

**Dynamic Stakeholder governance innovation and empowerment sustainability:  
demystifying Ebonyi State's agricultural empowerment policy regime experience.**

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## **Abstract**

*The concern of evolving complex societal problems and development needs mandate policy regimes to open doors of participation in policy governance to stakeholders as both normative and instrumental imperatives. This study investigates stakeholder engagement practice in Ebonyi State, Nigeria with a view to developing sustainable model for practice across global policy spaces. We mobilised semi-structured interview instrument through face-to-face and online survey across determined diverse stakeholder constituencies to gather data to corroborate our intense literature search and vast secondary data accumulation. Our findings have shown that Stakeholder engagement practice in Ebonyi State is inconsistent with most of the identified eleven factors for sustainable empowerment success, hence the evidence manifest in their experiences overtime. We observed that poor definition of a stakeholder and consequent controversially polemic engagement practice in the policy regime implicated the entire outcome in the empowerment policy regime.*

**Keywords: Empowerment governance, Policy Regime, Agricultural Policy Sustainability, Stakeholder Engagement, Food Security.**

## **Introduction**

This study focuses on addressing issues on stakeholder approach in empowerment (agricultural) policies and practices drawing from Ebonyi State, Nigeria experience. Importantly, agriculture occupies significant position in national economic life. Despite the growing relevance of other sectors of the economy (Nnaji et al., 2022; Ukeje et al., 2022), the important place of agriculture cannot be compromised as it owes so much to the well being of the people and sustainability of food security (Chukwuemeka et al., 2020; Idike et al., 2020; Ukeje, 2021) as an panacea for the attainment of sustainable development by 2030. Scarcity of food raises concerns in both

developing and developed societies (Osabohien et al., 2017; Nnaji et al., 2023) hence, the global agenda, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognised the need to “end hunger” in all its forms through both local and international collaborations and partnerships among diverse actors and institutions (UN, 2015).

Research concerns have been on addressing factors that affect agricultural production and sustainability in specific countries (see Utpal, 2017). As have been observed, agricultural practices and policies have implication for success in food security campaign and empowerment sustainability. Particularly, a study in Ghana, Africa has shown that farmers tend to network together with those in their similar production line as it helps to improve their mutual skills transfer, which impacts production success (Nyantakyi-Frimpong et al., 2019). Again, it is argued that sustainable agriculture rests on improved human capital of stakeholders in agriculture and technological development (Conceicao et al., 2016). In Ebonyi State, policy pathway to agricultural sustainability has favoured engagement of stakeholders.

The state’s agricultural policies recognise the need to feature selected stakeholders in agricultural policy implementations. It encouraged formation of cooperative societies by farmers as one of the criteria to access government agricultural empowerment benefits. Also, the state rolled out Ebonyi “one-man-one-hectare” agricultural programme for civil, public, and non-civil/public servants to empower them in their agricultural practices. This was a target strategy to engage and empower perceived relevant agricultural stakeholders.

Stakeholder engagement is not new; in an organisational setting, it is relevant to help ensure success and sustainability (Accountability, 2008). In developing societies, stakeholder engagement is not also a novel practice in public policy processes and empowerment regimes. Most engagement of stakeholders is stereotyped and actors participation pattern appear linear. The above is evident in most programmes and policies in Ebonyi and Nigeria generally. Biased engagement serves as clog in the wheel of policy/programme goal attainment. Whereas most government policy initiatives have tended to involve some stakeholders, the area has been poorly researched on.

Agricultural empowerment experiences - policies and outcomes - over time raise neglected concerns over how the stakeholders are engaged in the policy processes. Given, sustainability of

the public sector is highly depended on the engagement of stakeholders (Midin et al., 2018) and more especially relevant and dynamic stakeholders. Hence, the expectation that policy practice following stakeholder approach should have successful outcome and sustainability. Notwithstanding, how successful and sustainable has stakeholder engagement practice in agriculture been in Ebonyi? What insight does this portray in the practice and outcome of empowerment policies in the state and beyond? In this paper, concerns are being raised over who are engaged as stakeholders?

## Methods

This study is a part of a series of studies undertaken at Ebonyi State Ministry of Agriculture and Natural resources. The ministry has a broad goal of making Ebonyi State the foremost viable destination for investors in Nigeria and emerging as economic and commercial hub in West Africa and beyond through the revitalisation of agriculture in the state anchored on human and infrastructural development, people, infrastructure and economy (Ukeje, 2021). However, previous state government approach to empowerment and intervention scheme particularly in the sector is inconsistent with conventional intervention targeting methodologies (Ukeje et al., 2020a).

This study focused on the engagement of stakeholders in the agricultural empowerment regime of the state to understand the experience so far. The empowerment regime engaged multiple stakeholders across institutions, ministries, cooperatives and individual actors. These categories of stakeholders were captured in our analytical grid (figure 1 below). This study engaged actors across the grid to ensure a balanced data set and to compare them.

We recognised the position of cooperatives and individual actors which captured the nuances of stakeholder engagement and the actual actors in the agricultural production chains. Specifically, the paper relies on primary source of data like government documents, reports and face-to-face interviews with 15 respondents drawn from the cooperative societies and other stakeholders in the state through the help of 3 research assistants that aided data collection and analysis. Both documentary analysis and thematic analysis were used in order to address the research questions highlighted in the introduction. Importantly, the cooperative societies were an embodiment of stakeholder mixes from different institutions and bodies who were part of it as farmers and agriculturists.

We also developed a model termed Stakeholder Governance grid (SGG) for sustainable food security to enable us interrogate the existing practice and prescribe a more sustainable pathway. We drew this after we tested the six-step framework developed by Meessen and Criel (2008), and discovered some sustainability gaps inherent in it (see detail in Table 1). The insights drawn and our findings help to refine and form the building blocks of our models' policy practice prescriptions.

### **Data Analysis**

As noted earlier, the focus of the study was the actors across the entire stakeholder grid. We ensured that data were drawn from each category in the grid. The following data were gathered:

- a) Semi-structured interview data were collected by the researchers during visited to cooperative leaders as well as other key local stakeholders. Interview lasted about 30 to 1 hour.
- b) Semi-structured interview questions were sent out to different categories of stakeholders through online platforms such as WhatsApp.
- c) Field notes taken by the research team during periodic meetings of the cooperative societies were gathered and documented.
- d) Photos were taken at the state agricultural depot where agricultural materials and tools were being distributed to the stakeholders. The observations were described and documented by the research team (see Figure 2 below).

As evident, the nature of data needed in the study justified the research design adopted. This helps to cross-verify and validate the findings as well as the method considered in the study (Patton, 1999). The interview data generated were interrogated for validity and thematically analysed in the paper.

### **Stakeholder Engagement and Governance**

The concern of evolving societal nature and developments mandates the governments to open doors of participation in policy governance to the people (Roberts, 2004). This among others is ideally to explore and exploit the wealth of knowledge and skills that reside with the people which could be harnessed for everyone's benefits. The problems that confront the society are complex hence, the nature of these problems demands collaborative efforts to solve the problems (Barrutia

& Echebarria, 2020). Though governments command great force of authority and power of wealth and weapons, these often are incapacitated in the face of “wicked problems”. A wicked problem is a “public problem that persists over time and appears unsolvable” (Simon, 2017 p 1). They are tagged ‘wicked problems’ because of their fluidity nature and unstructured and multi-dimensional character (Carey et al., 2017).

Participation in solving problematic societal problems that demand collective efforts entertain enlarged spread of actors across several sectors such as public, private and non-profits (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Berrone et al., 2019). As complex problems, there are different approaches to solving them hence, the situation naturally demands that different facets of solution supply be engaged and deployed. Again, actors and members in the society have diverse interests, perceptions and needs that more often come in conflict rather than harmony. Drawing from evidence showing an empirical case in a situation of rural community project, stakeholder engagement is usually complex because it involves the imperative of meeting diverse stakeholder’s demands (Usadolo & Caldwell, 2016). Katsonis (2019) argues that by placing the experiences of the policy targets at the centre of policy outcome there is alignment with citizen's needs through informed programs and policies.

As those who affect or are affected by issues under consideration (Freeman, 1984), stakeholders long for opportunity to participate in the policy process of their environments. There can always be a way of engaging stakeholders in any policy situation inasmuch as it can in one or more ways affect them or be affected by them. Stakeholders could be engaged in different sectors and areas in as much as they are relevant in the policy problem. These arguments are supported by the findings that stakeholders play crucial role in both public and private sectors to bring about positive development in society (Senathip et al., 2018). Limiting participation hinders opportunity for relevant stakeholders to deployed their knowledge and skills to solving a particular policy problem. In the first place, Torfing et al., (2012) noted this that stakeholders have active expectation for inclusion in the policy processes. Interestingly, a project assessment has shown that performance is linked to involvement of stakeholders (Magassouba et al., 2019). Allowing active participation of the citizens empowers them to take charge of instrument that redefines their problem situation and offers them opportunity to solve their problem in their acceptable way.

Without doubt, "Empowered individuals can significantly advance a collective agenda, in some cases even spurring emboldened public's to action" (Brinkerhoff & Wetterberg, 2020 p. 276), as they are highly motivated by their pressing problems or concerns over their wellbeing which a policy is meant to address. Linkages between the state and citizens occasioned by stakeholder engagement opportunities open doors to great development significance in both developed and developing states (Srivastav, 2017). This is because engaged stakeholders can bring new vigour and energy into the policy processes of the government thereby helping to redefine state-citizen relations.

With the drive to "leave no one behind", often neglected categories of participants in the hintermost part of the society are incorporated into policy processes (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016). Though this could be driven by normative imperatives, active participation of citizens redefines policy practice. Active policy drive to ensure social inclusive development is aimed at enhancing participation opportunity as well as empowering the less privileged through human capital investment (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). That is, stakeholder engagement both helps to harness resources from the actors and for the actors.

As a broadened approach, high prospect is placed on Multi-Stakeholder Processes as avenue for achieving impact in agricultural creativity in developing countries (Bisseleu et al., 2017). As noted, earlier, the nature of problem agriculture seeks to solve such as reduced hunger, food security and poverty reduction require collaboration among diverse stakeholders from diverse areas/sectors. Accordingly, "All policies tend to have multiple direct and indirect stakeholders" because stakeholder (actor) "can be any person, group, or institutions that has an interest in a development activity, project, or program" (Lunt, 2018 p. 3).

As has been observed in policy situations, important aspect of policy design process such as policy conceptualisation and goal attainment is coordinated among several stakeholders in both public and private spaces (Graycar, 2018). As findings have shown, public organisations are becoming "open organisations" that permits collaborative efforts (Torfing et al., 2012). This was because it has been understood that responsibility for policy implementation should not rest with the institutions only; but stakeholders should be engaged in the policy process (Filho et al., 2018). Increasing the scope of collaboration is demanded increasingly due to the gaps in the policy processes. That is because it has been argued that consideration of broader categories of

stakeholders is essential for organisational success (Silvius & Schipper, 2019). Moreover, there is need for linkage between developmental stakeholders and researchers for elaborate achievement (Bisseleu et al., 2017) as well because there is need for their inclusion to enhance more informed policy processes. Local participation is seen as valuable in enhancing collaboration between implementers and the people as observed in a developing society case (Chukwuemeka et al., 2020).

Among other factors, inadequate collaborative policy-making which does not allow for collaborative efforts among stakeholders at all levels stand against policy programmes success (Hudson et al., 2019). Collaborative efforts in the production of public policies have been labelled in different ways including network governance, interactive governance and meta-governance (Lo, 2018). For about two decades, decision making and international issues of development has been located at 'multi-stakeholder initiatives' (MSIs) (see Biekart & Fowler, 2018). This draws hugely from the insight of the broad array of solutions that that can be gathered from these sources. Vividly, "Multi-stakeholder processes are necessary in the development of public policies seeking to promote innovation in the face of complex and multi-dimensional challenges" (Ville et al., sp. 62). A kind of management innovation by creating a third layer citizens' service management system, interfaced with the mainstream service provision management channel (Onele et al., 2021). Be that as it may, it is required that MSIs be unpacked to unravel the dynamics of internal balance and collaboration incentives that all help to ensure desirable accomplishments over time (Biekart & Fowler, 2018). Mutual and conflictual reinforcement exist among the government and citizen stakeholders that incentivise collaboration needs. MSIs ownership could be narrow (government) or broad (societal) hence, success of the former is limited compared to the later with implications for how MSIs are governed (Biekart & Fowler, 2018). There has been wide recognition of multi-stakeholder approach exemplified by the SDGs agenda (Zanella et al., 2018). Keen desire to broaden the ambiance of participation in policy process forms part of the bedrocks of Sustainable Development Goals agenda (Stuart & Woodroffe, 2016).

### **Ebonyi State agricultural empowerment policy regime**

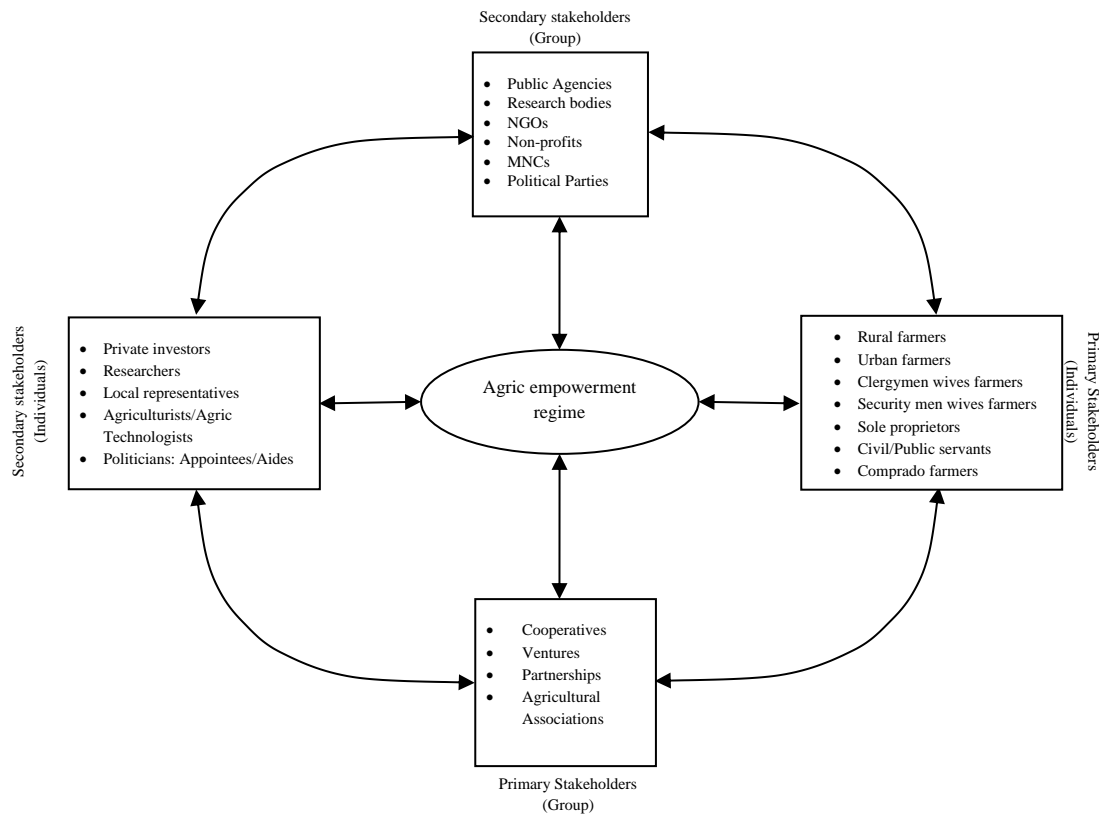
Ebonyi State has taken new drive in her agricultural policies and practice. This is in line with her drive and efforts to achieve zero hunger in the state. This drive is consistent with one of the core agenda of the global SDGs. Agricultural motivation of the state could also be traced to her drive

to run a “zero oil economy” (Umahi, 2015) free from the fluctuations of the international oil market.

Under the leadership of Governor Engr. David Nweze Umahi (2015-2023), the state enlisted 8000 civil servants, over 60 political aids/appointees, 4000 youths, and 1000 street hawkers for agricultural empowerment. The members of the public were encouraged to form cooperative societies to be able to access government empowerment benefits. The cooperative societies' engagement had two categorisations namely; the limited scope membership characterised by a particular number of participants, and the unlimited scope with free choice membership. The second category allowed for membership of both public servants and non-public servants.

The cooperative societies were to access agricultural resources ranging from fund to inputs for agricultural production such as fertilisers, seedlings and herbicides. They were organised under a state wide body known as Ebonyi State Farmers Association. The activities of the cooperatives were to be supervised, monitored and evaluated by Integrated Rural Farmers Development & Empowerment Organisation (IRUFADEO) an agency of the state government. Idike et al. (2020) have noted that failure or success of any empowerment is determined by its governance, due to the nature and practice of democratisation, inclusiveness and representation in the Nigerian public bureaucracy (Okpata et al., 2019; Idike et al., 2019; Okpata et al., 2020; Ndukwe et al., 2021). However, government empowerment scheme is defined as “a people focused development initiative that enhances self-reliance and self esteem, through active participation in the stages of policy process” (Ukeje et al., 2020a). Approach to empowerment governance in the state has favoured stakeholder approach. As noted, Engagement of stakeholders is an important aspect of intervention approach to poverty reduction (Ukeje et al., 2020b). Again, constructive engagement of stakeholders is what helps to drive meaningful development and intervention (Ukeje et al., 2020b). This paper places the practice of stakeholder engagement on the table to dissect it and unravel issues that characterise empowerment programmes over time in the state.



**Figure 1: Stakeholder governance grid (SGG) for Sustainable Food Security**

Stakeholders can be categorised into primary or secondary based on their involvement in a given policy problem. This categorisation can as well be determined by how they are affected by a policy situation. In the first instance, stakeholders who directly engage in farming activities can be regarded as primary stakeholders. These directly benefit from the policy programme for example, farmers. The secondary stakeholders in this instance are those who assist the primary stakeholders to participate or benefit from the policy programme. The second scenario applies to a poverty alleviation situation which shows how stakeholders are affected by a policy programme. In this case, the poor can be regarded as the primary stakeholders while non-profits among others can be regarded as the secondary. Stakeholders can participate either at individual level or group level. That means there could be individual primary stakeholders and/or group primary stakeholders. Similarly, there could be individual secondary stakeholders and/or group secondary stakeholders. In this study, we drew participants from the entire grid. We also admit our observation that cooperative societies draw membership from diverse segments of the society including stakeholders listed in any of the above grid as especially those that desired to benefit directly from

the programme. We observed that the cooperative societies were open to any member of the public who have interest in agriculture. Cooperative societies converge under state wide agricultural association. The members and leaders of the agricultural association are individual farmers who formed the different cooperative societies. The stakeholder governance grid above (figure 1) shows the interaction among stakeholders in an empowerment policy regime. This has global implications since “consensus on policy direction is not sufficient for the ‘big project’ as there is a lack of requisite consensus on ‘policy tool’ and ‘implementation preference’ among world states” (Ukeje et al., 2023, p.7). Hence, necessary approach should be taken to ensure policy domestication and implementation since public policy process derives its complexity from both technical and political considerations (Ukeje et al., 2023). Thus, sustainable stakeholder engagement entails effective and efficient interactions among the stakeholders in an empowerment policy regime, which leads to successful policies.

**Figure 2: Pictorial presentation of the cooperative approach to food security**



Fertilizer distribution



Farmer receive fertilizer



Fertilizer distribution



Cooperative Agents



Trailer of fertilizer



Clearance stage/ distribution



Offloading of fertilizer



Final clearance stage



Fertilizer Distribution Continued



Offloading of fertilizer



Cassava processing

From the pictures above, achieving sustainable agricultural development and food security reform should be backed up with guaranteed HCD, training and genuine empowerment of the relevant stakeholders in the various communities through their active involvement in all stages of policy process. Sustainable food security investment is hinged on promoting sustainable socio-economic growth, human capital development and poverty reduction strategies (Idike et al., 2020; Ukeje & Chukwuemeka, 2021; Nnaji et al., 2023). Thus, “poverty reduction has been defined as strategic policy measures, both economic and humanitarian, that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty” (Ukeje et al., 2020b, p.1).

### **Targeted intervention Framework**

Targeting has been identified as one of the most vital instruments in the intervention collections of government (Coady et al., 2004). Developing societies has seen adoption of targeting as policy strategy in several areas (Meessen & Criel, 2008). Due to how the idea of targeting appears to be straight, the common believe is that issues in targeting concept has been properly comprehended (Grosh, 1994). On the contrary, Meessen and Criel argue that due to diverse usage of the concept in different issues, there is yet a uniformity or clear knowledge on targeting. They rather propose to invent clear cut steps that explain the concepts and help improve the intervention policy process including design, implementation and evaluation.

As they noted, the reason behind targeting is that it is specific and purpose driven. That is, it could be to alleviate the poor among the rich or to provide health to the sick living among the healthy. Another example would be to provide tools, materials or fund to specific farmers such as poor, rural or urban farmers. There has been a kind of interpretation of targeting that tended to limit its scope for example that it is the rendering of specific service to a specific set of people, which at the same time means the exclusion of others not included in the set (Grosh, 1995). Exclusion is often determined by limited resources or the nature of product to be distributed to a specific people like drug for the sick only.

**Table 1: summary of the six-step intervention targeting by Meesen and Criel (2008): a missing link in the state-Governance empowerment approach**

The Six-step	The substances
The programme formulation	Summarized under this step is all the activities relating to policy initiation and relevant stakeholders engagement (the authors argued that involvement of representative of policy users is necessary not only for support but also for appropriation/accumulation of needed information). Majorly, they explain that key activities at this period involve: “(1) share of common awareness and understanding of the issues and challenges; (2) agree on the target group (in broad terms); (3) come to an agreement on desirable goals; (4) design the programme (a plan for action, the relevant institutional arrangements and a broad idea of the benefits package); (5) commit resources (including funding) and (6) turning the programme into a legal right for poor people (p. 271).
Defining eligibility	<p>The authors submitted that this ought to be part of the formulation stage but placed here to help achieve their aim. It is about defining poverty. As identified, there is both vertical and horizontal vagueness of poverty (Quizilbash, 2003). The vertical is concerned with threshold that indicates a demarcation between the poor and rich as to where to place the peg for identifying the poor. It could be seen as the poverty line but not the conventional but arbitrary determine.</p> <p>The horizontal is concerned with the dimension that poverty must be defined. Should it be in one (income) or many (health, literacy or nutrition among others).</p> <p>To properly define poverty, “poverty scientific experts” or “experience experts” (users) can be collectively relied upon.</p> <p>Important in setting eligibility is budget consideration, which is a function of political decision.</p> <p>Another factor to be considered is possible people’s alteration of their behavior because they want to benefit from the programme, which could have impact on them even after it ends.</p>
Informing the stakeholders	This is concerned with all activities relating to informing stakeholders about programme packages. Agency and efficiency are two arguments here: agency notes that citizens should be intimated with entitlements and rights of the programme for them to actively engagement in all activities to access them. Efficiency sees poverty reduction as multi-sector affair and therefore demands engagement of both direct actors (implementers and the poor) as well as actors who often engagement in similar programmes with established contacts with the poor. Effective avenues could be used such as face-to-face, radio, television among others.

The identification of individual eligibility for assistance	This involves screen the target population to meet step 2 criteria. There is challenge here in terms of reconciling sponsor's (government) information with that of identifying agent (implementer) and between identifying agent with that of the population (users), which could lead to exclusion or inclusion errors.  There is high tendency for clientelism, ordinary laziness or bribery, but these could be resolved through adequate accountability measures.
The entitlement	This stems from the step four and it is about granting entitlement to the identified population. The right of the targets needs protection hence, it is desired that a legal body or beneficiaries based body be assigned the task. They could have additional eligibility such as expected behavior and not as noted in step 3. Identifying agent can also serve this role.
The delivery of assistance	Key concern here is to ensure that delivered benefits really brings desired impact on the target population. In this case, both the frontline actors and policy makers share responsibility.

The six-steps had a great merit in the problem situation it was meant to address as it was targeted at specific experience in a health sector. However, it was limited in scope as it covered only the poor who need health care and assistance in low-income countries. The case was particularly in Cambodia health care funding experience. Whereas this study captured nuances of health care beneficiary targeting experience, it could not unravel contending issues in stakeholder engagement that lead to either success or failure of empowerment interventions. Hence, our prescription, SGG comes in to fill the gap and provide more detail of experiences for empowerment interventions involving diverse categories of stakeholder target groups.

The thematic analysis identified eleven themes based on the alignment observed in the interview data. The interview questions from which the respondent views were generated were framed from the study objectives and the conceptual model as developed in this paper. The questions helped the researchers to draw perspectives from the respondents on the identified themes. The respondent data validated papers position and arguments made in the literature.

### **Linking Policy ownership and Stakeholder engagement for sustainable food security**

This theme tries to find out whether the policy programme under study is a product of the stakeholders drawn from their definition of their peculiar and time bound problems. The involvement of the stakeholders offers them an opportunity to initiate, formulate, implement and evaluate a programme based on their imperatives. The policy problem under consideration in a given programme is a problem of the stakeholders, which they desire to take active part in solving so as to determine how best to go about it.

The stakeholders were not involved except those in the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources such as the Commissioners, permanent secretaries, head of departments and other stakeholders in the same ministry. These formulate the policies and only come out to announce to the people. The professional farmers are not involved in the blueprint design (Respondent 1).

From the above response, it can be observed that the stakeholders are very much aware of the existing engagement gap. It also shows that they actually expect and desire to be engaged. It revealed the engagement pattern of the policy regime (May & Joachim, 2012) where only key stakeholders in the public ministries are engaged, which make-up secondary stakeholders as identified in the SGG. The central theme of policy ownership is the policy problem. The secondary stakeholders, though they are experts in terms of scientific knowledge, lack user experience which primary stakeholders possess. In the literature, primary stakeholders are referred to as experience experts (Meessen & Criel, 2008). Their lack of engagement deprived the ministry the real knowledge of the policy problem. The primary stakeholders in the other way round are deprived of the eventual policy ownership.

### **Policy Legitimation: a missing link in the policy regime governance approach**

Policy impact highly depends on the agreement of the policy target to allow that effect. The stakeholders have the right to accept a policy or not to accept. The way to mandate policy acceptance is to place the stakeholder on the tunnel of the policy process. In this way, they cannot deny their workmanship. So, policy legitimacy ensures collective responsibility. By implication, the stakeholders have the moral obligation to strive along with the policy regime to make the programme work. The opposite is where the stakeholders are not obliged to consolidate with the

regime and might even have the tendency to blame and criticise them because they are alien to the course and have no understanding and adequate knowledge of the programme. Policy legitimacy can be defined as stakeholders' socio-moral obligation to consolidate a policy or programme when it appeals to their acceptance.

For policy to be successfully implemented, the stakeholders must first accept it  
(Respondent 10)

To an extent, stakeholders' acceptance of policy programme, policy regime, and approaches mobilised determine policy success not just how good policies might be  
(Respondent 07)

Normatively, that is true to some extent, however, the stakeholders often are not so much concerned about whether a programme or regime or approach could be accepted but on whether they would delay the needed good and service  
(Respondent 15)

It could be understood that from the responses that a policy or programme that meets stakeholders' needs is highly desired and clamoured for. Moreover, they opined that meeting real needs is possible through sound programme and approach to its implementation, and responsible policy regime.

### **Accountability**

If it is for the stakeholders to come to accountability, not very true I believe these stakeholders are deep into business and therefore accountability is a responsibility. What I see here is just government trying to escape some responsibilities (in accounting for money) and avoid giving the stakeholders much power (respondent 07)

Lack of provision for accountability is to avoid criticism (Respondent 03)

From this response, it could be drawn that stakeholders are kept offshore to ensure that accountability is not considered in the empowerment programme equation. It is therefore a huge



challenge for the policy regime to provide the platform that would permit scrutiny of the programme. The secondary stakeholders who are agents of the government and driver actors in the policy regime, do not wish to come to the limelight of accountability. Centralised policy actors in the regime work under the modus of operation of the regime and are susceptible to manipulation by the regime leaders. These often collaborate to defraud the primary stakeholders or effectively shortchange them in empowerment benefit (Idike et al, 2020).

### **Preference expression**

Do they assume stakeholders' needs? Yes. Do they avoid preference expression? Not really. But it seems as though they already have a decision in mind and seeking preference is just to fulfill “righteousness” (Respondent 07).

Actually, the policy regime knows that you need money, seed (like better seed) and other materials. They do not see the need to come to ask if you need them. They assume they know what the people need and make provision for it but then, eventually, it never gets to the people (Respondent 01).

Some respondents showed that they are provided with no opportunity for preference expression. Others opined that that provision even if available is just ceremonial. That is, the inputs of the stakeholders are not inculcated into the policy document or process. It could be seen that the needs of the primary stakeholders appear self-evident and clear. Though their needs can easily be understood, they expect to be engaged because there areas that may not come easily to the understanding of the secondary stakeholders and other policy actors.

### **Conclusion**

The era of policy process monopolisation is over and there is a call in public administration to turn a new approach (Bingham et al., 2005). That approach is stakeholder engagement (Farazmand, 2012; Trischler et al., 2019; Verschuere et al., 2018; Matu et al., 2020; Ukeje et al., 2020). However, as we have discovered in this study, engagement practice across regions of the world is raising concerns among scholars and practitioners (Kruijf & Vries, 2014). The problem that triggered this study was the absence of success even when the popular practice of stakeholder engagement has been adopted in the study area. We have come to understand that stakeholder

engagement on its own is not sufficient to sponsor policy success but a mix of key factors. We captured these key factors in a conceptual model known as Dynamic Stakeholder Governance Innovation model, as a unique contribution to both knowledge and practice. Our contribution sought to redefine stakeholder engagement practice and theory. Further, we contributed on the definition of who a stakeholder is, as an addition to the extant literature. We developed stakeholder governance grid that highlighted comprehensive categorisation of possible stakeholders in a system. Nonetheless, the grid drew hugely from the definition of Freeman (1984). Notwithstanding, we went further to x-ray insight into stakeholder definition as those who have realised that they have problem and at the same time need to take part in solving those problems. Complex problem of the society needs dynamic solutions. Some of these problems demand pool of actors from diverse sectors. It is this reality that makes dynamic engagement of relevant stakeholders inevitable and advisable.

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