

Electronic Mediated Administration and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria

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Abstract: The public service of any country is a major pillar in determining the development and stability of such country. This is because the public service is the engine for the processing of the vastly acquired and expanded government responsibilities of executing public policies and projects and rendering essential services to the people. In Nigeria, various governmental regimes have attempted repositioning the public sector for effective and efficient service delivery through various reforms. In spite of all these efforts, the Nigeria Public Service remains inefficient and incapable of delivering its responsibility. This paper adopts descriptive and analytical approach with data collected from secondary sources. By interrogating the exponential growth, usage and acceptance of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in Nigeria, it argues for a paradigm shift from the traditional approach to electronic administration to enhance the delivery of public goods and services which are considered necessary for the sustainable development of the country. ICT enabled administration has the potentials of revolutionizing the quality of services delivered to the citizens by ushering in transparency, accountability and efficiency which are the bane of the Nigeria's public sector.

Keywords: administration; ICT; public sector; service delivery; Nigeria

1. Introduction

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the last twenty years and the implication it portends for enhancing the performance of the public service, i.e., the agencies involved in providing public goods and services for or on behalf of a government, constitutes one of the major concerns in many countries and is at the forefront of political debate (Kampen, Walle &

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Bouckaert, 2006; Gega & Elmazi, 2012; Tan, Benbasat & Cenfetelli, 2013). This is because the public service of any country is a major pillar in determining the development and stability of such country. 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). The public service is an institution at the heart of the formulation and implementation of the policy of governments (Oyeleran-Oyeyinka, 2006). The public service is the engine for the processing of the vastly acquired and expanded responsibilities of a country's governments (Olugbemi (1987). Thus, the public service is a reflection of the state of that nation. The public service is therefore, viewed as a transformational institution because of its responsibility of executing government policies and programmes, transforming them to concrete essential services and ensuring that they are delivered to the public (Kwaghga, 2010; Gundu, 2011). In this regards, the public service is a fundamental instrument to the survival of any government and as noted by Adegroye (2005), no nation has been able to advance beyond its public service. In fact, the efficiency of the public service is a principal determinant of the effectiveness and productivity of any government. The efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in public service delivery is pivotal to the attainment of the Millennium Development goals by any country (Kemoni & Ngulube, 2008).

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 the performance of its public service through various reforms with the ultimate goal of boosting the capacity of the Nigeria Public Service for quality public service delivery and effective performance of core governmental functions regarded as pivotal to sustainable socioeconomic development of Nigeria (ECA, 2010). In spite of all these efforts aimed at repositioning it for effective and efficient service delivery, the Nigeria Public Service remains inefficient and incapable of delivering its responsibility. While high productivity in the public service is the major aim and a determining factor for the success and existence of any nation, 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 distorts the smooth operations of the entire civil service and has unproductively and adversely affected the efficient delivery of public goods and services to the citizens (Darma & Ali,

2014). The question of what new strategy capable of enhancing efficiency, productivity and service delivery in the Nigerian Public Service should be adopted for the desired economic cum political development of the country therefore imperative.

The development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the last twenty years, has transformed the system of administration and has been viewed in the global context, as a means for achieving good governance and for enhancing quality service delivery to the public (Zouridis & Thaens, 2003). It is in recognition of the importance of ICT in the modern administration nomenclature – e-administration, that the European Union advocates the elimination of constraints to e-administration at all levels of governance, including local level authorities, as well as between public administrations, businesses, and citizens, through which the principle of good governance and public service delivery should be achieved (Hodos, 2014). While governments of the developed countries are already utilizing the growth in the ICT to enhance the delivery of public goods and services to their citizens, the spread of the benefits of ICT to resource poor and less developed countries like Nigeria is almost nonexistent (Sharma & Sturges, 2007). The critical questions of to what extent can ICT be adopted for enhanced public service delivery in Nigeria and what are challenges of the strategy for enhancing service delivery by the Nigeria Public Service constitute the concerns of this paper.

2. Public Service Delivery and E-administration: A Theoretical Nexus

Governments, all over the world, are 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, access to public services which are prepared for the benefit 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 the effective and prudent utilization of fiscal resources is a key determinant of quality of life and considered as critical to poverty alleviation and the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (Shah, 2005; Besley & Ghatak, 2007).

In a similar dimension, Obaro (2005) reinstates the importance of quality public services in determining the health of an economy. He pointed out that the assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of public service delivery is vital to the formulation of policies, the designing of plans and strategies for good governance. For Humphreys (1998) and Prado-Lorenzo (2013) therefore, the pivot of public service involves taking action by the government in order to provide citizens with certain assistance which are funded by taxation and differ remarkably from private sector commercial services. While the private sector provides private goods efficiently, the public sector steps in to provide public goods and services. In fact, 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 (Besley & Ghatak, 2007). The provision of public service is therefore, a core function of government.

Anwar (2005) identifies equal treatment of persons and the allocation of resources according to needs as the guiding principles of public service delivery. 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.

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). This position is captured more vividly by Besley & Ghatak (2007) when they noted that one of the biggest challenges worldwide is how to improve public service delivery. This situation is more precarious in Africa given the low quality of service provision and the pressing needs of the poor. As observed by Omotosho (2014, p. 119);

The major challenge confronting governments anywhere in the world is not only how to make public service functional, effective, efficient, and flexible but also how to make it accountable and accessible to the people. This is with a view to making it result oriented, capable of rendering service to the people.

Thus, for most countries in the continent of Africa, challenges like inequitable access, poor quality of public services, and weak governance remain unresolved. The traditional focus of theoretical administration has typically paid little or no attention to the mechanism of public service delivery which makes efficiency and

effectiveness in large bureaucracy increasingly unsatisfactory (Clarke & Clegg, 1999; Prado-Lorenzo, 2013).

Pivotal to the wider moves of reforming the traditional approach to public service management is improving service delivery systems (Kohlborn, 2014). This stems from the fact that quality public service delivery system has fundamental implications for improving citizens-state relationship (OECD, 1996) and increased public trust in government (Kampen, Walle & Bouckaert, 2006). Previous approaches dominant in public service organizational form has been regarded as 'bureaucratic' which although, might seek to ensure fairness and impartiality in public service delivery systems, were often characterized by inflexibility and typified a top down professional client relationships and often with insensitive outcomes (Nam, 2014). Besides public discontentment with the limitations of this relationship, the need for concern on outcomes rather than on internal procedures, emphasis on personal responsibility rather than hierarchical decision making and the growing consensus that the public services need to develop more cost effective and responsive approaches has led to calls for more reforms in the, policy, organization, strategy and delivery of public service (Clarke & Clegg, 1999). In this regards, emphasis would be placed on the needs of communities and the strengthening of the voice of the people and increase their involvement in those services and their development (Humphrey, 1998). A new and more modern system of public service delivery that would replace the traditional approaches should therefore be flexible, inclusive, responsive and be tailored towards the needs of clients (citizens). The new approach must be more responsive to the competing pressures of the international system and equip the public service more effectively to meet changing needs for sustainable development.

The need for the transformation of public institutions for improved service delivery necessitates Information Communication Technology (United Nations Development Programme, 2008). Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has been seen as an important tool for empowerment of public institutions for public service delivery improvement. 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 development of ICT- based public service delivery system nomenclatured electronic administration or e-administration means that information and communication technology (ICT) having an increasing effect on public institutions,

which are heavily involved in the development of network infrastructures and related services (Attoura & Longhi, 2013). According to Hodos (2014), e-administration involves improving internal operational efficiency of the public institution, computerization of the relationship with citizens and corporate entities, as well as 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 administration processes into electronic processes with the goal of creating a paperless office, introducing total transparency and accountability, reducing costs and improving productivity and performance leading to better governance. For Batta, Sethi & Kaur (2012), e-administration is the use of ICT to improve administrative processes and the internal working of departments within an organization. Olson and Lucas (1982) however, see the concept as the method of automating key administrative functions using information communication technologies. In e-administration therefore, ICT is engaged for the support of administrative operations, for engaging citizens and for providing government services to the public (Saxena & Sharma, 2012).

The various operations of e-administration include e-services (aimed at improving the delivery of public services, e.g., providing public documents online (such as birth certificates, driving licenses, vehicle registration etc.), obtaining information, electronic filing systems, making online payments, e-procurement systems, online time sheets and expense account, electronic memo (e-memo), electronic application submission and approval (e.g. annual leave, sick leave, etc), word processing for generating correspondence, person-to-person communication via electronic message systems, teleconferencing services, facsimile transmission, on-line calendar systems, links to corporate files and outside services, decision support systems, the use of ICT for work-related tasks. It also include e-participation by enabling citizens to expose their opinion through public discussion in the law drafting processes as well as in various forms of debate conducted at specialized web portal of the Government and a host of other activities via the World Wide Web (Olson & Lucas, 1982).

E-administration is becoming a common practice in the business world as more professionals use electronic mail, word processing, and social media networking. In this regards, a critical component of e-administration is its communication functions. Communication technology is the most significant factor in the redesigning of organizations through e-administration. These electronic methods of communication allow people to share information, documents and records

seamlessly via the Internet instead of waiting for traditional mail and courier services. The use of ICTs, especially the Internet to enhance the provision of information and interactive and accessible services over different channels, is thus, the foundation of e-administration.

3. Methodology

This paper adopted a qualitative approach of systematic literature reviews as the method for data collection and analysis (Silverman, 1998). Extensive and analytical review of literature made up of published and unpublished works of scholars in both Political Science and Computer Science was carried out to generate data for this paper. The systematic literature review involves a rigorous and well defined procedure applies to an existing literature (Okoli, 2010). The essence of the rigour approach is to ensure that all possible and appropriate and research bases are considered and valid analyses are made (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2012). The review involved a systematic selection and perusal of 4 suitable previous studies from which the search key words pertinent to the paper emerged. The search terms used include “e-administration”, “electronic administration”, “digital administration”, “e-governance”, “public service”, “service delivery”, “public service delivery in Nigeria”, “ICT diffusion in Nigeria”, “Internet acceptability in Nigeria”, “internet usage in Nigeria”. We then searched electronic databases for relevant peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, report documents and conference proceedings on these key words. The publications were searched from EBSCO databases, sage online database (<http://online.sagepub.com>), JSTOR database, leading international development organizations e-library (e.g.: EU, UN, OECD), research institutions (Demo-net, Democracies Online Newswire (www.e-democracy.org/do) and International Teledemocracy Centre, Napier University, UK. Publications, based on their relevance to the study, were then selected for the analysis.

4. Electronic-administration and Service Delivery in the Nigerian Public Sector

Before the advent of colonial rule in Africa, the diverse ethnic groups and societies that constitute what is now known as Nigeria had lived in empires, kingdoms and clans with their various set of traditional administrative institutions through which

policies and programmes where implemented (Edosa & Azelama, 1995; Ogunrotifa, 2012). Modern public service in the country is, however, an evolution of the British colonial rule (Okotoni, 2003). The British government having established its authority over most of Nigeria by 1906, began to establish agencies such as Police, Prison, Public Works Judiciary, Department and the Departments of Customs, Ports and Telegraph for maintaining law and order on the territory (Oduwobi, 2001; Barkan & Gboyega, 2001). Under colonial administration however, 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). At independence however, Nigerians, following the indigenization programme, have to be trained to take over most of the workplaces in the Nigeria public service left behind by the departed foreign personnel (Ogunrotifa, 2012). Amidst the challenged scarcity of local skilled manpower, Nigerian governments had to expand the role of the public service beyond the colonial legacy of tax collection to community service delivery and nation building. There was the need to build a public service with a capacity to support the new government to plan and hasten the pace of the needed socio-economic development of the country. In fact, machinery of government that would promote accountability, transparency, predictability, participation, and efficiency and effectiveness was very much desired (Okotoni, 2001). At independence therefore, 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). Unfortunately, the Nigerian State fell prey to military authoritarian regime which impacted negative political culture on the character and philosophy of the Nigeria Public Service, though its roles in national development cannot be undervalued (Ayodele & Bolaji, 2007). Since the demise of military and authoritarian regime in Nigeria following the country's return to civilian administration in 1999, 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).

Over the years however, Nigeria continues to show evidence that public service delivery advancement in the Nigeria has not kept pace with the quality found in the

private sector despite the awareness that effective functioning of the bureaucracy is pivotal to poverty alleviation and economic growth and development (Besley & Persson, 2010; Haenisch, 2012). There have been several reforms aimed at addressing the crisis of corruption and inefficiency in the delivery of quality services in the public sector (Olaopa, 2008). Despite these reforms, there has been no significant and appreciable improvement in the Nigerian public service. Critical assessments have shown that these reforms have had little effects in making Nigeria Public Service effective and offer quality service delivery to the citizens (Salisu, 2001; Anazodo et al., 2012). The Nigeria Public Service is still considered motionless, incompetent, feeble and incapable of delivering quality service to the citizen (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank 2005). The Nigeria Public Service like many other countries in Africa, is hitherto bedeviled by lack of accountability, transparency and commitment in making services work for poor and marginalized citizens with the concomitant weak public institutions, collapse of infrastructures, public distrust of government and a development of a sense of despair amongst the Nigerian peoples (World Bank, World Development Report 2004; Ntetha & Mostert, 2010).

Empirical investigations have pointed out that government, perhaps more than any other organization, can benefit from the efficiencies and improved service delivery that stem from electronic administrative processes (Nam, 2014). E-administration has the potentials to positively affect administrative effectiveness, efficiency and equity in services delivered to the citizens. As observed by Pathak, Naz, Singh, & Smith (2010), the use of ICT, besides enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of governmental government for improved service delivery, has the potential of empowering citizens by making available to them an interactive access to and use of information (Snellen, 2005).

The last decade has witnessed a marginally improved ICT adoption in public institutions in Nigeria. The sporadic diffusion of ICT and its increasing acceptance and usage in Nigeria (Oni & Oni, 2014) signals the potentials for the application of e-administration in Nigeria. Following the promulgation of the promulgation of the Telecommunications Act in July 2003 which further democratized the telecommunications space in Nigeria, the diffusion of mobile technologies have continued unabated (Owens-Ibie, 2004). The telecommunication landscape is steadily changing with the introduction of GSM services, which has increased accessibility and provided opportunity for people to connect. In early 2014, over 125 million of the population have subscribed to mobile technologies (Budde,

2014). This has however, not transform to improved service quality, policy making and good governance in the country (Oni, Ayo, Mbarika, Gberevbie & Folarin, 2014). There is therefore an urgent need to employ electronic mediated administration in all public agencies in view of prevailing concerns about the quality of service delivery in Nigeria. The adoption of e-administration has the potentials of improving the internal workings of the Nigeria Public Service. This is because efficiency and effectiveness are key success criteria of government involvements and ICT driven processes increase the efficiency of government administration. This is a direct result of the replacement of the traditional bureaucratic approach by electronic information devices largely characterized by citizen-centric approach (Nam, 2014; Kohlborn, 2014). Furthermore, e-administration 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 (Snellen, 2005). In this regards, e-administration enhances an interactive policy-making process for effective democratic and good governance in Nigeria.

In the observation of Arjan de Jager (2008), however, the adoption and the successful application of ICT in the operation of any government will depend on the awareness and understanding of the cost involved and the assurance of continued funding that result from a 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 (Oni, et al, 2014), constitutes great hindrance to e-administration adoption. Furthermore, as observed by Oni, et al., (2014), e-governance and by implication, e-administration, is not just about the deployment of ICT tools, the successful application of e-administration also depends on the usefulness and usability which are regarded as fundamental qualities of websites.

It also depends on the skills and culture of the public service. It follows therefore, that public servants in Nigeria must be ready for this paradigm shift of administrative process to change and programme management through ICT and support e-administration. They must also be willing to build their ICT skills or at least be eager to learn and change.

The ICT infrastructure requirement for e-administration takeoff in Nigeria is still rudimentary despite its increased diffusion in the country. The cost of internet usage in Nigeria remains on the high side for majority of the people. The high costs of internet usage must be brought down in order to enable the people for whom the government is going online for to be able to benefit from it. Moreover, the epileptic power supply in Nigeria poses a great hindrance to e-administration in the country. Very few of the teeming 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-administration for effective and efficient public service delivery.

Many laudable projects in Nigeria Public Service die at the instance of corruptive practices among government officers and e-administration can suffer the same faith. Every loophole for embezzlement of funds allocated for projects, particularly, e-administration projects, must be blocked while agencies for curbing corruptive practices 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-administration in the country therefore requires that public servants who man government bureaucracy are hard-pressed to change. A mass campaign and sensitization of the public on the imperative of ICT for effective and efficient public service delivery is therefore.

5. 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 electronic mediated administration in the public service has been seen to enhance the quality of public services provided by the government and its institutions and agencies to the citizens in an efficient, cost-effective and convenient manner and make the processes of governmental administration 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 will capable of ameliorating those hindrances. This will place the country on the pedestal of real time poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

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