lack of connectivity and coordination of policy implementation and formulation can lead to implementation failure. The models identify the need for the link and coordination between policymakers and implementers but the models fail to identify how the link can take place. Furthermore, this study identifies information generated from the bottom, ascertaining whether the policy can be applied or not with the available resources as the main structure of linking policymakers and implementers that can lead to a successful implementation of the policy

## ■ 2.2 Stages of Policy Implementation

van Dongen *et al.* (2013) identify three stages in which policy are been made and implemented they are initial stage, pre- implementation stage and implementation and evaluation stage ( Figure 1).

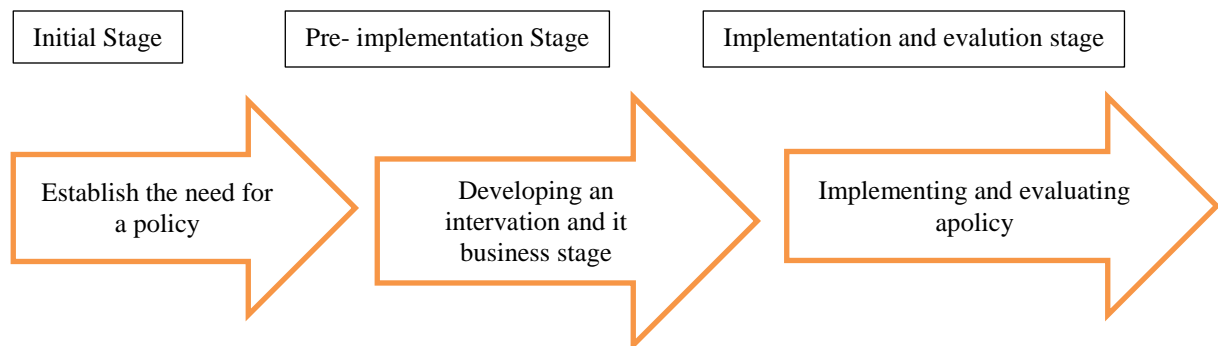


Figure 1 implementation stage source (van Dongen *et al.*, 2013)

**1) Initial stage**

The need for the establishment of policy is most of the time proposed by the employees who are responsible for the day-to-day running of the organization and can be triggered by one or more of the following factors;

- Legislation- policy are driven from legislation and regulations
- High cost issues
- Specific incident and funding opportunities
- Accreditation measurement of various performance indicators and Audit

**2) Pre-implementation stage**

The second stage of policy formulation and implementation is characterized by the development of policy as well as its business case in order to receive approval for its implementation from top management.

**3) Implementation and evaluation stage**

In this stage policy is implemented and evaluated. The relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability are evaluated. The result of the evaluation will provide inputs for informing and improving future policies.

**3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on secondary data which used published articles, such as journals, books and other published previous researchers to find out the gap between policy intent and implementation. Secondary data analysis is data analysis that others have collected for some primary reason. Use of these existing data offers a viable choice for researchers who might have limited time and resources (Melissa P. Johnston, 2017). Also Nurul Ain and Nooraini (2019) stated that secondary data is faster to access, save time and efforts and as well provides a way to access the work of the best scholars all over the globe.

Literatures were identified through the online data base example Google scholar, Scopus and web of science and the literatures are evaluated to ensure the appropriateness for the research topic (Melissa P. Johnston, 2017). The major advantages of secondary data analysis are cost effectiveness and convenience it provides. Since there are literatures available on the subject, the researcher needs not to devote his time, financial resources to collect data. Secondary data analysis provides various opportunities to further study through replication, re-analysis, and reinterpretation of existing studies. This allows the researcher the ability to participate in work to test new concepts, hypotheses, structures and study design models (Bowen, 2009). At a time when scholars and databases around the world are collecting, storing, and archiving vast volumes of data and literature, it is now more readily available. The time has certainly come therefore for researchers to use secondary data as tool for data collection and analysis. Today we have more information than we can use but the means to use such information has not been developed. There is a need for researchers to devise a means of using this information.

#### ■ 4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This paper attempts to explain the gap between policy intent and implementation and why policymaking and implementation take place independently without connecting. Implementing policy is one of the most important tasks. Implementers or intermediaries play a significant role in the execution of policy, which may likely fail without the support of the implementers. They interpret, mobilize and gather implementing resources, Successful implementation depends on the connection between implementers and formulator, coordination, monitoring and feedback, support and assistance, and from top policy implementers (Fowler, 2013).

Previous studies have been conducted in the past to address the problems and attempt to proffer answers on how to bridge the gap between policy intent and implementation. Khan, (2017) focuses his paper discusses the theoretical problems relevant to implementation objectively by content analysis, and the reasons linked to lack of implementation suggest that effective policy execution relies on a strong theoretical basis (Tummers & Bekkers, 2014). A research provides a theoretical basis for two main budgetary outcomes: consumer importance and preparation. The partnerships are discussed in a study of a proposed strategy by 1300 healthcare professionals. The findings emphasize that flexibility is necessary. Weatherley & Lipsky, (2015) studies focus on street level Bureaucrats and institutional innovation implementation the study indicates how the coping strategies needed to meet the demands of individual school staff can, as a whole, obstruct and impede the application of the reform of special education.

Adami, (2010) reviews Michael Lipsky street-level bureaucracy theoretical basis to consider the role played by public sector workers in enforcing policies. Lipsky reveals the complexities of public policy delivery and the relation between the legislative agendas and the real policy outcomes. Tummers and Bekkers, (2014) focus on frontline workers such as teachers who experience stress when delivering public service to clients due to excessive workloads they adapt using coping. The study indicates that even under difficult circumstances, frontlines give clients valuable public service. Chigudu, (2016) navigate policy implementation gaps in Africa the study indicates, in the absence of the opportunity to turn such intelligibly understood ideas into practice, inadequate policy timing, government inability to compensate for the failure, and absence of resources. explain for and predict why the implementation of evidence into practice is or isn't always successful. Powell, (2001) study on a comparative study of TVET projects implementation experiences from Jamaica and The Gambia the study established which initiatives are most likely to be executed effectively and potentially sustainable. In general, an ineffective project is distinguished by the absence of local participation in the implementation phase, thus dependent on resources and personnel from developing countries, while productive projects will most often include local workers in the execution and management process, and would use locally produced resources.

Birken *et al.*, (2015, 2016, 2018); Bunger *et al.*, (2019) found that the middle managers link between top managers who are the policy formulator and the frontline workers who implement day to day policy in an organizations. They propose a theory of middle manager in the implementation of innovation; the theory suggested that middle managers perform four roles by obtaining and disseminating information, synthesizing adopting information and innovation, mediating between policy and day to day work and selling innovation implementation and shape the implementation climate which leads to implementation effectiveness. This role indicated that the middle manager coordinates the implementation of the policy by liaising with the top manager.

Furthermore, especially financial information is important in implementation of policy and can be a factor that can decide whether to implement policy or not. Studies suggested that policy formulation is not based or grounded evidence therefore, there is the need to develop and improve evidence based policy making (van Dongen *et al.*, 2013; Alishahi Tabriz *et al.*, 2019). Creating a supportive conducive and cooperative environment that will encourage key stakeholders including frontline staff to acknowledge that successful implementation of policy. This study is important because success in implementing public policy is significant to determine the provision of basic amenities which depends on how it is implemented. The study suggests that for successful implementation of policy there is a need to involve the participation of implementers at the local level in policy formulation the objective is to involve all stakeholders to participate in the implementation and formulation of policy. Table 1 state the Barriers for implementation and recommendation to overcome those barriers.

Table 1 Barriers for implementation and recommendation to overcome such barriers

Barriers	Recommendations
Inability to reach consensus with the frontline workers on how to implement a policy	Organize a workshop and training to provide frontline workers with skills and competencies and also reach consensus on the implementation of policy. Work and communicate with different workers unions and organizations to create an environment for implementation. Consider inviting competitors to observe your processes.
Lack of information and knowledge about policy to be implemented	Train and disseminate knowledge about the policy to be implemented. All stakeholders should be aware of the policy and its new operational responsibilities. Key personnel such as front-line employees, managers should be trained to participate in policy implementation. Then these trained staff can become champions and trainers for others in their organization.
Limited resources	Provide adequate resources and staffing to implement a policy
Lack of support and commitment from leaders	Leaders should lead in implementation of policy and they should tell on the consequences of not implementation. Leaders should take responsibility of implementation and should not blame others, make implementation a priority of the organization. Organization leaders should provide a consistent message about adhering to the implementation by providing tangible assessment and appreciation. Management should provide reward systems which may include provision of certificates, gifts and senior leaders personally thanking the efforts of their frontliners on the floor for implementation.
Cultural resistance	The benefit of implementing the policy should be explained and involve all stakeholders in the planning and pre-implementation of policy which will help reduce barriers by creating ownership, promoting the dissemination of critical information and encouraging employee feedback for fine-tuning the policy during implementation. Host town halls with communities to educate and present the process of implementation.

Barriers	Recommendations
Frontline staff resistance	Respect the concerns of frontline staff, listen to and acknowledge them in the implementation of policy. The frontline staff should be informed that their efforts will help the work environment of the organization.
External policy and regulations	Before adopting policy officially there is the need to address relevant regulatory guidelines that would have an impact on policies. It is necessary to obtain approval from relevant regulatory bodies before the implementation of policy.

Source (Alishahi Tabriz *et al.*, 2019)

This study has several limitations first it was based on secondary data an empirical research needs to be conducted to collect primary data to support the secondary data. The study need to be conducted qualitative in order to generate an in-depth data. The study did not provide a case study or an example of policy implementation in order to relate it to the study. The study need to look at the perspective of policy formulators and executors in order to see if there is a link and to find out the gap. Finally the study focussed its attention on identifying the gap and link between policy intent and implementation. However future research should explore the gap and links qualitatively and quantitatively with case studies.

## ■ 5.0 CONCLUSION

The paper identifies the implementation gap based on other literature and the link between policymaker and implementers need to be specified for the easy implementation of policies. The engagement of a wide range of people and the larger community in policy formulation and implementation will enable the citizenry to participate actively in the means in which they are governed and to guard against any gap in policy implementation. As asserted by Ozga, (2017) that public policy must be accessible to the broader community. The research shows that policymakers and implementers play a significant role in the execution of the policy by coming together to formulate and implement policy. The study also found that frontline implementers provide information to policymakers at the top and confirm whether the policy can be applied or not with the available resources on the ground. Policy making needs to be based on realities on the ground. These findings fill the knowledge gaps about the specific ways in which policymakers will liaise with frontline implementers. Therefore, for a policy to prevail it needs to be implemented, there should be a link between policy formulators and implementers for clarity and implementation according to goals.

Linking policymakers and implementers has been identified as a significant factor to prevent implementation gap, majority of researchers focus on explaining the various links and fail to emphasize on how to connect policymakers and implementers, despite implementation literature had highlighted the importance and difficulties of implementing public policy. These difficulties can be overcome through linking policymakers and implementers by bargaining, use of authority, institutional design (Adam *et al.*, 2019), mutual adoption of policy (McLaughlin, M., 1987), bureaucratic entrepreneurship (Nakamura and Smallwood, 1980). For example the ministry of education can organize a workshop between the policy holders and teachers who are saddled with the responsibility to implement education policy. The key determinant for bringing the gap between policy intent and implementation is collaboration reaching consensus with frontline staff as they execute day to day policy.

On the contrary Adam *et al.*, (2019) argued that “inviting frontline implementers to decision-making process would have endangered a timely decision particularly since it was clear that implementers would tie their consent to the demand for appropriate compensation for additional implementation burden”. It has been witnessed in the current fight against the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic both the policymakers and implementers had jointly come together to fight the outbreak which is yielding success. Therefore, connecting implementers and policymakers need to be promoted.



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