



Policy Without Feedback: The Consequences of Weak Policy Feedback Mechanisms in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria's public policy process, focusing on how the absence of structured feedback mechanism affects policy effectiveness, governance responsiveness, and institutional learning. The aim of the study is to analyse how inadequate feedback systems contribute to recurring policy inefficiencies and weak implementation outcomes in Nigeria. The study adopts a qualitative research design relying exclusively on secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, and institutional reports and is anchored on Systems Theory, which conceptualizes public policy as an interrelated system of inputs, processes, outputs, and feedback necessary for stability, adaptation, and effective governance. Findings from the study reveal that Nigeria's public policy system is characterized by weak and poorly institutionalized feedback mechanisms, limited channels for structured stakeholder input, and inadequate integration of policy learning processes, which collectively result in repeated policy failures, weak institutional responsiveness, and declining public confidence in governance. The study concludes that strengthening feedback mechanisms is essential for improving the effectiveness and adaptability of public policy in Nigeria and recommends the institutionalization of structured feedback systems across all levels of government, the integration of digital platforms for real-time public input, and the enhancement of policy learning frameworks to support evidence-based decision-making and sustainable governance outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Public policy represents one of the most important instruments through which governments address societal problems and pursue development objectives. Across democratic and developing societies alike, governments formulate policies to improve sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, employment, and social welfare. However, the success of public policies depends not only on sound formulation but also on the extent to which governments continuously receive and incorporate

feedback from citizens, implementing agencies, and other stakeholders. Feedback enables policymakers to assess whether interventions are achieving intended goals, identify implementation challenges, and make necessary adjustments. Where such mechanisms are weak or absent, policies often become rigid, ineffective, and disconnected from the realities of intended beneficiaries (Howlett & Ramesh, 2014; Peters, 2021).

In many advanced democracies, feedback mechanisms are embedded in governance through policy evaluations,

stakeholder consultations, and public engagement processes. For instance, healthcare and welfare reforms in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States have often been revised following concerns raised by citizens and implementation agencies. At the same time, policy failures in these societies also demonstrate the consequences of inadequate responsiveness. The introduction of the poll tax in the United Kingdom during the late 1980s generated significant public resistance partly because early concerns from citizens were insufficiently addressed, eventually forcing policy reversal (King & Crewe, 2013). Such experiences highlight the importance of continuous feedback in ensuring policy legitimacy and effectiveness.

Across Africa, however, weak institutional capacity, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and limited citizen participation have often constrained effective policy feedback systems. In many countries, policies are designed and implemented through top-down approaches with little room for beneficiaries to influence implementation or communicate emerging concerns. As a result, several agricultural, poverty reduction, and social welfare programmes have struggled to achieve intended outcomes. Studies from countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa show that weak monitoring systems, poor stakeholder engagement, and inadequate consultation often contribute to implementation failures and public dissatisfaction (Alexander, 2010).

Nigeria presents a similar experience. Since independence, governments have introduced several public policies and development programmes aimed at improving citizens' welfare and promoting national development. Yet, many policies have recorded mixed or disappointing outcomes, partly because of limited institutional mechanisms for capturing and integrating feedback during implementation. Examples include the Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s, fuel subsidy reforms, agricultural intervention programmes, and poverty alleviation initiatives, many of which generated resistance, implementation challenges, or failed to meet public expectations due to poor engagement with beneficiaries and weak responsiveness to emerging concerns (Olukoshi, 1993; Akinola & Adesopo, 2017). In the agricultural sector, for example, implementation challenges associated with some intervention programmes have been linked to inadequate consultation with farmers, poor monitoring systems, and weak channels for reporting implementation concerns. Similarly, in education and healthcare, recurring implementation difficulties and public dissatisfaction often reflect limited responsiveness to stakeholder experiences. These challenges suggest that weaknesses in policy feedback mechanisms may contribute significantly to poor governance outcomes, inefficient service delivery, and limited social transformation.

Although several studies on public policy in Nigeria have focused on implementation challenges, corruption, and institutional inefficiencies, limited attention has been given to how weak feedback mechanisms shape policy outcomes across sectors. Existing studies also tend to emphasize isolated programmes rather than broader governance implications. It is against this backdrop that this study examines the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria's public policy process using qualitative analysis based on secondary data.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

Main Research Question

What are the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanism in Nigeria's public policy process?

To address this main question, the following specific questions are posed:

1. To what extent are policy feedback mechanisms institutionalized within Nigeria's public policy process?
2. What are the consequences of weak or absent policy feedback mechanisms on policy effectiveness and implementation outcomes in Nigeria?
3. How can policy feedback systems be strengthened to improve public policy performance in Nigeria?

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria's public policy process.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the extent to which policy feedback mechanisms are institutionalized within Nigeria's public policy process.
2. Examine the consequences of weak or absent policy feedback mechanisms on policy effectiveness and implementation outcomes in Nigeria.
3. Propose ways through which policy feedback systems can be strengthened to enhance public policy performance in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been established that, effective governance depends not only on the formulation of policies but also on the existence of structured systems that enable continuous feedback, evaluation, and learning. In systems-oriented governance thinking, policy processes are expected to function as cyclical mechanisms in which outputs are assessed and used as inputs for future decision-making. However, in many developing democracies, including Nigeria, this feedback loop remains weak, resulting in policy rigidity, poor responsiveness, and recurring implementation failures. Contemporary study by Grindle (2017) increasingly

highlight that the absence of effective feedback mechanisms undermines the ability of governments to adapt policies to changing social and economic realities.

A growing body of Nigeria-focused literature shows that citizen engagement and feedback systems remain largely underdeveloped in public policy processes. Gaventa (2004) observe that civic engagement in Nigeria is constrained by weak communication channels and exclusionary governance structures, which limit meaningful interaction between citizens and policymakers. Similarly, Norris (2011) notes that persistent distrust in government institutions, combined with weak institutional frameworks, has deepened the disconnect between citizens and the policy process.

In addition, The Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation (2025) reports that citizen engagement in Nigeria remains largely tokenistic, with limited influence on actual policy outcomes. Grindle (2017) similarly highlight that elite dominance and weak institutional structures continue to restrict inclusive governance. These findings suggest that participation without effective feedback mechanisms does not necessarily translate into improved policy performance, as citizens' inputs are rarely systematically integrated into governance processes. World Bank (2021; 2023) emphasizes that weak accountability structures and limited citizen feedback channels significantly undermine government effectiveness in developing countries. Likewise, the United Nations Development Programme (2023) stresses that adaptive governance requires structured systems for incorporating citizen input into policy revision and implementation processes. The African Development Bank (2024) also identifies weak citizen-state interaction as a major constraint to effective governance across Africa.

Furthermore, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2022) highlights that modern governance systems rely heavily on feedback loops to ensure policy learning and responsiveness, noting that the absence of such systems leads to policy stagnation. supports this view in the Nigerian context, observing that despite formal institutional provisions for participation, actual citizen involvement in planning and policy processes remains limited. Fung (2006) further demonstrate that poor awareness, weak coordination, and inadequate institutional support reduce the effectiveness of citizen involvement in policy implementation.

Despite these contributions, a key gap in the literature is that most studies such as Grindle (2017) focus either on citizen participation or implementation challenges, with limited attention to the systemic role of feedback mechanisms in shaping policy outcomes. Capability traps in developing countries where governments repeatedly implement reforms without sufficient learning from implementation experiences, while Grindle (2017) emphasizes institutional and political constraints

affecting policy success but gives limited focus to feedback loops as a central explanatory factor. Existing researches rarely examines how the absence of structured feedback loops contributes to policy repetition, weak institutional learning, and declining governance effectiveness in Nigeria. This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria's public policy process, thereby contributing to a more system-oriented understanding of governance performance in developing democracies.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Systems Theory of political analysis, developed by David Easton (1965). Systems Theory is a theoretical framework used to explain how political systems function through continuous interaction between institutions and their environment. Easton conceptualizes public policy as a dynamic system consisting of inputs, conversion processes, outputs, and feedback. In this model, inputs such as citizens' demands, interests, and political support are processed by the political system into outputs in the form of policies and decisions, which then generate feedback that influences future policy actions.

Since its introduction, Systems Theory has been widely applied and expanded in public administration and policy studies. For instance, Howlett and Ramesh (2014) employ systems thinking in public policy analysis, stressing that feedback is essential for policy learning, evaluation, and adjustment. More recent governance studies by Peters (2021) also reinforce the relevance of systems thinking by showing that modern policy environments require continuous feedback loops to improve responsiveness and institutional learning.

Within this framework, feedback is not a secondary element but a core mechanism that ensures stability, adaptability, and responsiveness in governance systems. When feedback channels are effective, governments are able to adjust policies based on real-world outcomes and citizen experiences. However, when feedback mechanisms are weak or absent, the system becomes closed, leading to poor learning, policy rigidity, and ineffective governance.

In the Nigerian context, Systems Theory provides a useful lens for understanding persistent policy challenges. Weak institutional feedback structures limit the flow of information from citizens and implementing agencies back into the policy system, thereby disrupting the policy cycle. This contributes to repeated policy failures, weak institutional learning, and poor implementation outcomes across sectors. Therefore, Systems Theory offers a strong analytical foundation for examining how weak policy feedback mechanisms affect governance performance and development outcomes in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria's public policy process. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration and interpretation of policy processes, institutional dynamics, and governance challenges. The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, policy documents, government reports, and publications from reputable international organizations. The selection of materials focuses on recent and relevant literature that reflects contemporary developments in public policy and governance discourse, particularly those addressing feedback mechanisms and implementation outcomes in Nigeria and comparable developing contexts. These materials were systematically reviewed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and arguments related to policy feedback mechanisms and their implications for governance effectiveness in Nigeria.

Data collected from secondary sources were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which involved identifying, categorizing, and interpreting key themes emerging from the literature. This method allowed for the synthesis of diverse scholarly perspectives on policy feedback, institutional responsiveness, and governance outcomes. The analysis focused on how weak or absent feedback mechanisms influence policy implementation, institutional learning, and overall policy effectiveness.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Extent to which Policy Feedback Mechanisms are Institutionalized within Nigeria's Public Policy Process

The extent to which policy feedback mechanisms are institutionalized within Nigeria's public policy process can be described as formally present but weakly operationalized in practice. While institutional frameworks such as monitoring and evaluation systems, legislative oversight structures, and administrative reporting mechanisms exist within the Nigerian governance system, their functionality remains limited by weak implementation capacity and poor integration into decision-making processes. Public policy scholarship emphasizes that effective governance systems depend on continuous learning loops where policy outcomes are systematically assessed and fed back into policy redesign. However, in Nigeria, this feedback loop remains fragmented and inconsistently applied across institutions. Policy systems require strong state capability and institutional learning capacity to ensure that feedback mechanisms are not merely symbolic but operational. As argued by Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock (2021), many developing states suffer from "capability traps," where formal institutions exist but do not translate into effective performance. In Nigeria, this is reflected in the weak

translation of monitoring and evaluation reports into actionable policy reforms. Similarly, performance management systems in the public sector are often treated as administrative routines rather than learning tools, limiting their effectiveness in generating policy feedback loops (Van Dooren et al., 2020). This challenge is consistent with broader public administration literature that emphasizes the importance of embedding evaluation systems within decision-making structures for institutional learning (Peters, 2021).

Furthermore, policy feedback institutionalization is constrained by weak transparency and limited public accountability mechanisms. Evidence from governance research shows that transparency plays a crucial role in strengthening citizen trust and enabling feedback processes that improve policy responsiveness. However, in many developing governance systems, including Nigeria, transparency mechanisms remain unevenly implemented, thereby weakening feedback effectiveness. This gap is further reinforced by limited citizen participation structures that are not adequately linked to formal policy processes, reducing the extent to which citizen experiences shape policy adjustments.

In addition, global governance studies highlight that even when institutional structures exist, policy systems may still fail to produce meaningful feedback due to weak learning capacity within bureaucratic institutions. According to Dunlop and Radaelli (2020), policy learning depends on the ability of institutions to absorb, interpret, and apply feedback from implementation processes. In Nigeria, this learning capacity is often undermined by bureaucratic rigidity and poor coordination across agencies, leading to limited policy adaptation over time. This challenge is further supported by broader evidence showing that weak institutional coordination reduces government effectiveness and policy coherence (World Bank, 2023; OECD, 2022).

Therefore, the extent of institutionalization of policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria remains moderate at the structural level but weak at the functional level. Although formal institutions for feedback exist, their ability to collect, process, and apply information for improving policies is still very limited. In practice, this gap between what institutions are designed to do and what actually happens in implementation continues to weaken learning within Nigeria's public policy system.

Consequences of Weak or Absence of Policy Feedback Mechanisms on Policy Effectiveness and Implementation Outcomes in Nigeria

Weak or absent policy feedback mechanisms have significant consequences for the effectiveness of public policy and implementation outcomes in Nigeria. One of the most critical effects is the recurrence of policy failure due to lack of institutional learning. When feedback systems

are weak, policymakers are unable to systematically assess the performance of existing policies or integrate lessons from implementation experiences into future reforms. This results in the repetition of similar policy errors across different sectors, as decisions are made without adequate evidence of what works and what does not. Empirical studies on public sector performance in Nigeria show that weak monitoring and evaluation practices contribute directly to ineffective policy outcomes and persistent governance inefficiencies (Gaventa 2004). This pattern is consistent with broader governance literature which explains that weak state capability limits learning from past implementation failures (Andrews et al., 2021).

Another major consequence is poor policy responsiveness and weak adaptation to societal needs. In systems where feedback mechanisms are absent or ineffective, government institutions operate in a largely top-down manner, with limited consideration of citizens' experiences and implementation realities. This disconnect reduces the ability of public policies to respond to emerging challenges, particularly in dynamic sectors such as health, education, and economic development. Studies have shown that Nigerian public institutions often implement policies without adequate adjustment based on field realities, leading to implementation gaps and reduced policy relevance over time. This reflects what policy scholars describe as weak policy learning capacity within public institutions, where evaluation systems are not sufficiently integrated into decision-making processes (Van Dooren, et al., 2020).

Weak feedback systems also contribute to declining public trust and legitimacy of government institutions. When citizens observe that their experiences, complaints, or suggestions are not reflected in policy adjustments, confidence in governance structures diminishes. This lack of trust further reduces citizens' willingness to engage with public institutions, thereby creating a cycle of disengagement and poor policy accountability. Research on governance effectiveness in Nigeria indicates that weak communication between government and citizens contributes significantly to dissatisfaction with public service delivery and reduced institutional legitimacy. In governance theory, transparency is identified as a key mechanism for strengthening accountability and improving trust in public institutions.

Furthermore, the absence of effective feedback mechanisms leads to inefficient resource allocation and poor policy sustainability. Without structured evaluation and feedback loops, government resources may continue to be invested in programs that are ineffective or misaligned with societal needs. This not only reduces the efficiency of public spending but also undermines long-term development planning. Studies in public administration emphasize that sustainable policy

outcomes depend on continuous feedback and evidence-based adjustments, which remain weak in Nigeria's governance system (World Bank, 2021; OECD, 2022). From a governance systems perspective, failure to institutionalize learning mechanisms results in persistent inefficiencies and weak adaptive capacity within public administration systems (Fukuyama, 2020; Head, 2022). Therefore, the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria are systemic, affecting not only policy effectiveness but also governance credibility, institutional learning, and development outcomes.

How Policy Feedback Systems Can Be Strengthened to Improve Public Policy Performance in Nigeria

Strengthening policy feedback systems in Nigeria requires, first of all, making monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks a core part of governance at all levels. The importance of this has been widely emphasized in the literature. Kusek and Rist (2004) explain that M&E systems are most effective when they are built into the policy process itself rather than treated as optional administrative tools. In the same direction, Bamberger, et al., (2012) note that strong M&E systems help governments learn from implementation by consistently providing information on what is working and what is not.

In practice, however, although M&E units exist within many ministries and agencies in Nigeria, several reports and studies show that they remain weak in function, poorly funded, and often disconnected from actual decision-making processes (World Bank, 2022). Because of this, they are not always able to influence policy adjustments in a meaningful way. Strengthening these structures therefore requires not just their existence, but also legal backing, adequate staffing, and a clear link to policy decisions. When M&E systems are properly integrated into governance processes, they provide continuous feedback that helps governments identify gaps early and improve policy outcomes over time (UNDP, 2021).

Second important strategy is the integration of citizen-centered feedback mechanisms into public policy processes. This means creating practical and accessible ways for citizens to share their experiences and concerns about how policies are being implemented. These can include town hall meetings, grievance redress systems, digital reporting platforms, and participatory evaluation forums. The idea is to ensure that citizens are not just passive recipients of policies but active contributors to how those policies are assessed and improved. The importance of involving citizens in feedback processes has been widely discussed in governance literature. Fung (2006) explains that when citizens are directly involved in governance processes, policies tend to gain more legitimacy because people feel their voices are being heard. In a similar way, Cornwall (2008) notes that participation helps to strengthen accountability, as it

makes government actions more open and easier to question. Gaventa (2004) also argues that citizen engagement improves responsiveness, especially when governments are able to learn directly from people affected by policies.

In Nigeria, strengthening these feedback channels would help reduce the distance between government and citizens, ensuring that policy decisions reflect real experiences from those affected. International development reports also support this direction. The World Bank (2021) and OECD (2022) both point out that strong feedback systems improve transparency and service delivery, especially in environments where trust in government is already weak. In the same line, UNDP (2021) stresses that participatory feedback mechanisms are particularly important in developing countries, where formal monitoring systems alone are often not enough. When these channels work well together, governments are better able to detect problems early and adjust policies before they fail.

Third, the adoption of digital governance tools and e-feedback systems can significantly improve the efficiency and reach of policy feedback mechanisms. This involves the use of digital platforms such as mobile reporting applications, online consultation portals, and data dashboards that allow governments to collect and analyse citizen feedback more quickly and efficiently. The importance of digital transformation in public administration has been widely recognised in governance literature. The OECD (2023) notes that digital government initiatives help make public institutions more responsive, transparent, and participatory by bringing citizens closer to decision-making processes. Similarly, OECD (2024) emphasizes that digital tools improve policy effectiveness by enabling real-time data use and more responsive public service delivery. United Nations Development Programme (2023) also highlights that e-governance systems strengthen accountability and service delivery by improving how governments interact with citizens and manage feedback across different levels of administration. Digital transformation in the public sector is not only about technology but also about improving institutional learning and the way governments respond to citizen needs. In contexts like Nigeria, where geographic, infrastructural, and institutional barriers often limit traditional feedback channels, digital tools provide a more scalable way of strengthening policy responsiveness. Evidence from global governance reforms further shows that when properly implemented, digital feedback systems can improve transparency, enhance trust in public institutions, and strengthen citizen engagement in governance processes (UNDP, 2023; OECD, 2023).

Finally, the need to strengthen policy feedback systems points to a deeper governance issue around how learning takes place within public institutions. From the

perspective of Systems Theory, public policy operates as a continuous cycle in which outputs are expected to generate feedback that is then reintegrated into future decision-making processes (Easton, 1965; Peters, 2021). However, the findings of this study suggest that this feedback-learning loop is weak in Nigeria's public policy environment. What this means in practical terms is that although feedback is often generated through monitoring and evaluation activities, grievance channels, or implementation reports, it is not consistently used to reshape or improve subsequent policy decisions. This weak connection between feedback and decision-making reflects a breakdown in the systems logic of policy learning, where information from the environment fails to properly re-enter the policy cycle.

As a result, institutional learning remains limited, and policy adjustments are often delayed, inconsistent, or not evidence-based. This supports the central argument of Systems Theory that a political system can only remain responsive and effective when feedback is actively processed and used to regulate future outputs. In the absence of this, even technically sound feedback structures may not translate into improved governance outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the consequences of weak policy feedback mechanisms in Nigeria's public policy process using a qualitative approach based on secondary data and anchored on Systems Theory. The study concludes that effective public policy depends on a functional feedback loop that enables continuous learning, adjustment, and responsiveness; however, in Nigeria, this feedback mechanism remains weak, fragmented, and inconsistently applied across governance institutions. As a result, policy processes are often characterized by limited institutional learning, recurring implementation failures, weak responsiveness to societal needs, and declining public trust in government institutions. The absence of strong and functional feedback systems means that policies are frequently implemented without adequate evaluation or integration of lessons from previous outcomes, thereby undermining policy effectiveness and sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to strengthen policy feedback mechanisms and improve public policy performance in Nigeria:

1. Government should institutionalize monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework across all ministries, departments, and agencies.
2. There is a need to strengthen citizen-centered feedback systems by creating accessible and

inclusive platforms such as public consultations, grievance redress mechanisms, and periodic policy review forums.

3. Government should enhance the use of digital governance tools such as mobile reporting systems, online dashboards to support real-time feedback collection and analysis.
4. Public institutions should promote a culture of evidence-based policy learning by training policymakers and civil servants to prioritize evaluation findings in decision-making.

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