CHAPTER FIFTEEN

E-government and Administrative Efficiency in Nigeria's Public Service

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Introduction

The subject of efficiency in the public service constitutes one of the major concerns in many countries, particularly the developing world and is at the forefront of political debate (Grandy, 2008). Despite the contention bordering on its measurement in terms of the ratio of input to output and what constitutes public values, efficiency continues to dominate as a primary criterion for the evaluation of the public service (Manzor, 2014). This is because public organizations are responsible to provide the necessary public goods and services to the citizens. For most countries, particularly, developing countries where the private sector is very weak, the public service has been recognized as pivotal to the economic cum socio-political development of such countries (World Bank, 1997). As the engine for the processing of the vastly acquired and expanded responsibilities of a country's governments, the public service is an institution at the heart of the formulation and implementation of the policy of governments (Olugbemi (1987). It is a crucial instrument to the survival of any governmental setting and as noted by Adegoroye (2005), no nation has been able to advance beyond its public service. The multidimensional objectives of the public service demand that performance is not only limited to mere cost–benefit analysis, but also incorporates the essential element of providing value to citizens (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2006, Gundu, 2011). Therefore, the effectiveness and productivity of any government is principally determined by the efficiency of the public service (Kwaghga, 2010).

The pivotal role of the public service to Nigeria's development informs the various reforms aimed at reinvigorating it in order for it to be able to efficiently and effectively deliver its responsibility. Like most African governments, the country has attempted improving performance of its public

service through various reforms. The ultimate goal of these reforms is to raise the quality of public services delivered to the citizens and to enhance their capacity to carry out core government functions, which are critical to the promotion of sustained socioeconomic development of Nigeria (ECA, 2010). In spite of all these efforts aimed at improving the administrative efficiency of the public service and thus, repositioning it for effective service delivery, the Nigeria public Service remains inefficient and incapable of delivering its responsibility. The bid to attain higher productivity in the Nigeria's Public Service has remained a wishful thinking as bureaucratic inefficiency continues to constitute its serious concern. It has adversely affected the efficient delivery of public goods and services to the citizens (Darma and Ali, 2014). It is therefore imperative that a new strategy that will enhance efficient productivity and service delivery in the Nigerian Public Service be adopted for the desired economic and political development of the country.

In the last two decades, the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has enabled a fundamental transformation of modern public administration. E-government has been viewed in the global context, as an institutional mechanism for driving efficiency in the public sector to achieve good governance and to improve the quality of public service delivery (Zouridis and Thaens, 2003). In the global context of e- Government, many countries have made significant advancement in utilizing the potentials of ICT for administrative efficiency, its adoption and implementation in Nigeria has been a contention among scholars and practitioners.

E-government and Administrative efficiency: A Theoretical Nexus

Efficiency has long played a central role in the terrain of public administration values and there is a growing demand that public organizations promote efficiency in the delivery of public goods and services to the citizens (Grandy, 2008). Mihaiu, Opreana and Cristescu (2010) define efficiency as the relationship between the outcome effects, or output and the efforts made or input. Efficiency in this regards, can be achieved under the conditions of maximizing the results of an action in relation to the resources used, and it is calculated by comparing the effects obtained in their efforts. According to them, the outcome effects must be viewed not only in terms of economic but also in terms of social effects resulting from implementing a program. Payne & Pheysey (1971) on the other hand view administrative efficiency in terms of the organizational structure, how works are well organized and progress systematically and how information are gathered, processed and

communicated. For Marudas (2004), administrative efficiency is seen as program expenses, i.e., expenses for administrative purposes in relations to the total expenses. It is obvious therefore, that a result oriented public sector in terms of delivering public services and improve value for public funds is the defining characteristic of administrative efficiency.

Identifying and measuring inputs and outputs (i.e., measuring the efficiency) in the public sector is generally a difficult operation. This is largely caused by the inability to quantify accurately the effects (outputs) because they are direct but also indirect due to the externalities which they generate, and also due to the clear and accurate non-statement of the objectives (Mihaiu, Opreana and Cristescu, 2010). Governments all over the world are however, concerned with how to provide reasonable public services to all citizens regardless of their financial means, and at an affordable cost (Prado-lorenzo, 2013). This is because citizens are entitled without restriction, to access public services which are prepared for the benefits of people living permanently or temporarily within an area (Zajdel, 2012).

It is pertinent to note the lack of a common nomenclature in relation to preferred definitions of public services and what constitute the concept may differ from countries to countries (Martin, 1997; Anwar, 2005). It is however, generally accepted that the delivery of quality public services consistent with citizen preferences and that fosters private market-led growth while managing fiscal resources prudently is considered critical to poverty alleviation and the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (Shah, 2005). As aver by Besley and Ghatak, (2007) public services are a key determinant of quality of life that is not measured in per capita income and they are also an important plank of poverty reduction strategy. In a similar dimension, Obaro (2005) reinstates the importance of quality public services in determining the health of an economy. Moreso, he pointed out that the perceptions of the public on the public service and the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of public service delivery are invaluable for the design of policies, plans and strategies to improve governance and the provision of government services generally. Humphreys (1998) defines public services as those services which are mainly, or completely, funded by taxation and as such, they can differ markedly from commercial private-sector services in a number of ways. Public services are those which public bodies (such as central or local government) either provide themselves or commission others to provide. For Prado-Lorenzo (2013), the pivot of public service involves taking action in order to provide citizens with certain assistance. Anwar (2005) identifies equitable

treatment and the allocation of resources according to need in the processes of decision-making, management and provision as the guiding principles of public services. In a broader and inclusive dimension however, OECD (1996) identifies the key components of quality public service delivery as consultation, openness, information, transparency; participation; satisfying user requirements, accessibility, accountability, availability, timeliness and convenience. Organizing public service provision is deemed to be a core function of government. The public sector came into being as a mechanism to combat the lack of interest of private enterprise in setting up businesses to provide universal services at affordable prices. As Besley and Ghatak (2007) aver, the standard view in economics is that the private sector provides private goods efficiently, and the public sector steps in to provide public goods and services and uses taxes or subsidies to correct externalities.

Throughout history, governments have had to tackle the problem of how to provide reasonable public services to all citizens regardless of their financial means, and at an affordable cost (Prado-Lorenzo, 2013). The challenge centres on how to make public service functional, effective, efficient, flexible and a make it accountable and accessible to the people (Omotosho, 2014:119). This is with a view to making Public service result oriented, capable of rendering service to the people. As observed by Besley and Ghatak (2007), improving efficient public service delivery is one of the biggest challenges worldwide particularly in Africa, given the low quality of service provision and the pressing needs of the poor. Thus for most countries on the continent, challenges like inequitable access, poor quality of public services, and weak governance remain unresolved. The traditional focus of administration has typically been on setting taxes and public expenditure levels while little or no attention is given to the mechanism of public service delivery which makes efficiency in large bureaucracies increasingly unsatisfactory (Prado-Lorenzo, 2013).

Public discontent and a growing political consensus that the public services need to develop more cost effective and responsive approaches, led to calls for more reforms in the, policy, organization, strategy and delivery of public service. In this regards, emphasis would be placed on the needs of communities and the strengthening of the voice of service users (citizens) and increase their direct involvement with those services and their development (Humphrey, 1998). A new and more modem system of public service delivery that would replace the unresponsive public service bureaucracies should be more flexible and responsive, geared to the needs of public service customers. It must be more responsive to the competing pressures of the outside world and equip the public service more effectively to meet changing national

socioeconomic needs.

E-government has been identified as an institutional arrangement for driving efficiency in the public sector (Curristine, Lonti and Jourmard, 2007). E-Government as a concept has been defined in various dimensions by various scholars, institutions and authorities. According to Haque and Pathrannaraku (2013) e-government is defined as the systemic use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) to support the functions that a government performs for its constituents, typically the provision of information and services. In this regard, e-government is the use of ICT to transform the traditional government by making it accessible, transparent, effective, and accountable. Basu (2004) also defines e-government as the use of ICT in all facets of the operations of the Government, which in turn leads to its use as a tool to achieve continuous optimisation of service delivery, constituency, participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationships through technology, the Internet and new media. For, Batta, Sethi and Kaur (2012), e-government involves the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in order to improve governmental processes and the internal working of the various departments within public organization.

According to Hodos (2014), e-government has the potentials of improving internal operational efficiency of the public institution and also allowing direct access of the end users, by electronic means to the services offered electronically by the public institution. It entails mechanisms which convert traditional processes of government into electronic processes with the goal of introducing total transparency and accountability, reducing costs and improving productivity and performance leading to better governance. E-government is important for public institutions to deliver public services more efficiently (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). This is because of the potentials of ICT to enhance consultation, openness, information, transparency, participation, accessibility accountability, availability, timeliness and convenience all which have been identified as key components of public service delivery (OECD (1996). The combination of the use of advanced ICTs, especially the Internet, and the support of new ways of thinking and working in public administration, together with the enhanced provision of information and interactive services accessible over different channels, is the foundation of e-government.

E-government has been seen as a global phenomenon and is being viewed as an institutional mechanism for driving efficiency in the public sector to achieve good governance and to improve the quality of public service delivery (Zouridis and Thaens, 2003). In recognition of this, many countries and international organization such as EU have directed the complete removal of

all barriers to the full implementation of e-government in member countries (Haquea and Pathrannarakul, 2013).

E-government and Efficient Delivery of Public Services in Nigeria

Though, erstwhile to the colonial rule, diverse ethnic groups and societies constituting Nigeria today lived in empires, kingdoms and clans with their various set of traditional administrative institutions through which policies and programmes where implemented (Edosa & Azelama, 1995; Oni & Joshua, 2010; Ogunrotifa, 2012), modern public service in the country is, however, an evolution of the British colonial rule (Okotoni, 2003). By 1906 British government had stretched its authority over most of Nigeria and began to establish its instruments of law and order such as Police, Prison, Public Works Judiciary, Department and the Departments of Customs, Ports and Telegraph (Oduwobi, 2011). In this regards, the Nigerian public service was the establishment of the British colonial government to support the colonial administration in its exploitation and exploration of the resources of the country (Barkan and Gboyega, 2001). It is imperative to state that the structure of the entire machinery of government and the Civil Service in Nigeria at this time, was configured necessarily to make easy for the British administrators to report performance to their home government and not to the indigenous people (Ogunrotifa, 2012). This perhaps laid the foundation of irresponsible governance in Nigeria. It is also imperative to note that under colonial administration, administrative, professional, managerial and technical posts of the Nigerian Public/Civil Service were occupied by Europeans while Nigerians were restricted to posts in the clerical, semi-skilled and unskilled manipulative grades (Olaopa, 2008). The post-independence Nigeria public service was indigenized following the perceived scarcity of local skilled manpower that could take over most of the workplaces left behind by the departed foreign personnel (Ogunrotifa, 2012). As a result, Nigerian governments were not only challenged with the need to create a whole machinery of government that would promote accountability, transparency, predictability, participation, and efficiency and effectiveness but to change the emphasis of civil service from colonial legacy of tax collection to the role of community service delivery, infrastructural development and nation building capable of supporting the new government to plan and hasten the pace of Nigeria's socio-economic development (Okotoni, 2001).

At independence on 1st October, 1960, the powers of the Nigerian civil service were rooted in the constitution of Nigeria to accomplish the function of appointments, advancement and discipline in the public service, predominantly as government business were planned under the departmental

establishments such as Public Works Department, Health Department, Treasury Department, Forestry Department, the Nigerian Railways, the Electricity Board, the Telecommunication Board and the Nigerian Harbour (Olowu, 1999). While years of military rule and authoritarian regimes in Nigeria have impacted negative administrative culture on the character and philosophy of the Nigeria Public Service, its roles in national development cannot be undervalued (Ayodele and Bolaji, 2007). That is why a repositioning and restructuring of the Nigeria public service to be in tune with democratic values of effective and efficient service delivery has become highly imperative (Ogunrotifa, 2012).

The efficiency of the bureaucracy is an important determinant of poverty, inequality, and economic growth (Besley and Persson, 2010). Over the years however, Nigeria continues to show evidence that service delivery advancement in the Nigerian Public Service has not kept pace with the increase found in the private sector (Haenisch, 2012), Nigeria today is regarded as one of the most corrupt nations in the world and to this effect, there have been various administrative reforms aimed at addressing the crisis of inefficiency in the delivery of social services in the public sector (Olaopa, 2008). Despite these efforts, there seem to be no improvement in the Nigerian public service. Critical assessments have shown that these reforms have had little effects in making Nigeria Public Service effecient and offer quality service delivery to the citizens (Anazodo et al 2012). The Nigeria Public Service is still considered motionless and incompetent, and incapable of reforming itself (Salisu 2001). It is crucial to note that these negative characteristics are still very much rampant in the present Nigerian public sector and service delivery is a major problem. Public service delivery has been inconsistent with citizen preferences and considered feeble (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2005). The problem of inefficient service delivery in Nigeria like many other countries in Africa, has been identified to be due to lack of accountability, transparency and commitment in making services work for poor and marginalized citizens (World Bank, World Development Report 2004; Ntetha and Mostert, 2010). Factors such as inadequate targeting of the poor, supply driven planning, elite capturing of programmes, lack of voice of the poor and inability to reach the government and service providers, are among the most common reasons. These lapses have led to weakening of public institutions, distrust of government by citizens, collapse of infrastructures and a development of a sense of despair amongst the Nigerian peoples.

Empirical investigations have pointed out that government, perhaps more than any other organization, can benefit from the efficiencies that stem from digital processes. Electronic government has the potentials to positively affect

effectiveness, efficiency and equity in services delivered to the citizens. As observed by Pathak, Naz, Singh, & Smith (2010), the use of ICT is not only intended to have a focus on efficiency and effectiveness in government but also to empower citizens by making available to them an interactive access to and use of information. Both private and public sectors now apply ICT to integrate and improve their service delivery (Snellen, 2005). Through electronic government, the expectations of people with respect to the service level of public administration are rising.

While the last decade has witnessed a marginally improved adoption of ICT in public institutions in Nigeria, more needs to be done to improve service quality, policy making and good governance (Oni, Ayo, Mbarika, Gberevbie, and Folarin, 2014). There is therefore an urgent need in to employ ICT in the operation of public agencies and institutions in view of prevailing concerns about the quality of service delivery in Nigeria. The adoption of e-government has the potentials of improving the internal workings of the Nigeria Public Service with new ICT-executed information processes. This is because efficiency and effectiveness are key success criteria of government involvements and ICTs increases the efficiency of government administration (this is a direct result of the replacement of street level bureaucrats by electronic information devices) and further enables more control of administrative activities of the workforce through the use of ICT application (Snellen, 2005). Furthermore, e-government enables citizens to have access to relevant information which will boost their wider participation in the decision process in the form of continuous opinion polling, instant referenda, tele-conferencing, digital cities, and discussion groups. In this regards, ICT can enhance interactive policy-making process for effective democratic governance in Nigeria.

In the observation of Arjan de Jager (2008), however, the adoption and the successful application of ICT by any government in its operation will depend on the a good understanding of the cost involved and the assured funding that follows careful analysis of its opportunity costs. This follows that the Nigerian Government must be genuinely committed to funding the adoption of ICT in its agencies. It is pertinent to state that the paucity of committed leadership with the capacity to articulate broad e-government vision and also galvanize the necessary resources needed to implement e-government in Nigeria constitutes great hindrance to e-government adoption(Oni, et al, 2014). Furthermore, as observed by Oni, et al, (2014), e-government is not just about the deployment of ICT tools, the successful application of e-government also depends on the skills and culture of the public service. It follows that public servants in Nigeria must be able, through ICT, to change and programme management and partnership building skills and willing to

support e-administration or at least be eager to learn and change.

The sporadic diffusion of ICT and its increasing acceptance and usage in Nigeria (Oni and Oni, 2014) signals the potentials for the application of e-government in Nigeria. The telecommunication landscape is steadily changing with the introduction of GSM services, which has increase accessibility and provided less demanding interfaces for people to connect. The ICT infrastructure requirement for e-government takeoff in Nigeria however, is still rudimentary. The cost of internet usage in Nigeria remains too high for a majority of the people. If the costs of internet usage are not brought down then the people for whom the government is going online for will not be able to benefit from it. Moreover, the epileptic power supply in Nigeria poses a great hindrance to full e-government adoption in the country. Very few of the teaming population have access to electricity as the power sector operates far below its capacity. Electricity consumption in the country is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa. A decisive step must therefore be taken by the government to address the issue of power supply in Nigeria to enhance the implementation of e-government for effective and efficient public service delivery.

Many laudable projects in Nigeria Public Service die at the instance of corrupt practices among government officers and electronic government can suffer the same faith. Every loophole for embezzlement of funds allocated for projects must be blocked while agencies for curbing corruption must be empowered for objective tackling of corrupt cases. Equally important is the deep rooted resistance to digitalization among Nigerian civil servants. Many civil servants are afraid of computerization because of the thinking that such will render some of them redundant (Yusuf, 2006). Successful application of e-government in the country therefore requires that public servants who man government bureaucracy are hard-pressed to change. There is therefore a need for mass campaign and sensitization of the public on the importance of ICT for effective and efficient public service delivery.

Conclusion

The information revolution has ushered in a new paradigm of administrative efficiency and effectiveness leading to improved delivery of public services necessary for economic development, peace and stability of a country. The adoption of e-government has been seen to enhance the range and quality of information and services provided to citizens, businesses, civil society organizations, and other government agencies in an efficient, cost-effective and convenient manner, making the processes of agencies and institutions of government more transparent and accountable to the public.

While some challenges still pose serious impediments to the adoption and application of ICT in the operations of the Nigeria Public Service, the advantages that such adoption portends for improved, efficient and effective service delivery in Nigeria necessitates a political wills capable of ameliorating those hindrance. This will place the country on the pedestal of sustainable development.

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