

# INFORMATION, PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

J. E. IMHANLAHIMI AND M. O. IKEANYIBE

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## ABSTRACT

Information and public policy analysis are critical factors in adequate public policy formulation, implementation and evaluation if the public good is to be achieved in Nigeria. This paper has carried out a critical examination of the interface between information and the public policy process and the effect on public policy analysis and has found that there is a crucial interrelationship among them in order to promote sustainable development. The paper found that the interrelationship is however, seriously interfered with or obstructed by a variety of dominant constraints. The constraints include inadequate human capital, financial resources, large-scale secrecy in government business, inadequate incentives to statisticians and grand corruption in many, if not all, public organizations in Nigeria. They promote negative effects, including unreliable data and information, inadequate public policy analysis by analysts, and more importantly inadequate public policy outcome or impact. The paper also found a rather self-imposed constraint by some public policy analysts who obviously colour their analysis by getting involved in prescriptive public policies. The paper proffers recommendations such as provision of adequate training and retaining for statisticians, formation of a virile statistical association for statisticians, provision of incentives for statisticians, honesty in the application of information by analysts and reduction in the level of secrecy imposed on governmental information. Finally, it is recommended that policy analysts should restrict themselves to objective description and explanatory analysis of public policy rather than prescription.

## INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps obvious to assert that only the human element is more critical than information in the managing of a successful organisation, be it public or private. It also appears reasonable to state that the level of success of each organization or political system is a function of the information available to it and its application. Therefore, the importance of information, indeed adequate information, can only be under emphasized, not over emphasized.

As has been rightly put, knowledge is power, knowledge is mainly obtained from correct, reliable, and adequate information available to one on timely basis. Therefore, if information is incorrect or belated, knowledge and power may not be derived from it. The power referred to here is not the brute type but the one that can enable an informed person to outshine his/her colleagues who do not have the relevant information at their disposal. Three points, *inter alia*, seem to be important to be highlighted in what has been said above. One is accurate information, which can only be obtained from authentic source(s). The second is the timely availability of information because accurate or reliable but belated information would be almost, if not indeed, useless for a particular purpose. And third, the quantity of information (Aiyepoku, 1978).

Surely, it is saying the least to assert that it is terrible to operate without information. Stolper (1966) incidentally writing on the Nigerian national planning in the immediate post independence experience, without adequate information, titled his work "Planning Without Facts". Operating in such a situation is sometimes described as "guesstimate" or proximate" or rule of the thumb approach. Although social, economic and political statistics may not be as very accurate as the information for the natural sciences, there is at least some level of data/information that can promote rational and acceptable level of economic, social and political policies and hence facilitate adequate public analysis. Beyond that level, the public policies formulated may be very much fraught with serious weaknesses and problems of implementation and analysis, and incapable of sustaining development. The above brief discussion essentially seeks to stress the central position of information for public policy analysis and analysts.

The central problem of this paper is how to ensure that public policy analysis in Nigeria can always be achieved or

undertaken with dependable and reliable information which is made available in adequate quality, quantity and timely. Thus, public policy analysis can be undertaken with a high sense of confidence, relative ease and acceptance to public policy makers and implementers, and to the benefit of the society as well.

The methodology for this research work included personal search of the available extant open records and documents in the Federal Office of Statistics, now renamed National Bureau of Statistics, (NBS), Edo State, Nigeria. The researchers also had some interviews and discussions with some statisticians in the NBS and in the Edo State civil service, as well as personal search on their open files. All this was supplemented with a critical review and use of available relevant literature and the vast experience of the authors as former top administrators.

Structured into four sections, the first section of the paper is on introduction and structural layout. Section two is on conceptualizations, while the third focuses on the constraints of data sourcing for policy analysis and effects of lack of adequate reliable information in Nigeria. Recommendations to improve on information production, storage, retrieval and dissemination to enhance public policy analysis for sustainable development constitute the fourth section of the paper.

## II CONCEPTUALIZATIONS Sustainable Development

The term sustainable development was recently developed. It dates back to the 1980s and was borrowed from the biological sciences where it was used as "sustainable yield", that is, the handling of species without depleting the population or causing their extinction (Morris, 2002). The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), borrowing a leaf from the biological sciences, defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs (Morris, 2002., Onokerhoraye, 2005).

The central position of information and public policy analysis in sustainable development, in the light of the above definition, can be justifiably sustained. Sustainable development therefore calls for adequate public policies, adequate and reliable data or information made available on time for policy analysts to utilize. These are to be harnessed

by objective analysts who are expected, nay required, to investigate, analyze and explain the strengths and weaknesses of public policies in Nigeria, so as to promote the common good or happiness of the society. At the same time, these efforts are expected not to harm or obstruct the ability of the future generations to promote their development needs.

Unfortunately, the trend has been the reverse. Morris (2002:2) has asserted that "most discussions [and actions] of sustainable development have failed to give due attention to meeting the needs of the present" and indeed the needs of the future generations are also being threatened. Some of the teething issues in this matter include the terrorist attacks, especially the suicide attacks, in different parts of the world, including the United States of America, Kenya, Indonesia, Britain, which are threatening human existence, but are erroneously alleged to facilitate entry into Heaven. There is also the dreaded AIDS, which is fast ravaging the world. And of course, the issue of frequent plane crashes and incessant road accidents resulting from inadequate road construction or maintenance in Nigeria leading to the loss of thousands of lives. Then there is the issue of grand corruption. The existence of these terrible problems, amongst others, cannot be said to be promoting sustainable development. They are consequent upon unsatisfactory public policies premised on high level corruption, arbitrariness and blatant show of power—all of which are anti-sustainable development. As Onokerhoraye (2005:14) puts it, the world should be seen as "one ecosystem" in which the concept of sustainable development would promote "the principles, ideals, and values seen as desirable and necessary if the world is to deal effectively with the current global problems of environment and the development process". Therefore, adequate public policies in each nation-state, reliable information, in Nigeria which is our focus of study, as well as objective public policy analysts are needed to contribute substantially to ensure a harmonious global system.

### The Concept of Public Policy Analysis

The literature on the conceptualization of public policy analysis is very rich as there are numerous definitions that have been proposed by different writers. But a close examination of the definitions would reveal that they essentially regard public policy analysis as the study or investigation of public policy (Nagel, 1977; Hambleton, 1979; Dye, 1995; Anderson, 2003; Ikelegbe, 2005). Egonmwan (1991), however, stands out rather spectacularly through his categorization of the contributors to the conceptualization of public policy analysis into two broad schools. These are the behavioural and normative schools, while also offering definitions, which represent the two schools.

The summary by Egonmwan (1991) of the conceptions of the two schools is quite clear. The first he conceives as commonly involving a systematic investigation of a particular policy area without either approving or disapproving of such policy. This means the description, analysis and explanation of causes and consequences of public policy in the society. The second school he presents "in the context of a study as a prelude to policy decision making. Such a study is geared towards the solution of a practical problem of the society.... The normative approach is analytical and prescriptive".

For space constraint, we can only provide one or two definitions from the behavioural and normative schools respectively, before some criticisms are advanced and our definition is offered. One definition in the behavioural school is by Anderson (2003:2). According to him,

First, its primary goal is to explain the adoption of a policy rather than to identify or prescribe "good" or proper policy. Analysis, rather than advocacy, is its style. Second, it rigorously searches for the causes and consequences of public policies by applying social-scientific methodology, which is not restricted to the use of quantitative data and methodology. At a

minimum, it does require that one should strive to be rational, empirical, and objective. Third, this approach aims to develop reliable theories and explanations about public policies and their politics.

Another definition from the behavioural school is by Poister (1978:1). He states that public policy analysis concerns the "analysis of the determinants, characteristics and implications of public policies and programmes and the substantive consequences and outcomes they produce". The above two definitions place emphasis on rigorous social scientific approach to policy analysis. They have no room for prescription or recommendation of preferred public policy.

On the other hand, Ikelegbe (2005:15) pitches his tent with the normative school. According to him, "public policy analysis is aimed at improving the basis for public policy making, the content, knowledge about the outcomes and impact of public policy and ways and means of improving public policy performances". Ikelegbe (2005:15) in his explanatory notes on his definitions clarifies his normative bent better. He asserts that "...policy analysis is particularly prescription rather than descriptive".

Dye (1995:14) is one of the writers that offered what would have passed as a very precise definition of public policy analysis in the behavioural school. But the classification by Egonmwan (1991) which we agree with has shown that Dye does not really belong squarely to the behavioural school. He is rather flexible and therefore in the normative school. For him, in public policy analysis, social scientists (nay political scientists) are

Concerned with who gets what in politics and more importantly, why and what difference it makes [In other words], we are concerned not only with what policies governments pursue but also why governments pursue the policies they do and what the consequences of those policies are.

This definition passes for a behavioural approach or leaning. In deed, Dye (1995: 3) offers a first clarification, which further passes him for a behaviouralist. Public policy analysis, he clarifies, is:

The description and explanation of the causes and consequences of government activity. This focus involves a description of the content of public policy, an analysis of the impact of social, economic and political forces on the content of public policy; and inquiry into the effect of various institutional arrangement and political processes on public policy; and an evaluation of the consequences of public policies on society, both expected and unexpected consequences.

It is the following second clarification by Dye (1995:7-8) that shows his flexibility and tolerance for both schools; hence we placed him in the normative school. Public policy analysis, he stated, involves "a primary concern with explanation rather than prescription. Policy recommendations—if they are made at all—are subordinate to description and explanation". It is clear that Dye in this second clarification of public policy analysis as quoted above, is flexible, for a "primary" concern must have a "secondary" concern. Policy recommendations (prescriptions) according to Dye, could be made but they may be seldom. It is obvious that while Dye in his definition has attempted to exclude prescription or normative orientation from public policy analysis, he did not succeed in doing so precisely. He rather ended up being flexible and belonging to the normative school.

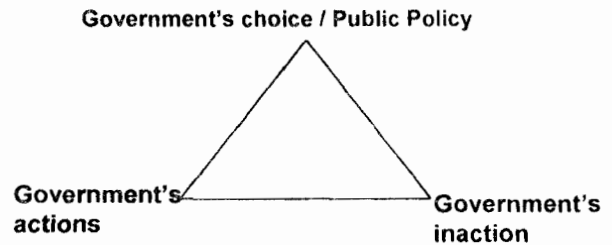
Before offering our definition of public policy analysis, it is pertinent to ask some questions. (1) Are public policy analysts public policy makers? (2) Does the established role of public policy analysts and civil servants go beyond developing alternatives to public policy making and specifying their implications? (3) Can public policy analysts replace politicians as the people's representatives in public policy making? (4) Is it desirable that they do so? (5) Is public policy making an

objective or political affair? (6) Is public policy analysis an objective or political affair? (7) Are all public policy analysts objective or political? (8) Should public policy analysts, especially social scientists, be objective or political in their analysis? (9) Does rigorous scientific methodology or inquiry advocated in public policy analysis admit of prescription or objective investigation, analysis, explanation and recording? (10) Do prescriptions, also, generally, called administrative principles in political science and public administration, admit of rigorous scientific methodology and analysis? (11) Is it not because of non-rigorous analysis that Simon (1946) rightly referred to administrative principles or theories as proverbs of administration? (12) Can prescriptive analysts be impartial in their prescriptions? (13) Can prescriptive analysts faithfully serve any political master that gains the reign of political power in a polity from time to time? (14) Is politics no longer a profession? (15) Do public policy analysts belong to that profession? (16) Does the blurring of politics-administration dichotomy extend to prescription making by the administration? (17) Will prescription continue to earn respect, honour, and integrity to the body or generality of academic public policy analysts? (18) Would analysts continue to be themselves if their prescriptions are disregarded by decision makers? (19) Would they continue to be encouraged to undertake objective public policy analysis which might similarly not be acceptable to, or might be rejected by, policy makers? (20) Would analysts not feel rejected especially in the less development countries such as Nigeria, Uganda, Chile, Pakistan, and Jamaica, if their prescriptions are rejected, and camp with opposition party? (21) Would analysts be as objective as they would have ordinarily been in analyzing public policies chosen by government or decision makers in preference to their prescribed policies?

A critical and careful examination of the above twenty-one questions shows that thirteen of them attract negative answers and the rest eight similarly do not point favourably to the analysts or their functions. That informs the basis of our definition of public policy analysis which is precisely or unequivocally in the behavioural school. Our public policy analysis definition agrees with Dye's in some respects. It looks at public policy analysis from a three-prong perspective as in Figure 1.

Now our definition. Public policy analysis focuses on the critical and objective description, examination, investigation and explanation (for short, "analysis") of the content of public policy or programmes or actions or inaction of government. It also focuses on the analysis of the social, economic, political,

cultural, institutional and other forces in the implementation or output stage. It as well concerns itself with an analytic evaluation or assessment of the impact or outcome or consequences of the public policy on the society, and a possible development of alternative decisions or courses of action with their implications, so as to improve and or facilitate the public policy process.



Source: The authors.

Figure 1: Scope of Public Policy Analysis

In the behavioural tradition in which we are rooted, we seek to state that public policy analysis should be undertaken on strict academic basis. This means seeking after the facts in the attributes of the three-prong areas in Figure 1 as detailed by Table 1. The focus of our definition is that analysis should be on investigation and explanation of the issues in the areas in Table 1 for greater understanding and hence to assist policy makers and implementers, mainly, to act in the greatest interest of the citizenry in the future. All we have tried to do in Table 1 is to state the broad areas in which government makes policies and to show that it is the same areas in which it may, or may not, take actions. It is the same areas that evaluation and analysis are done and in which alternative decisions with their implications may be developed by analysts to facilitate government's choices or decisions. Prescriptions are excluded. Our definition insists that analysis should leave out the prescriptive, preferred or political choices which interface with decisions. They belong rightly to the government or politicians who have the constitutional, popular or enfranchised and professional rights to make choices or decisions.

Table 1: Issues in the Study or Analysis of Public Policy

Public Policy making	Implementation		Evaluation of Impact /outcome / consequences	
	Government's choice/policy in:	Government's Actions in:	Government's Inaction in:	Possible development of alternative decisions in:
• Economic	• Economic	• Economic	• Economic	• Economic
• Political	• Political	• Political	• Political	• Political
• Social	• Social	• Social	• Social	• Social
• Cultural	• Cultural	• Cultural	• Cultural	• Cultural
• Institutional	• Institutional	• Institutional	• Institutional	• Institutional
• Other matters	• Other matters	• Other matters	•Other matters	•Other matters

Source: The authors.

**Public Policy Analysis value**

A discussion of the purpose of policy analysis and who benefits from such analysis may promote a better understanding of our definition of public policy analysis.

Some writers (for example, Egonmwan 1991) have approached the discussion of the purpose of policy analysis from the view point of issues which inform it. These issues include the intellectual, political, economic and social bases. In this paper however, the intellectual, practical and service

purpose will be used because in our opinion they embrace all the other issues.

The intellectual purpose of analysis, according to Egonmwan (1991) is to assist the decision makers in choosing a preferred course of action among competing alternatives under certain conditions. This purpose agrees exactly with the view expressed by the Rand Corporation (1977) of policy analysis. Our observation is that intellectual purpose of policy analysis does not serve the interest of policy makers only. It

also serves the interests of practical men or implementers in the policy process, the interest of the analysts themselves and the interest of the general public as well. Through a well informed public policy choice which is optimally implemented as a result of the effects of adequate policy analysis, the public will benefit. The analysts can stamp their relevance in the process. This is why our contention is that the intellectual, practical and service purpose of policy analysis is to assist in enhancing understanding, decisions, programmes and activities that are undertaken in the public policy process, not only in the interest of the decision makers but in others' interests.

Policy analysts (not only social scientists) are said to contribute to public policy analysis from two basic perspectives. First is the descriptive and explanatory and the second is the prescriptive and normative (Egonmwan, 1991). As far as we are concerned, only the first perspective is acceptable to us. This is so because the descriptive and explanatory perspective is usually informed by scientific rigour, empiricism and the application of other analytic tools which normally depend on resources, data, and information obtained from political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Knowledge so produced can be used to assist the public policy process better than information from the prescriptive or normative orientation. This assistance which informs the heart of the purpose of policy analysis, includes better empowerment of the public policy makers, implementers, evaluators, the general public as well as the analysts to understand, appreciate government's strengths and weaknesses and to perform better their roles in the process.

Specifically, policy analysis enables the government to better handle the public policy process, and to know how far its public policies are appreciated, accepted, utilized and owned by the citizenry and protected by them. It also enables the informed public to appreciate better the public policy process in terms of content, strengths and weaknesses of a particular public policy. Furthermore, it offers what Okereke (1998) refers to as a level of political education. Of course, it offers empowerment to choose in elections. In short, therefore, the intellectual, practical and service purpose of public policy analysis is integrative of all the other issues which arrow towards solving political, social, economic, institutional and cultural problems and indeed societal problems in order to improve on the social contract or common good. For emphasis, it is clearly stated that the beneficiary from public policy analysis includes the decision makers, implementers, evaluators, the citizenry, as well as the analysts themselves.

### Issues for Public Policy Analysis

In what areas would information be needed for public policy analysis? The answer to this question would depend on the issues appropriate for public policy analysis. From the available literature, issues for public policy analysis have attracted divergent views of scholars and writers. Dibia (2000:31) states that:

A clear understanding of the policy-making process in government is necessary to enable us appropriate (sic) not only how public policies are formulated but also to facilitate the analysis of public policy process as well as monitoring its effective implementation.

The crux of his contribution is the concern with public policy-making and implementation. His submission seems to exclude public policy evaluation and impact or outcome assessment.

Okereke (1998:75-77) submits that issues for inclusion would relate to problem identification. His argument is that:

Any group, community or individual that succeeds in attracting attention to its (sic) problem, thus transforming it to a public problem, and succeeds in convincing government or policy-makers that it (sic) problem is deserving of

attention and solution, would have succeeded in pushing the issue on the policy agenda thereby enabling them (sic) to attain agenda status

This argument does not appear convincing enough. A community or group or individual problem can attain public agenda and get solved without necessarily attaining public policy status or agenda. A devastating gully erosion in a community that draws the attention and sympathy of government in Nigeria and gets promptly solved, would not qualify to be called a matter for public policy formulation. The action taken by government on such a matter is usually called a decision or decision-action, and in many cases such issues are part of existing public policy or public policy implementation. Even if the matter does not attract the attention of the government, it is all the same a part of public policy, which is yet to be implemented or for which there is no government action.

In summary, issues for which information would be required to promote effective analysis by public policy analysts relate to the ramifications of the public policy process (Table 1).

### Information

For the purpose of this paper, information and data are used synonymously but for emphasis, they may sometimes be used together in parts of this paper. Data and information, the dictionary states, are respectively facts and knowledge. Therefore, it is appropriate to state that known facts constitute knowledge.

Information may be expressed qualitatively or quantitatively. If expressed graphically, information is put in the form of drawings, while symbolic expression of information, according to Ola and Oyibo (2000), is a shorthand for description. The overriding point about a given information is the understanding it affords the user and its timely and appropriate dissemination. In other words, for information to be useful it must be properly packaged for the understanding and acceptance of its target group. Such target group will normally vary from the less literate to the very literate, including, for example, policy analysts, researchers and scholars. The implication of this is that every member of the target group would have to understand or discern the available information in varying degrees of perceptions.

The reliability of information greatly depends on its source of origin. Members of a target group know fairly well where to source for information. Social science scholars or academics or researchers, for example, would generally access social science journals, published academic books, the internet, government gazettes, government organs such as the printing press and concerned ministries and departments. Additionally, they carry out survey work in order to obtain reliable or empirical information. Dependable and reliable information would, not doubt, increase effective analysis by public policy analysts and hence contribute to more informed public policy process and sustainable development. In addition to reliability of information, which could contribute its quota to improving analysis by public policy analysts, it is relevant to stress the need for adequacy and empathy in giving information. Empathy represents a state of mind of the informer or information scientists as the case may be, to imaginatively put himself in the stead of the potential user or reader (Chambers English Dictionary, 1990). This way, he would be in a position to give information that would be regarded as reasonably adequate on the subject-matter. The target group we have mentioned above tends to condition the state of mind of the informer or information scientist, but his empathy, will no doubt, widen his appreciation of the level of information to disseminate, so as to place the target group fairly on the same pedestal.

Timely availability of information comes handy to assist our emphasis on adequate (right quality and quantity) of information. A belated information is surely not as useful as a timely one, especially viewed against its facilitative function to enhance the effectiveness of public policy analysts. As has



been stated in the introductory section of this paper, belated information would promote guesstimate. Therefore, in the interaction and discussion by public policy analysts, untimely information would result in their waste of some valuable resources to arrive at, or end up with, dissonance, rather than effective and acceptable analysis and the sustainability of the development efforts. Obvious resource problems in the timely dissemination of information must be handled adroitly and dynamically, possibly through persuasions, reminder memoranda, justification, emphasis on usefulness, gentle pressure, other resourceful means, and so on, to obtain the necessary resources and succeed. For too long, officers in charge of matters in the public sector in Nigeria have stressed the "cannot do" factors or reasons. It is time to emphasize the "can do" or "success" factors. Only the "success" or "can do" factors will bring about the dissemination of timely and adequate (that is, right quality and quantity) information, which can promote greater understanding and the effectiveness of public policy analysts in policy analysis for sustainable development in Nigeria.

### Information Management System and Networking

Public policy analysts and government in Nigeria should have no much problem with the development of information and communication technology (ICT). There appears to the writers no question with accepting the arrival of ICT which government should endeavour to grapple with. ICT will help government to store, process, retrieve and disseminate information as and when necessary to be used by the analysts. ICT is breaking down bureaucratic boundaries and creating new opportunities for improving the conduct of government work. No doubt Hayward (1987:101) was right when he asserted that information is, after all, "a strategic resource- the life blood of organization".

Government will need to design new systems for information processing and may need to involve public policy analysts, so that basic application inputs that will facilitate the requisite information processing will be installed in the processor. Governments' annual reports by different ministries and parastatals, audit reports, gazettes and such other annual publications are no longer enough for public policy analysts to rely upon to do a good public policy analysis. Such system lacks the kind of on-going, reiterative and systematic process to keep the flow of information going to those who need it (Pirie, 1986). Current strategic management of information requires networking that is, the installation of a system of computer terminals and other devices that can pass information across a number of interconnected computers (Chambers English Dictionary, 1990). Information networking thus helps to facilitate the communication of the same information across governmental organizations, integrate intelligence (Pirie, 1987) and to reduce what Anderson (2003:21) calls "information asymmetry" that is, differing amounts of information to end users, such as policy analysts, decision makers, implementers, and so on. Another advantage of networking information is its timeliness on providing information because it is usually or normally entered as soon as received in an open system. Or as the Uganda

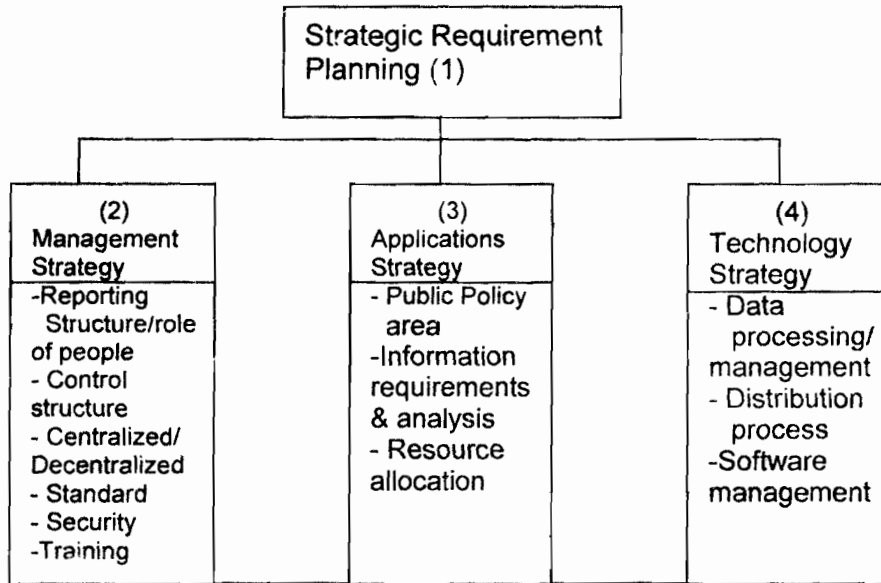
government's Public Service Review and Reorganization Commission cited in Kiragu (2002:109) puts it, "computerized systems... facilitate the constant flow of information from the various sections of the service to the center".

To assist in the strategic information management to enhance the work of public policy analysts and the policy process, government would need to do three basic things. These are: (a) establish a formal mechanism for continually gathering reliable and dependable information. It is noted that most governments in Nigeria have adopted Planning, Research and Statistics Departments (PRSD) but they seem not to have been empowered to discharge their duties efficiently and effectively. Their research capability is usually of low ranking and they are not usually empowered with appropriate and adequate training and retraining. The PRSDs usually have few facilities such as computers, typewriters, low level secretarial staff and, of course, they have low financial and communication base. (b) the departments need a clear, on-going or standing authority and accountability to manage the information flow. The security information that should not enter the system should be barred from the Department. Until the information bill on the free flow of information in Nigeria is passed into law, it will continue to remain rather difficult to establish clear lines of difference between security and harmless information. This means that in Nigeria, quite some information may continue to be arbitrarily classified and not made available, thereby hindering effective policy analysis. However, any information that gets to the Department should be freely processed for dissemination (c) as already stated, there should be networking of information in government, so that users, including public policy analysts, do not have to congregate at one source for information. The flow of information will therefore enhance accountability and could reduce corruption, in the Nigerian government, while improving effectiveness of public policy analysts.

All we have discussed above the need for networking of information for easy access to users, including analysts may look verbose. Hence an attempt is made to provide a model (Figure 2) that could be adapted or adopted for producing, processing, retrieving and distributing information using the computer. With the model, users may have ready access to information. The model focuses on strategic structures or mechanisms for information management. The overall purpose of the model is to encourage government to develop a proactive approach to systematic information management, so it can always be relied upon, and speedily and easily accessed.

The model in Figure 2 comprises four major structures or mechanisms: strategic requirements planning, management strategy, applications strategy, and technology strategy. A brief discussion of each follows

(1) **Strategic Requirements Planning-** This component of the model deals with the governmental policies and objectives. It is the nexus of the model since it provides the *raison d'etre* or link between the plans and strategies for information



Source: Adapted from Hayward (1987:104)

**Figure 2:** A model for Information Management in Government Organizations in Nigeria

system with the corporate objectives and policies of government and how to ensure their realization. The stage involves the top management level intimately as the most important and uniting one with the other levels of the model.

**(2) Management Strategy-** In this stage, management maps out strategies for reporting, or role relationships among its employees, so that the management of information system (MIS) can be operated satisfactorily to achieve corporate or governmental policies and objectives. Here too, decisions need to be taken on control system, that is, whether centralised or decentralised. This will depend on the type of the information needed. As already stated, security information will have to be centralised and may not be put into network. General information or data would have to be decentralised. The standards needed have to be set in areas such as the type, level of information needed, how it is to be accessed or disseminated, general conduct of staff-all would need to be set up. Similarly, security for equipment, accessories, data, information dissemination would be determined. Equally important at this stage is the need to train staff appropriately in new concepts, security consciousness, and so on. The training must be dynamic, so that staff can be adaptive and hence perform their assigned duties optimally.

**(3) Applications Strategy-** This deals with information architecture or requirements analysis with respect to the public policy area, process, as well as outcomes. It is basically concerned with analysis of strategies for obtaining information, resources allocation for public policy process as well as outcomes. The stage similarly deals with interrelationships among the information stages of the public policy process. Applications strategy stage also has to take cognisance of the public policy area, so that information required could be adequately analysed. Information required must be properly understood before it could be sourced. Data analysis technique and statistics would have to be developed as appropriate, depending on the public policy area. On resource allocation, rationality, and systemic consideration would be very useful in handling scarce resources, with prejudice, however, to meeting priorities. This way, all the subsystems of

the government organization would feel part of the information management system, on an interdependent basis.

**(4) Technology Strategy-** This stage and applications strategy are close but they are separate in some respects. Emphasis here is on the use of the computer to support the earlier stages to achieve the overall governmental goal and promote the desired effectiveness of analysts. It is important to stress that investment in computers, once regarded as negative and against the secretarial staff, and so on, has been found to be worthy and beneficial. It is interesting to note that there is global pressure, for instance, from the United Nations (Kiragu, 2002) on the use of the computer by national governments. Even though some socialist critics might call it neo-colonialism and capitalist exploitation, we see it more as a positive, necessary evil. It is sad to remark here that computers in the public service, especially the civil service, in Nigeria are still a rarity in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Investment in computers yields bountiful rewards: easy information storage, access, speedy communication, greater understanding which promotes empathy and analysts' and citizenry satisfaction which can encourage government to support better MIS, and so on.

Developing appropriate technology in Nigeria would therefore require acquisition of more computers, relevant software and appropriate strategies for data analysis and data base creation. Therefore, distribution of information should be decentralised, provided that sensitive national security information is not allowed to be accessed. In addition, however, government information can also continue to be usefully distributed through governmental publications such as bulletins, gazettes, annual reports, hansards, statistical digests, white papers, and so on. They are hard to destroy, and cheaper to obtain than on-line down loading of papers, although slower to produce. This informative service through government non-on-line method, which is usually subsidised, is an inevitable and or all-important social service which is bound to be beneficial to all and sundry. It is surely a high ranked priority need of the society as well as public policy analysts, although second to computer or on-line information service.

As for software management, the advice is that it should be handled as part and parcel of the general technology acquisition for improved information management. There is need to spend some funds to acquire current and relevant software that can offer a range of applications, and to up-date them from time to time. Computers may appear expensive but the rewards are manifold and indeed the costs are gradually collapsing.

In all this, the public policy analysts should be involved *mutatis mutandis* in the planning and execution, so that there may be a synergy between the government and field operators (public policy implementers and analysts) to promote stakeholder involvement, ownership, empowerment and effectiveness to the benefit of all concerned, including the society.

### III CONSTRAINTS TO ADEQUATE INFORMATION AND EFFECTIVE ANALYSIS BY POLICY ANALYSTS IN NIGERIA

Many constraints trail the provision of adequate information thus hampering effective analysis by public analysts in Nigeria. Such constraints include inadequate human capital, inadequate financial resources, inadequate equipment, secrecy in government business, inadequate incentives, and corruption. The following brief discussion of each of the constraints is not presented in any particular order.

**(a) Inadequate Human Capital-** As we have already pointed out, human beings are the most important production factors in any organization. In fact as Likert (1961) has rightly remarked, without human beings, every other thing in the organization is moribund. It is the human being who give life to the other productive inputs in the organization. Therefore, inadequate human capital in an organisation would mean that a number of issues would be unsatisfactorily handled.

In spite of the fact that public organizations have from colonial times been hard hit by inadequate professional staff the situation has remained virtually the same with Research and Statistics Department in many, if not all, public organizations in Nigeria. The reason for the state of affairs include what we have described as the rather unexciting nature of the work, the inadequate facilities placed at the disposal of the staff in that Department in public organizations, the rather low status that the staff of the Department attract from other staff and the general public in Nigeria are all issues to worry about. The issue of the training and retraining of the staff is most important. The experience is that once trained, the staff are hardly exposed to retraining in order to upgrade their knowledge. They are therefore forced to operate with inadequate knowledge most of the time.

**(b) Inadequate Financial Resources and Equipment:** The Planning Research and Statistics Department (PRSD) has peculiar and overriding functions to carry out in the interest of a variety of persons. These include politicians, accountants, planners, administrators, academics, and so on. They therefore deserve to be specially treated with regard to the provision of financial resources. But the contrary is the case. The experience of the Department is that it is treated in the same way like any other Department in the public service and allocated the normal yearly budget provision. And like any other department, the budget is usually inadequate and may not even be fully released for its operations. Inadequate financial resources therefore affect other resources for work. These other resources include inadequate vehicles, computers, computer accessories, softwares, radios, and so on. The staff of the PRSD therefore find themselves managing to cope with their work as much as possible with little to show for their performances. This is in turn affects other persons, including general users of statistics or information and in particular public policy analysts.

**(c) Secrecy in Government Business-** As it is well known, government business could be divided into two categories. The first category has to do with non-secret matters and information, which the society may easily have access to. The second category can be regarded as the classified or secret matters and information, which the public cannot easily, (may not), have access to. But the experience of the public in Nigeria and indeed in many less developed countries (LDCs) is that many matters and information at the disposal of civil servants, including statisticians, are regarded as secret. Secrecy in government is actually the bane of Nigerian public organizations. Although different information in governmental bureaucracies were to be given different levels of protection, such as secret, confidential, restricted, etc., under the said two categories of secret and non-secret, the operations of virtually all matters in the civil service leaves much to be desired. They are virtually handled with a great deal of caution by over zealous public servants, that leaves only a fragment of information accessible to the public, including public policy analysts. Ola and Eboh (1993:148) were so disturbed by secrecy in the operations of the Nigerian public bureaucracy that they had this to say: "openness satisfies the people's right to know while secrecy denies them this basic democratic right ... Civil servants cannot claim to work in the public interest if they do not let the public know what they are doing"

It is to deal with the secrecy in government business that the Federal Government of Nigeria, in 2005, put an information bill before the National Assembly to remove some of the obstacles and bring about more openness in accessing a great deal of government information without prejudice to the issues relating to national security which must be jealously guarded.

**(d) Inadequate Incentives-** Some of the issues in inadequate incentives which constrain staff in PRSD in the Nigerian public organizations from putting out their best in the work habits have been touched upon in our discussion of inadequate financial resources. So only a few issues in inadequate incentives are left for handling here.

As staff who are in what we have described as the "dry prairies" of the public service, the PRSD staff need incentives that will induce them to put in of their best in the performance of their official duties. But the situation that such staff face is that allowances are hardly honoured in full. This means that in some cases their overtime allowances are reduced, and some may not be paid, or payment is unduly delayed.

They are hardly provided with Department vehicles to undertake many necessary field trips to facilitate their collection of relevant, reliable and timely data and other information. Their offices are hardly equipped with necessary facilities in the name of their being field officers who hardly use their offices. Forced to cope with the situation presented to them, the PRSD staff are bound to perform their duties inadequately.

**(e) Corruption-** The final constraint we are discussing is corruption, which prevents the PRSD staff from operating effectively and efficiently. Corruption pervades the Nigerian society and in the public or civil service it deprives the operational staff from getting the resources that have been enumerated above and the incentives. The problem of corruption works in a way that the leadership is in the habit of pinching allocations to the PRSD staff. The staff of the Department would, of course, take a cue from the leadership to help themselves with whatever gets to them.

Perhaps, it is appropriate to tie all the other constraints we have discussed to the problem of corruption in the public service. And unfortunately, the type of corruption currently ravaging the Nigerian public service, including the legislative and executive arms, is the one described as grand corruption (World Bank, 2002). It does not cohabit with sustainable development and democracy. It promotes

inefficiency and ineffectiveness, which will in turn affect the level of information produced, processed, stored, retrieved and disseminated. The inadequate level is inimical particularly to effective public policy analysis in Nigeria. It would need a decisive action to bring it under control.

#### **Some Effects of Lack of Adequate and Reliable Statistical Data or Information in Nigeria**

Many problems are encountered in the above situation. They include:

First, the very difficult or daunting nature of research work undertaken by researchers in general and behavioural academic researchers in particular in Nigeria and indeed in some other less developed countries, especially many African countries. Behavioural researchers, as empirical researchers, take less interest in guesstimate, informed judgment or qualitative persuasions. They want reliable data to do the persuasion and convincing. They want to hinge analysis on what Yesufu (1996:52) calls "qualitative information" as the foundation of empirical data.

Second, lack of adequate and reliable statistical data, in a particular country, even in the 1960s in Nigeria was easily spread round. That was the time that Stolper wrote about lack of data for planning in Nigeria. In this age and time, it takes less than a day for information about the shortage of adequate information or data on a particular matter in a particular country to spread round the world which has been rightly described as a village. Such a negative information often leaves a stigma which is difficult to erase. This is the unfortunate situation many African countries, including Nigeria, find themselves. The world-wide circulation of such negative information does a lot of harm, especially to academic researchers or analysts. Thus, whatever academic or analysts write in such a country is taken with a grain of salt in many countries and indeed within the country by some critical and honest persons. Suspicious not only trails the academic endeavour of many researchers and analysts in such a country, many of their works face stiff rejection or they encounter demeanour in many places. Academic works or analysis in such countries hardly promote sustainable development.

Third, analysts can hardly muster dependable analysis on important public policy issues or matters. Counter views and explanations bring about weaknesses in analysts' analyses and less acceptance by policy makers and implementers. In such a situation policy makers and implementers seize the opportunity to dismiss analysts and their analysis and do whatever they like in the name of inadequate analysis. The society suffers in consequence.

Fourth, lack of adequate and reliable data and poor analysis encourage corruption as political leaders are confident that analysts would not have adequate information to substantiate their allegations of corruption and impropriety against the leadership.

#### **IV: RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW ADEQUATE INFORMATION CAN BE OBTAINED TO CONTRIBUTE TO EFFECTIVE PUBLIC POLICY ANALYSIS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

A lot of recommendations would be germane to this matter but the critical ones are what we have presented here in no particular order

(a) **Traning-** Training and retraining of PRSD staff have occupied the pride of place in these recommendations. This is in consonance with our earlier agreement with Likert (1961) that human beings occupy the central position in an organization (private or public). Nigeria lacks adequate professional staff. The training and retraining of PRSD staff would be a right step in the right decision. Many people, including the public in general and the public policy analysts, would benefit from the professionalization of the PRSD staff because the latter will be in a better position to perform their duties.

Some thought, which we agree with, has been given by Yesufu (1996:51) to the training, which should be given to PRSD staff on this matter. It is so germane that we quote it in *extenso*:

But there is still a great deal to be done to improve the overall quality and expertise at the sources of the data. This requires special effort on the part of the office (Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), now National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), to mount regular training for staff of different ministries and agencies (federal, state and private) on the nature, importance and methodology of statistical gathering, elementary analysis and testing as well as presentation. The importance for the national economy cannot be over-stressed.

It is interesting to note here that it appears that the NBS has already started responding to the above recommendation made by Yesufu. The NBS (2006 b) now expresses concern for the need for effective co-ordination of statistical activities and programmes across governmental boundaries and in between Agencies. According to Yesufu (1996) and we agree with him, the concern should be extended to private sector organizations. NBS (2006 b) similarly talks about daunting responsibilities and challenges facing the Nigerian Statistical System and it has started holding meeting of National Consultative Committee on Statistics, with the first Bi-annual meeting having been held in 2006 with the support of the World Bank.

More importantly, the NBS (2006 a) has mapped out training programmes and commenced the training of PRSD staff of Federal agencies as an off-shoot of the on-going efforts at reforming key institutions/agencies at the Federal level. One of the such training was organized for the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) in 2006 and NBS (2006 a) expressed the willingness to go into further collaboration with other Agencies alike with a view to strengthening the capacities in statistical production, application and dissemination.

(b) **Statistical Association-** It is interesting to note that there is a National Statistical Association in Nigeria, which is a co-ordination body for all statistical bodies, including NBS and statisticians in the country. We recommend that it should be strengthened to be a virile and respectable Association, which members would respect and owe allegiance. It should have clearly documented and comprehensive codes of conduct, formulated on participatory basis for its members, who must be encouraged to pay membership dues. And above all the Association must be prepared to impose sanctions on erring affiliate bodies and individual members, while honouring the distinguished members of the Association. It is such equitable justice that can help or contribute, in part, to restore the lost glory of statisticians in Nigeria, so as to enjoy improved respect and dignity. In turn, they will be in a position of discipline to offer improved service to the benefit of the society and the public policy analysts.

(c) **Incentives-** Information or statistical generation is one area of governmental activities which is not attractive of "green" as some other areas such as deployment to Government house or protocol functions, or the Ministries of Finance, Lands and Surveys or Internal Revenue Department. Imhanlahimhin (1995) observed that deployment to "non-green" areas such as PRSD and Ministries of Works and Agriculture seems to take one to the "dry prairies" of the public service, which civil servants do not fancy. Whereas civil servants lobby for posting or deployment to the "green" areas, it is generally regarded as a punishment, especially by non-specialist staff, to be posted or deployed to PRSD. Even the specialist staff, that is, those who have qualifications in statistics or related disciplines, such as mathematics, if they have the option, would want to be posted out from PRSD.

Ideally, PRSD staff are really supposed to be very active people. They are supposed to be like the field or site



engineers who are proud to wear moderate clothes such as jeans trousers and short sleeve flying shirts, and heavy laden rubber shoes to work. Active engineers abhor flowing, expensive and other inhibitive dresses such as suits and ties to work. But, of course, they are relatively well paid and may enjoy other incentives such as hazard allowance. On the other hand, the PRSD staff in the ministries and government parastatal organizations in Nigeria are paid like other public employees. Yet they are hardly expected to enjoy the coolness of their offices, which are invariably sparsely provided with office furnishings and comfort. The basic rationale for this is that personnel in statistical/information production are expected to be in the field most of the time gathering information/statistical data.

Precisely, the point being made here is that personnel in statistical/information production in the Government service in Nigeria need attractive incentives to increase their effectiveness. This is because even though the PRSD professional staff applied for the job, they no doubt see their colleagues in some other offices who appear to be enjoying their work more than the PRSD staff. Since the function of statistical/information production, analysis, storage and retrieval, wherever it is performed, is generally not quite exciting, the staff engaged in it deserve some incentives, so that they would be more committed to this all-important job.

Incidentally, the incentives being recommended by us are not really far from those that the Government service is used to. Such staff should be encouraged through the provision of adequate facilities for work – vehicles, computers (both desk and lap tops), their accessories, constant electricity supply, funds, communication gadgets, and, of course, prompt payment of their allowances, etc. After all, though in a developed country, it is estimated that 20-40 percent of the United States of America's Gross Domestic Product and one-half of the nation's workers are involved in information processing. This ratio is also estimated to be slightly lower in Japan, West Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden (Aiyepoku, 1978). The cost of the incentives we have recommended is a far cry from the above estimated expenditures. In addition, PRSD staff should be elevated or promoted meritoriously as and when due, so that those who are working, or not working, hard will be encouraged alike to work hard. Reward for indolence will put a blur on the incentive offered by promotion for hard working staff. Perhaps, the greatest incentive to emphasize for this category of public employees is personal satisfaction and development. The odds in accurate or dependable statistical data/information management are many and it takes more than a jiffy to excel in it. Personal satisfaction, discipline, and development would no doubt provide some impetus to the staff to put in their best in the production of reliable and dependable statistics/information. It is interesting to note here that the National Bureau of Statistics has commended capacity building through training programmes for statistical personnel in some Nigerian public services (NBS, 2006a; NBS 2006c).

It is one thing to hire a number of staff and assign them the responsibility of information management. The right attitude will be created in them if proper and adequate incentives, as discussed above, are provided for them to work with. Such incentives could work spectacular results, including shoring up effectiveness of analysts whose primary basis for action is availability of reliable and dependable information.

(d) **Honesty-** In view of the present problems of inadequate statistical information in Nigeria, we agree with Yesufu (1996:51) that researchers, and for the purpose of this paper, public policy analysts should make the best out of the information or statistics at their disposal and "enter due caveat or qualifications". Public policy analysts and other researchers should be honest enough to state their views on the statistics they are using for their analysis, including their survey data, as all data are prone to some weaknesses in one form or the other. Such honesty is likely to contribute to understanding,

more acceptable description and explanation of public policy analysis.

It is interesting to note that our recommendation on honesty has already been taken seriously or adopted by the NBS, so we actually took a cue from that Agency to make it. In almost every of the recent documents emanating from the NBS (2006a; 2006b) as already stated, there is a general admission of possible inadequacy of the data or statistical information or activity of that Agency. This is followed by requests by its Authority for criticisms and suggestions for improvement, which seem to give the impression that there may be better days ahead for improved information or data availability for planning and public policy analysis in Nigeria. Some of such documents of the NBS where they have solicited for criticisms and suggestions for improvement include for example, The Nigerian Statistical Fact Sheet on Economic and Social Development (NBS, 2005a).

Another aspect of this honesty in the use of statistical data by public policy analysts is that in their dispassionate discussion of the weaknesses in the data they use, they might indirectly be assisting the statisticians to put their problems across to the appropriate authorities to appreciate. In this way, the necessary support or resources that the statisticians need might be made available to them to enable them discharge their onerous responsibility more creditably to the advantage of all.

(c) **Secrecy-** Our recommendation on this issue is that the passage of the information bill on openness of information in Nigeria appears to be the only solution to the hoarding of information by government and other organizations. Interesting enough, it is the same government, perhaps under a rather more sensitive and dynamic leadership of President Olusegun Obasanjo who is trying to improve transparency in government, that the information bill has been sent to the National Assembly to be passed into law.

Some pressure has been mounted by some people and organizations on the National Assembly to pass the bill into law. We join the progressives in this matter to recommend that the National Assembly should expedite action in the passage of the bill, which ideally ought to have emanated from the National Assembly itself rather than the Executive arm of government. It is agreed that the National Assembly has the constitutional duty to properly scrutinise the bill and ensure the protection of national security but this activity is taking too long to accomplish in view of the fact that the bill has been with the National Assembly for upwards of a year. The more the delay in the passage of the bill the more there will be planning and public policy analysis with less data and hence guesstimate. The passage of the bill will definitely shore up the use of information and data for planning, analysis, and understanding in Nigeria.

(f) **Networking-** Free flow of information as discussed above, and networking for easy accessibility and uniformity will be of great advantage in many respects. These include the equitable, if not indeed equal, empowerment of all users, including public policy analysts, of the information made available. There is also the merit of timely information and a better understanding of the basis of adopted public policies. Networking of information across governmental organizations could similarly reduce arbitrariness, corruption and increase transparency and accountability in the public policy process, resulting in increased policy output in the public interest.

(g) **Type of Public Policy Analysis-** We recommend that for easy acceptability of analysis and improved integrity of public policy analysts, and for sustainable development in Nigeria, analysts should restrict themselves to objective analysis of the facts and empirical issues and data in public policies in the spirit of behaviouralism. This will reduce areas of controversies, hunches, problems, biases and disagreements between public policy process personnel and analysts. Public policy analysis is not exactly politics but more of an academic and professional exercise, which should result

in what Rado (2004:86) calls "valuable information and proposals". It is a profession different from the profession of politics. Professionalism requires professionals to know themselves and restrict themselves to their profession. It is agreed that there is need for co-operation as has been found necessary in the politics-administration blurring, but the extent of co-operation is limited.

Our analysis of this matter (*supra*) has shown that public policy analysts that delve into prescription of public policies to policy makers are very likely not to be objective in doing so. They are also likely to lose respect and not be able to serve successive governments with their analysis, which is prescriptive rather than objective. Hence only descriptive, analytical, and explanatory public policy should be the concern of public policy analysts for easy acceptability and the promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria.

## CONCLUSION

This paper set out to examine the role of information in promoting the public policy process and in particular better informed analysis by public policy analysts in Nigeria for sustainable development. To proceed, the paper clarified the concepts of sustainable development, public policy analysis value and its beneficiary, information, and information management and networking. A linkage was established among the concepts by establishing the importance of the critical factor of information as the basis for formulating adequate public policies in line with what Dible (2000) calls public good intention. Information was established as the basis for adequately discussing, analysing and understanding public policy issues and effective and acceptable analysis by public policy analysts as the basis for promoting sustainable development in Nigeria.

The inadequacy of information in Nigeria was discussed in the paper. The constraints to adequate information, occasioning inadequate analysis by public policy analysts were noted to include inadequate human capital, financial resources, large scale secrecy in government business, inadequate incentives to statisticians and the problem of corruption in many, if not all, public organizations. These attracted the following appropriate recommendations: the provision of training and retraining for statisticians to empower them properly, the formation of virile statistical association to regulate the activities of statisticians, so that with proper standards and codes of conduct, more reliable information and data might be available to researchers, analysts and other users in Nigeria. Public policy analysts and other users of statistical data were, in the recommendations, encouraged to be honest with themselves in discussing the nature of statistics they use with a view to pointing out weaknesses and entering caveats where necessary to serve as caution to other users and their readers. Our recommendations also included advice that secrecy in government business be considerably reduced through the passage into law of the information bill on openness of information which is before the National Assembly in Nigeria. The paper also recommended the need for more computers and networking of information in the Nigerian public service.

Finally, we recommended that public policy analysts should restrict themselves to objective empirical analysis of public policies, including the formulation, implementation and evaluation stages, with a view to explaining, and analysing facts and in particular the rationale, consequences and impact of public policy issues. And we recommend that public policy analysts should restrict themselves from prescribing public policy options or choices as this matter squarely belongs to the elected representatives or partisan politicians who also make political choices. By so doing, and in the face of reliable data and the behavioural tradition, more informed public policy analysis might be easier to achieve to promote sustainable development in Nigeria. We have confidence that these recommendations can, *mutatis mutandis*, apply to other African countries experiencing low level of information

availability, reliability and hence inadequate public policy analysis for optimum public policy process and sustainable development.

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