

IMPEDIMENTS TO E-GOVERNANCE AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract: *In the present globalised world, E-Governance is increasingly becoming citizens - centred particularly in the delivery of government services to its public. In classical traditions and as accepted norm both government and Non -Governmental Organizations exist to offer citizens the means to directly or indirectly participate with a view to improving the quality of governance through service delivery. In Nigeria the attempt in the experience to make this possible has been characterized by obstacles. Hence such efforts have met certain critical impediments so that despite efforts towards realising the desired objectives of e-government as a tool for service delivery to the public sector such seems not to have been achieved, apparently, because of the fact that adult literacy level is low and issues of poor power supply are prevalent among others. The objective of the paper is to examine the impediments to e - governance and service delivery in the public sector in Nigeria. The paper recommends that the government should initiate and implement a pilot programme to explore the effectiveness of e-government in service delivery in the Public sector in Nigeria.*

Keywords: Citizens - Centred, Non - Governmental Organisations, Literacy Level, Power Supply

Introduction and General Background

Government is both the instrument and system through which a state or society is governed. The state in its classical and modern forms owe the citizens a lot of responsibilities while the citizens in return owe the state certain obligations. It is through governance that the will of the state in terms of meeting its responsibilities to citizens are both expressed and realised through formulation and implementation of policies and programmes that have direct bearing and impact on citizens or the public. Governance itself is a process of exercising political, economic and administrative authority, especially over the state and its supporting institutions and agencies. Embodied in governance are also mechanisms, processes and institutions put in place through which

citizens articulate their interest, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (Okeke, 2010).

In recent times, particularly in the modern era, the idea of the new information age creates a web of change in the literature on New Public Management (NPM). NPM, which is fast replacing the Old Public Administration, pattern apparently, seeks to 'reinvent' government in the form of entrepreneurial, business-like, mission and vision-driven state model, which itself changes the role of the state from 'rowing' to 'steering' (Dunleavy and Hood, 1994). The basic principles in this model are: promotion of markets through creation of incentives, introducing competition between units through fragmenting functions and roles with the sole aim of achieving effective and

competitive service delivery in the public sector (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

The availability and effective use of Information and Communication Technology in governance takes administrative services nearer to the people by inducing citizens and stakeholders to participate in planning and decision making processes which serves to enhance public service delivery at all levels of government. This means that e-Governance is a step ahead of new public management as it enables a reinvention of governance through the emergence of networks through which states and citizens, governments and private sectors, organizations and citizens form a web of relations that redefines accountability relationships, and places the citizen at the centre and focal point of government efforts.

The paper examines the impediments to the application of e-Governance in service delivery in the public sector in Nigeria. In the attempt to achieve this, the paper is structured into the following parts: introduction and general background, the concept of e-Governance, the nature of the public sector in Nigeria, service delivery in Nigeria, mode of e-Governance in service delivery, impediments and challenges in the application of e-Governance in service delivery, issues in e-Governance in Nigeria and the conclusion.

Conceptualisation of key concepts

- Public sector: the part of the economy controlled by the state, concerned with providing basic and various government services
- Poor power supply : Inadequate or very limited supply of energy for supporting the use of e services for governance
- Citizens – centred: a coordinated approach/collaboration between and within state agencies concerned about the citizens and aimed at providing or delivering quality services to people within the state.
- Non – Governmental Organisations: private voluntary efforts by individuals or organisations

independent of government to provide humanitarian people oriented services, organised on a local, national or international level.

- Literacy level: the ability to read and write and within the context of this work, it refers to the ability to access and make use of e facility for governance and service delivery.
- E – Governance: The application of Information and Communication Technology, for Delivery ICT), for delivering government services, exchange of information communication transaction etc. It is the delivery of services locally and nationally via the internet and other digital means to citizens.

The Concept of E-Governance and service delivery

Governance is conventionally conceptualized, as the process by which a political system achieves such values as accountability, participation, openness (or transparency) and respect for the rule of law and due bureaucratic process. It also includes, according to Boeninger (1992), the capacities of a system to exercise authority, win legitimacy, adjudicate conflicts as well as carry out programme implementation. In other words, the bottom line of governance is its ability to respond to the needs, aspirations and yearnings of majority of the citizenry. And once a political system is able to achieve these, it is referred to as responsive, accountable and effective governance.

The term e-governance is of recent origin and there is no commonly accepted definition. The term was perhaps coined about a decade ago after the success of electronic commerce to represent a public sector equivalent of e-commerce. Definitions of e-governance abound. The term is used in a loose manner to describe the legacy of any kind of use of information and communication technology within the public sector. For those who see it as some form of extension of e-commerce to the domain of the government, it represents the use of Internet to deliver information and

services by the government (Bhatnagar, 2007).

UNPA and ASPA (2001) e-Governance is the public sector's use of the most innovative information and communication technologies, like the Internet, to deliver to all citizens improved services, reliable information and greater knowledge in order to facilitate access to the governing process and encourage deeper citizen participation (Ndou, 2004). E-governance is defined as utilizing the internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to citizens (United Nations, 2008). General definition describes e-governance as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to transform government by making it more accessible, effective and accountable.

European Union (2003) defines E-governance as the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations combined with organizational change and new skills in order to improve public services and democratic processes and strengthen support to public policies.

Wimmer and Traunmuller (2001) contend that the main objectives of e-governance should include the following: (1) restructuring administrative functions and processes; (2) reducing and overcoming barriers to coordination and cooperation within the public administration; and (3) the monitoring of government performance.

The Nature of the Public Sector in Nigeria and Service Delivery in Nigeria

The UNDP (1999) defines service delivery as a set of institutional arrangements adopted by the government to provide public goods and services to its citizens. Therefore, it is the specific institutional arrangements that critically influence the performance of public service delivery. There are four basic broad forms of public service delivery arrangements that governments everywhere have adopted:

a. Direct Delivery of Services

The central government brings out legislation, enforces it, hires staff, invests, produces and distributes services, either directly operating from the headquarters or through deconcentrated line agencies, assumes full responsibility, and is accountable not only for provisioning but also for delivering services. Retaining power within itself, the government also adopts different sub-arrangements for the actual delivery. Other than direct delivery of services such as public health care, it creates public corporate enterprises and delegates to them the production and delivery functions. The Agriculture Inputs Corporation, which distributes farm inputs, and the Nepal Food Corporation which distributes subsidised food grains are examples.

b. Privatisation of Service Delivery

Government transfers the delivery of public services to private companies. In this case it assumes no responsibility except monitoring the company's compliance to legal codes. In many countries transportation and communication services are privatised. The basic rationale of privatisation is to gain advantage of allocative efficiency of the market mechanism and meet resource gaps by mobilising private sector investment in the public services sector.

c. Alternative Service Delivery Models

In the arena of public service delivery "alternative service delivery" models are a relatively recent phenomena. They are a marriage between the government and private sector with different contractual arrangements. The most common alternative service delivery models are:

- i. Contracting services to the private sector for services such as transporting and revenue collection.
- ii. Contracting out services to non-government organisations (NGOs) such as for literacy campaigns.
- iii. Franchising some government services, for example the postal service.

- iv. Licensing for information dissemination,
- v. Partnership among local governments with regard to meeting the need for large scale service production, and partnerships between the government and local government for sharing complex technical capacities.
- vi. Build-Own-Operate-Transfer (BOOT) and Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) systems such as for roads or subways.
- vii. Public-private partnership: This is the latest mode of service delivery where government and private sector/NGOs enter into co-operative agreements, which include shared objectives.

In all such case ultimate ownership is generally vested with the government and it retains the power to provision of public services, whereas private parties make the actual delivery.

d. Decentralisation of Services

Decentralisation of service delivery functions to local government is the most popular mode in most countries. Decentralisation is based on subsidiary principles of governance; a rule where provisioning, production and delivery of services are to be devolved to the lowest governmental tier, subject to economies of scale and capacity. By virtue of being closest to the citizens, local government are better positioned to match supply of a given service to citizens' demands, transforming citizens from service recipient to client, and ensuring citizens greater accountability for service quality.

Decentralisation of service delivery is not a new concept in Nigeria. It is getting more refined and attuned with the universal principle of devolution. The enactment of the Local Government reform- Act 1979 is an important milestone towards continuous movement for decentralised systems of governance and public service delivery.

The Government is initiating the devolution of a number of service delivery areas to local

government and more development areas. The issues of primary health care delivery has been transferred to local Governments and is currently in operation.

Modes of E-Governance Service Delivery

While e-governance encompasses a wide range of activities, (Monga, 2008) identified three distinct areas. These include

- i. Government-to-government (G to G),
- ii. Government-to-citizens (G to C), and
- iii. Government to business (G to B),

Government to citizen (G to C) facilitates citizen interaction with government, which is primary goal of e-government. This attempts to make transactions, such as payment of taxes, renewing licenses and applying for certain benefits, less time consuming and easy to carry out.

Government to Business (G to B) sector includes both the procurement of goods and services by the government as well as the sale of surplus government goods to the public on Line. (Mutula, 2012) In many respects, the Government to Government (G to G) sector represents the backbone of e-government. It is felt that governments at the union, state and local level must enhance and update their own internal systems and procedures before electronic transactions with citizens and business are introduced. Government to Government e-governance involves sharing data and conducting electronic exchanges between various governmental agencies.

Theoretical Perspective:

As a result of nature and manner the state came into being in Africa and citizens expectation from it, it remains the major source of initiative and development in all spheres including the public sector. Again because of the leading role of the state and elites within it, it remains an instrument for primitive accumulation. Once this is the case the elites will always frustrate any attempt to free the state from any move that will dislodge or not allow the flourishing of primitive accumulation that they are used to. The traditional ways of conducting

governance in the public sector in delivering basic services to the citizens characterised by the challenges discussed in this paper promotes and enhances this primitive accumulation process which itself hinders the effective implementation of e governance in service delivery. Hence any effort towards the implementation of e governance must start and take into account these problems and challenges.

Challenges/ impediments of E-Governance in Nigeria

There are a number of challenges/impediments which every government has to face in the process of the attempt to achieve functional e-Governance implementation and even though they will vary from country to country there are a few which are common to all with relatively few differences.

i. Technical issues

A primary problem in the implementation of e-Governance is the lack of basic information technology in most parts of the world or rather the disparity of technological quality between developed and developing nations (Norris, 2001; Jaeger and Thompson, 2003; Ndou, 2004). There also exists a shortage of IT skills and knowledge in the implementation of eGovernment and at the same time there exists a lack of standards for IT. The costs of internet usage in many countries still remains too high for a majority of the people and these people regard internet usage as a luxury they cannot afford (Backus, 2001).

ii. Privacy and Security Concerns

The privacy and security of citizens when they use government services is also another challenge. If citizens feel their privacy and security is at risk by participating in eGovernment then they will be reluctant to use these services/

iii. Citizen expectations

Another difficulty that governments face in the development of eGovernment is that of

understanding and meeting citizen expectations (Lau, 2003). As governments actualise eGovernment they realise that they are unaware of what kind of eGovernment services their people want and how this will effect responses to the services offered. Therefore governments must become citizen or customer focused to ensure that their efforts are not wasted and the citizens receive the implemented initiatives.

iv. Political challenges

The major challenge is bridging budgeting barriers (particularly relevant in the current economic context), most of the time, the scope, breadth and depth of e-Governance is not properly put into perspective and does not receive the necessary monetary allocations and Many countries go into e-Governance without appropriate laws and a "lack of cyber laws" with which citizens can be protected. These also help to guide individuals" use of the internet (Backus, 2001; Ndou, 2004).

v. Problems of literacy level: Nigeria is bedevilled by a chronic problem of literacy level that is the ability to access, understand and apply facilities offered by the internet for e governance and delivering basic services to citizens.

Issues in E-Governance in Nigeria

Implementation of e-Governance in most African nations are faced with a lot of problems, these problem are sometimes general or country specific. In Nigeria, Munday and Musa (2010) identified the followings issues as part of the challenges militating against full implementation of e-governance.

i. Poor Electricity supply

Nigeria at present generates less than 3000MW of electricity for a nation of over 140 million people, this is very low thereby forcing many households and companies operating in the country to depend on generators for their electricity (Ayo and Ekong, 2008). This would have adverse

effects on the implementation of e-Governance in the country. It would not make a lot of sense if e-Governance is introduced and the people to benefit from it cannot access it to make use of it. An option for the government would be to find an alternate source of energy such as solar power for devices such as kiosks and for internet cafes so that they can function always regardless of the power situation.

ii. Teledensity

According to statistics from the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) there are more than 67 million phone users in Nigeria as at April of 2009 and a teledensity of 47.98. The telecoms industry in Nigeria is the fastest growing in Africa and the third in the world going from a teledensity of 0.73 in 2001 to 47.98 in 2009 (Ayo and Ekong, 2008). This will definitely have a positive impact on the implementation of e-Governance in the country.

iii. Internet diffusion

Internet diffusion in Nigeria was virtually non-existent in 1999 and it has now risen to a population of over 10 million users, second only to Egypt with an online population of 10.5 million (Ayo and Ekong, 2008). Although the figure seems very little considering the population on the country it is expected to keep growing, this does not take into account the number of people who go online from their mobile devices. The key to successful implementation of e-Governance is the level of internet diffusion in the country therefore more has to be done to improve on this.

iv. Adult literacy rate

According to Ayo and Ekong (2008), adult literacy rate in Nigeria is above average and therefore would be a good factor in the implementation of e-Governance in the country. Furthermore with the introduction of initiatives such as the Universal Basic Education scheme (UBE) which ensures free education for children till 15 years of age, the literacy age is likely to improve in the near future (Ayo and Ekong, 2008).

v. Unemployment rate

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is a factor that has remained high due to the absence of basic infrastructure, good electricity and proper implementation strategies for government initiatives. This also has the potential to adversely affect the implementation of eGovernment in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The world is fast becoming a global village with the aid of fast and modern technological advancement. Hence, the adoption of e-governance across all nations in regards to service delivery. Nigeria as a nation is grappling with this particularly as regards e governance and effective service delivery. This however is not without problems, some of which are electricity supply, adult literacy and high unemployment rate among the youth. Egovernance in service delivery provides a platform for provision of services to citizens, businesses, and other levels of government. To develop information as a framework capable of bringing the citizen closer to the government in a typical government to citizens (G2C) transaction, it becomes important to evolve all e-governance initiatives around the citizen's needs. The key building blocks for such a focused e-governance programme for public service delivery should have some of the following components.

- i. Leadership should be provided from higher levels of government for initiating and implementing pilots programme. But once a pilot has been found successful, the replication should become the responsibility of the state government.
- ii. There must be empowered e-government coordinators at various levels. They should be available, at district level, state level and at the centre, persons with experience and vision who have the power to take decisions on the kind, quality, standards, strategy, replica-ability,

- etc of e-governance projects within a given overall framework.
- iii. A strong framework for e-governance and for its overall management at the central level, which goes down till the last mile with inbuilt scope for flexible adaptation at the local level.
 - iv. A criteria for defining 'success' of a project, so that it can be taken up for replication, and a system for sharing best practices at the state level, nationally and globally.
 - v. A legal framework at the central and the state level (inter-operability framework, Information security policy and practice, Outsourcing policy and Commitment to innovation).

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