

Challenges facing foreign policy formulating institutes in Nigeria: A study of NIIA and NIPSS

Ade-Ibijola, Aderemi Opeyemi

Department of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The article examines the challenges facing foreign policy formulating institutes in Nigeria. The institute involved are Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and its sister institute the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS). These aforementioned institutes came into being in 1961 and 1979 respectively to help provide data through their research activities. The data generated were to help government in formulating policies aimed at enhancing Nigeria's foreign relations. Consequently, the paper identifies the myriad of challenges facing the research bodies since their inception and suggests ways through which the challenges could be tackled so as to pave way for better understanding of international Affairs.

INTRODUCTION

For a country to relate effectively with another, its foreign policy must be well defined, well thought out, and must possess a lucid direction. When the Nigeria Nation became an independent sovereign entity in 1960, it articulated its own foreign policy. At independence, Nigeria could not really assert herself due to the fact that the newly independent state was just trying to find here footing. Nigeria assumed wider roles shortly after independence.

During the early 1960's (Nigeria) played a relatively hesitant and minimal role in international affairs, not only because she was new to the international system but also because she was relatively poor and weak in almost every sense. But since the late 1960's she has assumed more vigorous posture in world affairs largely as a result of great political and economic changes that have taken place in the early¹ 1970's.

Thus, it became imperative for government to put in place necessary institutions that would engender improved Foreign Policy Formulation in the country. This was done in order to meet the new challenges.

The system and scientific investigation of domestic and international affairs, the linkages between them and the delineation of policy options that falls within the purview of Foreign Policy think tank, It is this same logic that informs the role of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) as Nigeria's Foremost foreign Policy think tank. This places the institute at the cove of Nigeria's engagement with the

World, and challenges it with the task of studying and perfecting the country's Foreign Policy Formulation Process².

The (NIIA) was established to create an enabling environment and provide necessary information that can help to link Nigeria with the rest of the World.

President Olusegun Obasanjo while delivering an address to participants at the National Institute for Policy and strategic (NIPSS) in Kuru, Jos (1999) succinctly captured the relevance of the institute when he said:

I have in my mind an institution which applies its facilities to those individuals who aspires to high leadership roles in order to meet and learn from one another through exchange of ideas and find solution to national and international issues. It is therefore an institute in which all those who have attained position of responsibility in all professional fields can bring their experiences and ideas to bear on all issues as they affect our ever changing society and the well being of Nigeria³.

The above submissions have exposed the influence of the institutes vis-a-vis Foreign Policy Making in Nigeria. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part is the objectives of NIIA and NIPSS, while the second concentrate on the challenges of the institute and how they can be solved. Third is general conclusion.

Objectives of NIIA: According to the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Act 18th August

1971 (CAP 311), its objectives are as follows: To encourage and facilitate the understanding of international affairs and the circumstances, conditions and attitudes of Foreign Countries and their people; To provide and maintain means of information upon international questions and promote the study and investigation of international questions by means of conferences, lectures, and discussions and by preparation and publication of books, reports or otherwise as may seem desirable so as to develop a body of informed opinions on World Affairs; To expand the ranks of the attentive public” in matters of Foreign Affairs with a view to raising the incidence and quality of debate on international question in Nigeria.

The NIIA is to develop fruitful relationship with the Nigeria government and its agencies involved in Foreign Policy especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was specifically stated that the institute shall provide such information and advice the government of the Federation and members of the public on matters concerning international relations. In order to achieve these objectives, the institutes was charged with facilitating the scientific study of international policies, economics and jurisprudence and providing facilities for the training of Nigeria diplomats and personnel and those of other countries whose vocation relate to international affairs.

Objective of NIPSS: The decrees establishing the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), section II subsection I of decree No 20 1979 clearly states the objectives as follows: To conduct courses for top level policy makers and executors drawn from different sectors of the nation with a view of expanding their outlook and perspective ad stretching their conceptual capacity and quantities of discerning and analysis and thereby helping to improve their different fields of action; To award the certificate of attendance to those who participate in a sufficient and satisfactory manner in any of its course; To conduct seminars, workshops and other action oriented programmes whether on a continuing or ad hoc basis for leaders in the public services (including the armed and other disciplined forces) the private sector, political organisation, professional and other groups with a view to promoting and defining and enhancing appreciation for, long range national plans and objectives; To identify, encourage, stimulate, assemble, organize and help to deploy to the best national advantage of the country's intellectual talents and experienced policy analysis who are likely to make positive contribution to the

treatment of complex problems; To organize and carry out an inter disciplinary basis in intellectual support of those charged with making and implementing policy for Nigeria research in depth into the social, economic, political, scientific, cultural and other problems facing the country and to formulate and present, in usual form, the available option for their solutions; To disseminate by way of publication of books, record, reports, or otherwise, information about any part of its activities to the extent deemed justified by the board in the interest of the nation and generally as contribution towards knowledge and for better national and international understanding.

Having highlighted the various objectives of the institutes under focus, it is essential to proceed by looking at the challenges that had hindered the (NIIA) and (NIPSS) from performing optimally.

Challenges Facing NIIA as a Research Institute:

The Field of Foreign Policy has today become enormously specialised. Similarly, activities involved in the conduct of external affairs of states have equally expanded tremendously. “The field of foreign policy has increasingly become specialized as issues in international relations have become very complex. The Foreign Policy landscape has also expanded and has historically remained intrigue dominated” The statement above testifies to the complexities, intricacies and enormity nature of Foreign Policy Formulation.

Thus, apart from the expansion in the conduct of states interactions, there is the challenge of closely related institutional actors in Nigeria for resources, what this means is that The (NIIA) finds itself as an institution of the Nigerian State in a situation where she must complete with similar policy formulation bodies such as national Institute for Policy and strategic studies (NIPSS) and National Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) etc. to gain government attention and recognition. “NIIA now operates in a context where it has to compete with similar institutions for the attention of government and the Nigerian public”.

Each of the institutions would generate ideas that would attract the attention of the political authorities. This development has become a major challenge to the (NIIA) over the years. The close resources and supremacy may be detrimental to the entire system”. Bureaucratic and political competition sometimes mean that a state is running several foreign policies simultaneously” thus leaving government with adopting the most viable alternative or options.

The NIIA also faces the challenge of re-establishing its relevance, repositioning itself and expanding the existing division to accommodate issues such as democracy, good governance, poverty eradication and human rights. The institute under discourse needs to take urgent step that would re-commit Nigeria and make her focus attention on the issues and make same as determining factors and basis of relating with other African States. The institute is also bedevilled by absence of rigorous academic and intellectual leadership in the areas of international relations and Foreign Policy not only in the Sub-region, but in Africa. These challenges have been the bare of the declining Foreign Policy Formulation over the years.

The NIIA faces the challenge of contending with priority of material resources in order to meet her statutory responsibility. "It is quite regrettable that the NIIA library, admittedly one of the best in the country and indeed in the sub-region has in recent times suffered from poor funding.

Another major challenge confronting the institute is the hardly satisfactory institutional relation between the Nigeria Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). There is this feeling that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs duties are been taken over by the NIIA. This erroneous notion has been a contributory factor to the Foreign Affairs and NIIA cold relations.

Inadequacy of manpower is another constraint facing the NIIA. A research fellow of the Research Department said, "Over the years, successive administrations both military and civilian had neglected the institute in terms of funding and manpower. As an institute our budgetary allocation is abysmal. The research Departments needs more qualified hands in order to discharge its duties optimally. The business of conducting research requires adequate manpower and funding" he submitted.

How to Tackle NIIA Challenges: From the foregoing, it is clear that the NIIA is facing a myriad of challenges occasioned by years of neglect. The following should be considered by Nigerian government in order to solve the myriad of challenges the (NIIA) is facing. First, the NIIA should be given financial autonomy. This has become absolutely essential if the institute is to overcome its problem of "abysmal" funding. The institute needs to be accorded an autonomous status to be able to address the issue of funding. "The NIIA is only

autonomous in terms of research; financially we are dependent as we still access our allocations through the Foreign Affairs Ministry. It might interest you to hear that before Funds are approved for the running of the institute, we often go through rigors" a stakeholder submitted.

Thus, this submission corroborates the need for NIIA to be given a full independent recognition. The institute is too important to be left at the mercy of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Secondly, efforts also need to be made in the area of good governance, poverty eradication human right and democracy. The NIIA should broaden its activities by accommodating these issues on their research programmes. The issues enumerated are pivotal if Nigeria is to attain her place among the comity of democratically, economically and politically advanced countries of the World.

Thirdly, the NIIA should employ the public private partnership approach in addressing her challenges. The institute should partner with cooperate organizations who can help finance the programmes of the institute. It would go a long way in improving the institute research activities. More personnel also need to be recruited into the research department to enhance productivity.

Challenges facing NIPSS as a research institute:

Material resources are very critical to the efficient management of an institute. The National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies is not an exception. The Director-General of the Institute lamented the precarious financial situation or condition of the research department when he said: 'No dedicated research funding has been approved in any budgetary allocation since its inception. The department was supposed to be a life wire of the institute, added that the absence of a research outfit for a period of close to ten years was due to lack of qualified staff and inability of the department to retain qualified manpower due to poor condition of service'.

From the above, it is obvious that the institution is not only bedevilled with the problem of raising sufficient fund to maintain the research department, but it is equally plagued with the difficulty of sustaining competent and qualified personnel. The poor economy of the state as a whole also affects and still affects the funding of NIPSS as a research institute.

Secondly, the (NIPSS) also has the challenge of limited participation in courses by members of the private sector and state government officers. It therefore shows that the activity of the institute is not open to many. The National Institute for Policy and

Strategic Studies should play a more active role in the conduct of Nigeria's Foreign Policy and that its current low profile conception of its role is not in order" this shows that the impact of the institute on the conduct of Nigeria's Foreign Policy is not far reaching. This is because of the low profile of the institute. The NIPSS is also faced with the challenges of not been able to retain many of its qualified personnel arising from poor condition of service. From 1993-2003, the institute could not boast of conducting a single research.

How to Tackle NIPSS Challenges: First of all, the institutes should strengthen its research agenda, since this is crucial to her existence and should sufficiently energize researchers through provision of motivational packages and exposure to related institutes across the length and breadth of the international environment.

The Nigerian government must employ more qualified persons into the institutes. This has become imperative if the productivity level of NIPSS is to be enhanced.

The NIPSS should strengthen and intensify their own in-house revenue drive for financial assistance. Additionally, government should appreciate the need to increase the allocation to the institutes. This is necessary because how well Nigeria can assert herself in the sub region, Africa and in the World depends in part on how major stakeholders like NIIA and NIPSS are positioned.

CONCLUSION

The importance of NIIA and NIPSS as public institutions cannot be downplayed. The institutes are so pivotal if Nigeria is to relate effectively with the World. As research institutions, Seminars, Symposia, lectures and conferences among others are organized to improve, refine and define foreign policy. The essence of their research activities is to provide relevant information that can aid or influence policy, including foreign policy given decision makers

various options or alternatives. The Nigerian government should begin now as a matter of urgent national importance to look into the myriad of challenges facing the NIIA and NIPSS as doing this would engender the much needed transformation of the research bodies.

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