The Public Policy Process in Africa
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Leading, the discussions under this premier session, the presenter, (Dr. Paul Anangwe of the University of Nairobi), noted that the public policy process in Africa can be analyzed at three levels: policy making, policy implementation and policy evaluation. At each level, there are a number of problems.

Using David Easton's model of the political system, a public policy process can be divided into several parts, namely, the 'environment' in which it is set, 'inputs' in terms of public demands and resources, a 'conversion process' comprising the decision-making system as well as the organizational network, 'policy outputs' and a 'feedback mechanism'. Thus, the policy-making process entails multiple roles and it is also a multi-actor process. Although a policy choice may be selected by a single actor, the making of a policy is an extended process that goes beyond the decision making system.

Key issues of concern in respect of African policy making include the following:

Firstly, African policy makers do not seem to understand their policy environments and the kinds of problems they generate. This is attributed to the social distance between the policy makers and the rest of the population. The former belong to the elite group and their backgrounds make them perceive policy problems from a perspective that is somewhat impaired, resulting in wrong policies being made vis-a-vis policy problems that confront the bulk of the population.

Secondly, African policy makers seem to be making choices without adequate information because of poor articulation between political and administrative roles in the policy process. Often politicians would like to seize the initiative in making certain policies, and they tend to do so without adequate knowledge of the consequences, a problem that could have been avoided if they had listened to the expertise which the bureaucrats possess.

In addition, research institutions have been marginalized to an extent that their findings do not meaningfully impact on the policy process.

Thirdly, the inability to mobilize adequate resources as well as the inability to effectively utilize available capacity render policy making a symbolic exercise.

Policy implementation in Africa is also confronted with diverse problems. For instance, implementation rates of national development plans in the last two decades have ranged from between 5% and 30%. Another obvious constraint is the politicization of policy implementation. Many interest groups are also not always aware of the content of policy until the implementation begins. It is only at this stage that powerful actors realize what a policy contains and they then make vigorous attempts to frustrate the implementation of unpalatable aspects of such a policy.
Policy evaluation is another problem area because the feedback mechanism in African policy-making process is deliberately weakened. African policy makers do not like to hear that their policies are performing poorly. Hence, previous mistakes remain undetected and uncorrected. At the same time, no meaningful lessons can be learnt from past performance within this milieu.

Notwithstanding these problems, it is fair to acknowledge that some successes have been registered in Africa in some specific areas, the most prominent being in education and health sectors.