

Public Service Delivery in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic: Issues, Challenges and Prospects for Socio-Economic Development

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Abstract. Government all over the world exists to provide essential services to the citizens. When there is effective and efficient service delivery, the citizens’ well-being is assured and guaranteed. This paper is designed to x-ray the strategies that have been adopted by the Nigerian government over the years to deliver services to the citizens as well as to examine the challenges associated with public service delivery in Nigeria. The paper is qualitative because data for the study were sourced through secondary means and data gathered were analyzed using historical method. The paper found out there is low level of socio-economic development in Nigeria because government over the years has not been able to provide effective and efficient services to the citizens. The paper adopted the social contract theory as the theoretical framework. The paper recommended among other things that government officials should shun corruption and favouritism in the provision of services to the citizens. The citizens on their part should try as much as possible to hold government accountable in order to ensure improved service delivery.

Keywords: Public Service, Development, Corruption, Government, Public-Private Partnership.

1. Introduction

Government the world over exists to provide essential services to the citizens. It is on this note Burns cited in Akindele (1998:47) while defining representative democracy said it is a system whereby “all (i.e. people) elected a few to do for them what they could not do together”. It is in order to ensure that services are well delivered to the citizens that government all over the world has been in constant search for efficient and effective ways of carrying out its functions. It is on this note that a lot of reforms

have been carried out in the public sector. The domain of governmental activities is known as the public sector which is quite different from the private sector.

The public sector has undergone series of reforms to make it more effective and efficient in the delivery of services to the people. This is because prior to the reforms, the public sector was entangled in a plethora of challenges that made it difficult for it to perform its functions creditably. This made Okoye (2011:1) to say that “the reliance on the public sector to finance and provide public services in most developing countries has resulted in disappointing results”. Panayotou cited in Okoye (2011:1) observed that a combination of technical, financial and structural problems of public institutions have resulted in poor cost recovery, unsatisfied consumers, financially insolvent systems, and unreliable service delivery. This situation of the public sector necessitated the need to have it reformed to enable it perform its function effectively and efficiently. The place of the public sector in any country’s development cannot be overemphasized and this explains why Fatila and Adejuwon cited in Lamidi et al (2016:1) referred the public sector as a tool available to African government for the implementation of developmental goals and objectives. In the same vein, Haque cited in Lamidi et al (2016:1) is of the view that the public sector is to provide goods and services to citizens.

In Nigeria, the low level of socio-economic development is traceable to the poor service delivery of some public services. Corruption, political interference and others have combined to negatively affect public service delivery in Nigeria. This explains why some public enterprises in Nigeria have been privatized.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study is the social contract theory. The major proponents of the social contract theory are; Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J.J. Rousseau. The basic thrust of this theory is the fact that people who hitherto did not have government or lived under an organized state decided to form the state in order for the state to serve their basic needs. This was corroborated by Anifowoshe (2015:95) when he said that “according to the social contract theory, the state was created by a number of individuals voluntarily entering into a contract, the terms of which provided a political authority. As a voluntary association, however, it differed from any other because it provided for the exercise of sovereignty, the supreme power to control by coercive means, if need be, the conduct of its members”.

It is to be made clear that when the people in the state of nature were no longer comfortable with the kind of life they were living, a situation where might was right and the stronger/strongest amongst them devouring the weaker/weakest at will, that they decided to have an agreement to have a state that would protect their lives and property. It is on this note Burns cited in Akindele (1998:47) while defining representative democracy said it is a system whereby “all (i.e. people) elected a few to do for them what they could not do together”. The people having decided to have the state must also decide those who would man or run the affairs of the state and in doing that, they are expected to have at the back of their mind those that would effectively take care of their interest by making life meaningful for them.

This scenario explains why the social contract theory was chosen as a theoretical framework in this study. As far as this study is concerned, it offers explanations regarding the fact that the state has obligation to the citizens in respect of providing them with basic and necessary services. Though it does not offer explanation of the modus-operandi of how the services would be rendered or what should be done when the state fails in its responsibilities.

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Public Service

The term public service is a term used in understanding the public sector. We noted earlier in this paper that the public sector is the domain of governmental activities. These governmental activities are carried out by the public service. Public

service can be used in two senses, first as an institution of government and second as service delivered by government. Adamolekun cited in Nwizu and Nwapi (2011:20) defines the public service as the “totality of services that are organized under government authority”. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) defines Public Service to mean the service of the state in any capacity in respect of the government of state and include services as:

- Clerk of the House of Assembly
- Member of Staff of High Court, the Sharia Court of Appeal, the Customary Court of Appeal or other Courts established for a state by this constitution or by a Law of House of Assembly
- Member of Staff of any commission or authority established for the state by this constitution or by Law of a House of Assembly
- Staff of any local government council
- Staff of any statutory institution or corporation established by law of a House of Assembly
- Staff of any educational institution established or finance principally by a government of a state, and
- Staff of any company or enterprise in which the government of a state or its agency holds controlling shares or interest.

Public service from the service point of view according to Obikeze (2011:70) implies “all that are provided by individuals who operate in government agencies, institutions, organizations and establishments”. The public service exists to perform certain functions to the citizens. According to Nwizu and Nwapi (2011:21), the roles of the Public Service include:

- **Prevention of exploitation:** If private enterprises are allowed to render the essential services, there will be exploitation and discrimination in their provision so public service helps to eliminate exploitation for services rendered.
- **Ensuring a constant supply of service:** If these services are left in the hands of private enterprise, there will be irregular supply in order for them to make huge profits.
- **Public service avoids private monopoly:** Private monopoly in the provision of the essential services is detrimental to members of the public. It may lead to high cost of living but with public service whose aim is not to make profit but to render service to the people, the cost is usually lower.

- **Public service helps in economic development:** Their presence attracts rapid economic development from both local and foreign investors and fastens the economic development of the state.

3.2 Public Service Delivery

According to Olowu (2002:123) “services delivery is the *raison d’être* of the public service. The primary responsibility of any public administration system is to deliver services that the private sector may not deliver at all or to deliver services to those who cannot afford the market price of the product”. To Ahmed (2005:76-77) service delivery has been an old concept which draws attention of organizations to their responsibility to render service to their customers, in the most satisfactory manner. The terminology varies depending on the time, place or context. The concept presupposes that, in public service, there is contractual relationship between the customer (the public) and the service provider (government agency) which obliges the latter to render service to the former in most satisfactory way, be it in terms of utility, quality, convenience, timelines, cost, courtesy, communication or otherwise. Another presupposition is that just as in business, the customer is regarded as ‘king’. Accordingly, in public service delivery, the public is regarded as ‘master’, and the ultimate judge of performance.

According to Ahmed (2011:77-78) the Nigerian public’s expectations from the public service, in terms of service delivery include:
An organization that is staffed with competent men and women and well managed

A public service that is:

- Courteous, friendly, receptive and is helpful in its relationship with the public
- Eager and proactive in offering information to the public with feedback and follow-up
- Transparent, honest and averse to corruption, fraud and extortion of the public in official dealings
- Exemplary in its standards of efficiency in both production and rendition of services with minimal waste
- Punctual and time conscious in all official business
- Run on well planned programmes with activity schedules and calendars that are firm and respected

- Prompt in response to problems and complaints of the public, which are conclusively attended to.
- Objective, professional, fair and patriotic in the treatment of matters of public interest or cases entailing competition among persons or organizations.

A Public Service whose:

- Services and products that are almost of cutting-edge standard are rendered with minimal need for members of the public to leave their homes to visit the office concerned or to spend substantial amounts of money or provide copious documents and passport photographs
- Charges and billing systems are affordable and convenient to the public
- Public infrastructure facilities are built to unblemished standards, regularly maintained and promptly repaired

A Public Service with:

- Continuous improvement in service mix and methods, based on communication and feedback from the public

According to Ahmed (2005:79), “at the time of the hand-over to democratic regime in May 1999, the state of the Nigerian Public Service, in terms of image, operational modalities and service delivery was rather dismal. It was common for expert observers to paint the public servants as being:

- Lethargic and slow in official decision and action
- Insensitive to the value of time
- Irregular attendance at work
- Nepotic
- Wasteful with government resources
- Corrupt
- Slow to change
- Unresponsive and discourteous to the public, etc.”

3.3 Development

Development is a multi-dimensional concept in the sense that there are various aspects of development. There is political development, social development, cultural development, technological development, as well as economic development. But generally, development in all its ramifications connotes improvement in the various aspects of human existence. On this note, Sen cited in Todaro & Smith (2004) enthused that development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives we lead and the freedoms we enjoy. He argued that, to make sense of

the concept of human well-being in general and poverty in particular, we need to think beyond the availability of commodities and consider their use and freedom to use; what he calls functioning and capabilities. Functioning refers to commodities of given characteristics. And capabilities referring to the freedom the person have in terms of the choice of functions given his personal features and command over commodities.

According to Thomas (2010:132), an important deduction from the conceptualization of development in the extant development praxis is that development implies the capacity to secure and sustain a better life for human kind in society. The striving to elevate human life and comfort from a given level considered unsatisfactory to a better and perhaps more comfortable level. Development is about people- the mental state of people, the economic, social and institutional activities and arrangements the people are capable of and put in place to enhance and sustain a better life in a given society and epoch.

4. Strategies for Public Service Delivery in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

In order to provide services to the citizens the Nigerian government over the years has adopted several strategies in doing so. The strategies adopted for public service delivery in Nigeria include but not limited to the following:

- **Contracting Out:** According to McNabb (2009:171), "contracting out is the hiring of a private sector firm or non-profit organization to provide goods or services for the government. The government controls financing the activity and has management and policy control over the type and quality of goods or services provided". This strategy is mainly adopted in the areas of roads and railway construction.
- **Public-Private Partnership:** Public-Private Partnership is one of the new strategies introduced in Public Administration to bring about improved public service delivery. This view was corroborated by Olaopa (2012:149) when he asserted that "indeed, partnership between the private and the public sector is just another component of New Public Management (NPM) aimed at reforming public sector organizations for better public service delivery". According to the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnership- "Public-Private Partnership is a cooperative venture between the public and private sectors, built on the expertise of each

partner, that best meets clearly defined public needs through the appropriate allocation of resources, risks and rewards. There is a symbiotic relationship between the government and the private sector organization engaged in public-private arrangement in the sense that each of the partners is expected to benefit in relation to its objectives and goals for engaging in such partnership. Public services provided under the PPP arrangement are prevalent in the area of infrastructural provision.

- **Outsourcing Government Services:** Oriakhi and Okoh cited in Okoye and Oghoghomeh (2011:4) see outsourcing as "the contracting of the delivery of goods and services (fully or partially) to a private sector entity under a contract that typically involves no equity and capital. Here, public ownership of the assets is retained, while the management and operation are contacted out". This strategy of public service delivery in Nigeria is prominent in the area of human resource function such as retirement plan management and prospective employee recruiting and screening.
- **Direct Public Service Delivery:** This has to do with the services provided directly by the government and its agency. Here, the private sector is not involved in the public service delivered. Most public services are delivered through this means.

5. Challenges of Public Service in Nigeria

The Nigerian Public Service is faced with a plethora of challenges which have made the provision of essential services to the people to be inefficient and ineffective to the extent that the citizens are disappointed in the public service which made them to keep wondering if they actually have government in their country. The challenges facing the Nigerian Public Service include but not limited to the following:

Problem of ethnicity and religion: Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. In the public service, issues of ethnicity and religion often rear their head the operation of public service in Nigeria to the extent that ethnic and religious factors and considerations often becloud the sense of judgment and operation of some public servants in the provision of services and other activities such as appointments and admission into unity schools and tertiary institutions.

Corruption: Corruption has permeated and penetrated every segment of the country. The public service is not an exception to the malaise. Some public officials have embezzled money meant for the provision of services to the people. This is one of the greatest reasons why the citizens are not enjoying effective and efficient service delivery from the government. On this note, Niskanen cited in Sharma et al (2013:45-46) asserted that “just as businessmen maximize profits and consumers’ utility, bureaucrats maximize budgets. The bureaucrats were identified as public enemy No. 1. It was because of this economic rationality that government budgets were refusing to go down”. This explains why budgets have been padded in Nigeria by the National Assembly.

Lack of technology and adequate skilled manpower in most technologically related areas: No doubt, technology is essential for effective and efficient service delivery. Nigeria being a developing country is faced with the problem of lack of technology and adequate skilled manpower particularly in the area of technology. For instance, the essence of the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria during the regime of President Ibrahim Babangida which was aimed at ensuring that students acquire vocational training and skill that could make them to be self-reliant failed because of lack of the required technology as well as lack of the skills required by the teachers to train the students. As a result of this, most of the machines imported for the purpose got spoilt because they were not put to use. The end result of this is that the 6-3-3-4 system of education failed to achieve the desired result.

Poor Power Supply: The place of power in service delivery cannot be over-emphasized. Nigeria is known to be facing serious problem of electricity supply. Power supply has been epileptic. Even the privatization of NEPA has not really helped matters. There is no way effective service delivering can be done in the absence of power supply.

Politicization of the Public Service: Politics has seriously permeated the public service in Nigeria to the extent that virtually all the public services in Nigeria have been politicized. Politicians in power to a large extent determine who should be employed and who should not. This condition has brought about a situation where some of the public servants are accountable to those who made it possible for them to be employed instead of being accountable to the Nigeria state and the citizens they are meant to serve. This situation no doubt affects adversely public service delivery.

6. Prospects for Effective and Efficient Public Service Delivery for Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria

For socio-economic development to be achieved in Nigeria, the government should make concerted effort to ensure efficient and effective service delivery to the citizens. This is because effective and efficient service delivery is sine-qua-non to socio-economic development. Below are some of the factors that can engender effective and efficient service delivery in Nigeria.

Giving contracts to companies that have the required capacity to deliver and execute projects: No doubt, there are some projects that require heavy capital and resources to execute and not only that, expertise is also important in the execution of most projects. Government and its officials should be able to identify companies that have all the necessary resources and equipment to properly execute projects and give them contracts to execute such projects. This is to ensure timely completion of such projects.

Corruption should be shunned by government officials: Corruption has been identified as one of the factors that have led to shoddy execution of projects as well as projects abandonment. When projects are done in a sub-standard manner and or even abandoned it leads to waste of public fund and the citizens are also denied the benefits of such projects. To guide against high level of corruption in Nigeria the anti-corruption agencies should be strengthened to be able to comprehensively and vigorously fight corruption in Nigeria.

Government should adopt the public-private partnership model in the delivery of some services: Okoli cited in Amujiri (2011:113) is of the view that “partnership is very necessary and inevitable whenever the owner of the project or service is unable to execute or provide the services in the face of competing demands. In other words, funds are at the root of partnership. In addition to the requirements of funds, technical expertise is another overriding consideration, especially in projects or services requiring high technology and expertise. These can be pooled together to the advantage of the project or services”.

Government should improve power supply: A lot of services are dependent on the availability of power and such would be adversely affected if there is epileptic power supply. Regular power supply is sine qua non for effective and efficient public service delivery.

Increase citizenship participation in the governance process: It is the responsibility of the citizens to take serious interest in the governance system of their country. With this, they are meant to ensure that they hold their government accountable. This will make the government officials to live up to expectation by ensuring that projects and programmes initiated for development purposes are carried out effectively and efficiently. This will bring about increase in infrastructure, economic development and citizens well-being.

7. Conclusion

Considering the relationship between efficient and effective service delivery and the increase in the citizens' economic activities and well-being, it behooves on the government to try as much as possible to put machinery in motion to provide effective and efficient services to the people. The advantages derivable from effective and efficient service delivery is enormous because it brings about enhanced infrastructural development with its attendant positive effects on the health of the people, job creation, increase in disposable income of the citizens as a result of increased economic activities. More money would still go to the government in the form of tax from the citizens.

When people are gainfully employed, it will reduce the number of people that would want to go into crime, thereby reducing the crime rate with its attendant positive effect on security. No doubt, development can only take place in an environment where there is relative security of lives and property. In recognition of these facts, it is therefore incumbent on the Nigerian government not to rest on its oars in ensuring the effective and efficient service delivery.

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