
PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS AND EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

Charles Nwekeaku, PhD

Department of Public Administration,
Nasarawa State University, Keffi

Bathlomew Obiorah, MSc

Ultimate International School
Works and Housinh, Gwarinpa

ABSTRACT: *Governments all over the world, Nigeria inclusive desire ways to provide welfare services to the citizens with fewer resources, enhance transparency and accountability of public servants. The Nigerian Public Service has witnessed some reforms, including SERVICOM. This paper examines the extent the application of SERVICOM has improved the service delivery of the Nigerian Public Service. This is because it serves as the major machinery through which governmental policies are implemented. This paper examines the ability of the Nigerian Public Service to effectively manage public affairs. The paper highlighted the critical importance of Public Service delivery to the citizens in a timely, honest and effective manner under civil rule. It is discovered that government reform adopted to improve service delivery has not changed the public service for the better as nation-wide service failure persists. It is recommended that training and retraining programmes should be mounted for public servants, the National Orientation Agency should be empowered to begin enlightenment programme for the Citizens, NGOs and CBOs should be encouraged for active participation in monitoring government agencies and ministries, while other machineries should be put in place for effective monitoring of service delivery to the citizens.*

KEYWORDS: *Public service, enlightenment; service delivery; accountability and transparency.*

INTRODUCTION

The standard of service delivery in the Public/government sector, no doubt; plays an increasingly significant role in the economy of many countries, Nigeria inclusive. In today's global competitive environment, delivering quality service in all sectors is considered as an essential strategy for success and survival. The essential elements of the New Public Management [NPM] as explained by Pollitt (1995) are budget cutting, disintegrating traditional bureaucratic organizations into separate agencies, decentralization within the agencies, separating the function of public service delivery from purchasing, introducing market mechanisms, working to performance targets, indices and output objectives, flexibility in public employment, and laying more emphasis on service quality and customer responsiveness.

Hence, it has become expedient to rethink public service delivery in order to improve their quality (Roy and Seguin, 2000) to satisfy public needs, please people and firms as much as possible, favour good governance and national economic competitiveness (Carvalho, 2010). In Nigeria, the main objective of the public sector is to provide and serve as catalyst for affordable and quality service delivery to the citizens. Basic needs of life, such as, food, shelter, education, power and energy, health and water supply, but above all, peace and security are needed to live a decent and productive life. This cannot be possible without the provision/delivery of services that are capable of ensuring and enhancing human security and welfare by government.

One of the challenges of government and of course the legitimate expectation of the citizens of a developing country such as Nigeria is the ability of the public service to properly direct its aspirations towards improving the general welfare of the citizens. This is because the primary responsibility of government is to deliver services through its public service effectively and promptly to citizens at affordable prices, particularly now that the country is under civil rule following the wind of democracy which has blown over countries of the world.

However, the ability of the Nigerian public service to effectively and efficiently manage public affairs and ensure prompt and quality service delivery had always been called into questioning over the years [Mimiko, 1999]. Consequently, a number of far-reaching reforms on its structure and personnel management aimed at improving its performance have been put in place by the Nigerian government since its inception.

Indeed, the Nigerian public service as the most critical instrument of the modern state its efficiency has been put to test and it has undergone series of socio-economic, structural and political transformation, courtesy of the political leaderships of this country at one time or the other. Under the present civilian government, a number of strategies have also been adopted to improve the delivery of services to the citizens. It is however, doubtful if these reform efforts have changed the public service for the better.

Conceptual Framework

Service quality has been defined as the extent to which an organization meets or exceeds expectations of customers or beneficiaries (Parasuraman, 1998). It is the gap between customer expectations of service and perceived service (Zeithaml, 1990). Perceived service quality is derived from comparisons by customers, of expectations with what they perceive of service delivery by the suppliers (Zeithaml, 1990). Customers' expectations, according to Bitner (1994), are their perceptions of service that serve as standards against which service performance is judged. Parasuraman, (1998) explained that expectations are what beneficiaries think a service should deliver rather than what might be the offer. If expectations outweigh performance, then perceived quality is not satisfactory and customer dissatisfaction occurs (Parasuraman, 1985; Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). Four factors are identified as influencing customers' expectations: word of mouth communications; personal needs; past experience; and external communications (Zeithaml, 1990). A gap is created if customers' perceptions of service delivered fails to meet their expectations (Ramseook-Munhurrum, 2010). This gap can be closed by identifying and executing strategies that affect perceptions or expectations, or both (Parasuraman, 1985; Zeithaml, 1990). There are

two main perspectives on the appropriate method of measuring service quality: the expectation disconfirmation paradigm; and the performance paradigm. The former explains service quality as the extent to which service provision meets expectations while the latter argues that expectations are not relevant and only performance should be considered. These two explanations have given rise to two theories: SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, 1985; Zeithaml, 1988) and SEVPERF (Cronin and Taylor, 1992).

In view of the fact that the consideration of expectations in public service provisions allows for participation of the public in issues of governance and better consideration of the needs of the people in the process of service delivery, we adopt the SERVQUAL model or gap analysis which proposes that customers evaluate the quality of a service on the basis of five factors: “reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles” (Ramseook-Munhurrum, 2010:39).

Public sector service delivery in Nigeria has recorded a history of woeful failure and disappointment, particularly in the public enterprises sub-sector such as Power Holding Company of Nigeria, NITEL, NIPOST, NRC, NNPC etc (Okon, 2008). Similarly, the Nigerian civil service has often come under heavy criticism for poor organization, lack of planning, over-staffing, indiscipline, red tape and secrecy, insensitivity, rigidity and over centralization, apathy, incompetence, corruption and favouritism, rudeness and high-handedness, laziness, truancy and malingering (Adamolekun, 1986). In the same vein, the Political Bureau set up by the government in 1986 observed that goals and aspirations of the public service were not properly directed towards improving the general welfare of Nigerians and it had rather mainly served the interest of the bureaucrats and those of capital accumulation of private, local and foreign companies (Political Bureau Report, 1987). According to Herbert [1965] “We are plagued by a corrupt polity which promotes unlawful and/or immoral behaviour. Public interest has no practical significance in everyday behaviour among the ruling factions. The real problems of our world are not being confronted by those in power. In the guise of public service, they use whatever comes to hand for personal gain. They are insane with and for power.” Sequel to these obvious weaknesses of the entire public service in Nigeria, numerous public service reforms were carried out during the several years of colonial and military regimes to the present civilian government. Although, the SERVICOM is a program targeted at attitudinal aspect of Nigeria’s public life, geared towards service delivery and predicated on customer satisfaction, its success in ensuring qualitative transformation of the lives of the Nigerian citizens is in doubt.

Public service delivery as a concept has been at the forefront of public sector reforms discourse. It is associated with the New Public Management (NPM) theory attributed to the works of Pollitt (1990); Hood (1991); Pollitt & Bouckaert (2004). This places high premium on good governance, technological innovation and democratization. The theory also focuses on institutional and organizational restructuring as one of the panaceas of raising the performance of the public sector, which will in turn lead to a better and improved service delivery (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2015:189). Proponents of this theory stress the need for a paradigm shift from the norms of traditional public administration which places high emphasis on adherence to procedures rather than result orientation (Pollitt, 1990; Sarker, 2006; Hughes, 2012). Some scholars advocate the borrowing of some of the guiding principles adopted in private business organizations, which include:

“accountability and transparency, efficiency and effectiveness; reduction of public sector (cost) expenditure; improvement in resource use through labour discipline; flexibility in decision making; competition in the public sector through decentralization and emphasis on result and not procedure” (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004:66).

According to Oronsanye (2010:31), public service delivery can be seen as “the process of meeting the needs of citizens through prompt and efficient procedures.” This implies that the interaction between government and citizens are such that the needs of the citizens are met in a timely manner, thereby making the citizens key in public service delivery. The implication here is that as the private sector considers its customer as ‘king’, thereby ensuring quality service delivery, the public should be regarded as the ‘master’ and beneficiary of enhanced performance of the public service (Aladegbola & Jaiyeola, 2016:162).

Acceptable service delivery can be seen as one of the core responsibilities for the establishment of public organizations. It is identified as “one of the key functions of the public sector.” (Mitel, 2007:2). Okafor, Fatile & Ejalonibu (2014:49) comprehend public service delivery as “the result of the intentions, decision of government and government institutions, and the actions undertaken and decision made by people employed in government institutions.” They opine that it is “the provision of public goods or social (education, health), economic (grants) or infrastructural (water, electricity) services to those who need (or demand) them” (p. 49).

Underscoring the opinion above, Ohemeng (2010:115) views public service delivery from the light of its key features as “doing more with less, empowering citizens, enhancing transparency and holding public servants accountable.” Corroborating this further, Coopers (2014:9) itemises seven core objectives for public service delivery, namely:

- i. **Speed:** The time taken to deliver a service should be the shortest possible for both the customer and the organization delivering the service, right first time.
 - ii. **Engagement:** The manner in which services are delivered should be seen as customer-centric (i.e. participatory and trustworthy with the customer’s needs at the core).
 - iii. **Responsiveness:** There should be an ‘intelligent’ mechanism in place to address any variation in meeting service levels and to drive changes in the service delivery organization.
 - iv. **Value:** The customer needs to believe that the service delivery mechanism is cost effective, and value is driven by customer outcomes, not organizational processes.
 - v. **Integration:** The service delivery mechanism should be integrated. There should be no ‘wrong door’ policy for the customer.
 - vi. **Choice:** There should be multiple channels for service delivery, so that customers can have ‘channels of choice’, depending on specific needs at specific times.
 - vii. **Experience:** Personalization of service is necessary to ensure that customers’ experiences are on a par with what they are used to receiving from the private sector.
- Consequent upon the above, it can be deduced that there is a relationship between e-governance adoption and enhanced public service delivery in a country.

Public Service Delivery in Nigeria

In Nigeria and other developing countries of the world, the government usually has the major responsibilities for the maintenance of stability and the promotion of rapid economic and social development. These responsibilities of government have become more compelling in Nigeria today in view of the harsh economic climate and the highly deplorable conditions of living of most Nigerians. Government agencies are therefore designed for the realization of these responsibilities. This is why the public service of any nation is often regarded as the live-wire or nerve-centre of the state structure. The civil service is the operational arm of government charged with the analysis, implementation and administration of public policy (Oyedele, 2015). It is the executive arm of public administration. The public service manages the day-to-day affairs of the state by administering public services and back stopping government operations (Kyarinpa 1996).

Indeed, the civil service has been rightly described by the former head of the Nigerian civil service, Mr. Stephen Oronsaye as the bridge between the government and the governed, stressing that an inefficient public service, therefore, constitutes a barrier between the government and the people (The Nation September, 28, 2010). The importance of the public service can be seen in the fact that it gives effect to the policies and decisions of the government of the day whose responsibility it is to administer the affairs of the state. As the machinery of government, it has the traditional duties to collaborate with any political party that wins the election or is on power, whether or not it agrees with the tendency and views of government as they relate to policies for the effective identification, formulation and implementation of public policies and legislation designed for the good of the citizenry. To a large extent therefore, the efficient and effective performance of the public service determine greatly, the level of development and stability of a nation's administration system (Naidu, 2005). This is why every government in developed and developing countries of the world acknowledge that the achievement of its social and economic development objectives depends on effective public services (Nti, 1996).

The public service of any country, including Nigeria performs certain distinct and crucial functions. It provides a number of social services to the people of a country. Such services include transportation, communications, supply of water, roads, education, health, housing, power, public enterprises and other public utilities in the interests, of socio-economic justice. It also formulates and implements laws and policies of government. By so doing, it remains the essential instrument for translating laws into reality. The public service provides continuity when governments change in a country. It survives even revolutions and coup d'états (Naidu, 2005). It is in the light of the crucial role of the public service to deliver social services to the citizenry that we need to examine the critical importance of effective service delivery in Nigeria. As noted above, the public service is the main machinery of government for the implementation of public policies and decisions.

It, therefore, follows that the primary responsibility of government is to deliver, promptly and efficiently, quality services to its citizens at affordable prices. Indeed, service delivery is the "raison d'être" of the public service. Fundamentally, the ability of a government to legitimately tax and govern people is premised on its capacity to deliver a range of services required by its population which no other player will provide. In other words, government owes its existence and

its legitimacy to the fact that there are services in which the possibility of market failure is great (Olowu, 2008).

The goods and services that are usually provided by government are known as public goods. This category of goods and services require exclusion, jointness of use or consumption, and not easily divisible. They are usually consumed jointly and simultaneously by a large number of people and difficult to exclude people who do not or cannot pay. Public goods are also usually allocated through decisions made by political, process and considerations. By its nature, service delivery in Nigeria has variously been described as “chaotic,” “epileptic,” “unsatisfactory,” “shoddy”, “deplorable”, “sensitive”, “inflexible”, “non-cost effective” and so on; and has been characterized by such negative attitudes and traits as insensitivity towards customers and their complaints, lateness; absenteeism, needless delay and red-tapism; palpable negligence, inexcusable incompetence, unbridled corruption, favouritism, lackluster performance and a general lackadaisical attitude to work (Okon, 2008).

By its nature therefore, public service delivery is crucial to a greater percentage of a country’s population. In view of the daring significance of public service delivery to the citizens of any country, the need for effective delivery of these categories of services cannot be over-stressed. This is why public service delivery should also be accessible, high in quality and be effectively delivered. The government is, therefore, faced with the challenge of providing basic public services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner. However, over the years, public service failure or ineffective delivery of such services has always been the order of the day in many developing countries of the world.

This has also become the concern of many of these countries today. In order to effectively address this challenge, it has become imperative for governments to adopt strategies that will increase citizen participation in decision making on how public services are provided. This is why the pressure toward greater citizen involvement in decision making in government has compelled governments everywhere to seek to increase the quality of government services at a time when the available resources for delivering services have declined (Olowu 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts the ex-post facto research design. This research design is descriptive in nature and relies on secondary sources of data obtained from relevant books, journals, and Internet materials to examine public service delivery in the Nigerian public sector. The justification for this research design is based on the fact that it allows the “investigator starts with the observation of dependent variables, and then, studies the independent variables in retrospect, for their possible relationship to have any effect on the dependent variables” (Chukwuemeka, 2006:19).

When assessing perceived quality of service delivery, reliable information is difficult to obtain, and this has remained one of the major difficulties over the years in Nigeria. Basic statistics on performance released by public institutions are neither generally correct, nor comprehensive enough. Thus, service quality can be measured by tangible assessment, reliability, responsiveness,

assurance and empathy. These factors were taken into cognizance in designing the questionnaires. The Basic Services considered were health, electricity, water, safety, security and sanitation. The effort is the continued tracking of citizens' opinion on salient issues affecting human wellbeing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Although, the service delivery reform was designed to make the public service truly a tool for the promotion, growth, stability and development of democracy; the findings of this paper demonstrate abysmal failure. The good intentions of this service delivery reform efforts have been largely unrealized as service delivery is still ineffective and inefficient. Indeed, the mission statement of the reform to serve as the strategic vehicle for all the efficient coordination, communication and monitoring of government policies and programs implementation across the arms and among the tiers of Nigerian government in the best tradition of political and public service loyalty has remained a mirage.

A number of issues have been raised as constituting the failure of public service reforms. Apart from the issue of service delivery, the different reforms are still disjointed and required a more integrated approach for them to achieve the overall objective of system's rejuvenation. The implementation progress report and critique show that the reform has a strong political will behind it, but it is still largely incoherent and uncoordinated (Olaopa, 2008). This is still true of the reform today.

As it is now, the enthusiasm and the high expectations placed on SERVICOM appears to have dropped significantly. This has been demonstrated in the very low publicity and public enlightenment of the SERVICOM reform to effectively sensitize the public on the need to, as of right, insist that they should be served right. In the final analysis, efficient and effective public service delivery is at the center of the social contract binding successive but transient political office holders to the Nigerian electorate (Okon, 2008).

The National Orientation Agency should therefore be mandated and properly equipped to embark on nation-wide public enlightenment and publicity on the tenets of SERVICOM. Moreover, the present limited scope and coverage of SERVICOM should be expanded from its present abode at the Presidency to cover all tiers of government in the country.

The study has revealed that the reality on ground is that government has not been able to deliver on public service provision based on its development plan in all the sectors. There is a glaring gap between the requirements of the peoples and their desires for public service provision and what the government has been able to actually deliver.

There is an obvious gap between government budgetary allocations/expenditure for the provision of public services and the actual performance in terms of tangible deliveries. In terms of the availability, access and quality of public service provision, there is a gap between the urban and the rural areas in all parts. The Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who are promoters of social justice and socio-economic development are usually engaged in the advocacy for the provision of

these public services, but the Organizations need to be more actively involved in the monitoring of the implementation of these public services especially in the rural areas. The implementation of the national budgets particularly the capital budget has been less than satisfactory, at below 50 percent.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this paper is to examine public service delivery in Nigeria. From the studies, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guarantees the provision of services to the people by government without any discrimination whatsoever. Yet the same constitution failed to provide that the service delivery it guaranteed is justiciable and enforceable in the Court of Law. Furthermore, SERVICOM that was meant to monitor and ensure that MDAs provide quality services for Nigerian citizens was found to be ineffective as only 50% of the MDAs established the SERVICOM Unit in their establishments. The established SERVICOM Units in the MDAs were found not to be independent of the MDAs, within which they were established, thereby making them to compromise in the discharge of their duties and responsibilities.

The study also discovered that there is a gap between the urban and rural areas in terms of service provisions/delivery in Nigeria, while the gap between the budgetary provisions and peoples' expectations on one hand and the actual delivery of services to the people on the other hand tends to widen. The study however discovered gender parity in public service provisioning/delivery in Public Water Supply, Cleaning Services and Electricity Supply. The sources of funding for the National Budget is basically from government main sources of revenue which comprise of Crude Oil, Non-Oil Exports, Customs Duties, Taxes (Company Income Tax, Personal Income Tax, Value Added Tax etc.) and other sundry revenue sources. There is no indication of any contribution from aids/grants in the funding of National budgets in Nigeria as same is not incorporated in national plans and budget, though a lot of intervention is provided by development partners. In the area of budgetary allocation, government was discovered to have neglected the 1st National Implementation Plan (NIP) of Nigeria Vision 20:2020, which is a need assessment and policy document of government developmental plans on which budgetary allocation ought to have been based.

The key public service sectors that tend to critically impact on the lives of the people were found to have received less allocation compared to less critical areas that do not directly affect the well-being of the people. The budgetary allocations over the periods have been in favour of recurrent expenditure due to high cost of governance and corruption, while capital expenditure, which is used to undertake projects that are meant to impact directly on the lives of the people, was assigned lesser budgetary allocations. Besides, even the implementation of the unfavorable capital budgets allocated to the key public service sectors have over the years been less than satisfactory at below 50 percent. Substantial increases in successive budgetary allocations during the period under review were never commensurate to the actual performance and tangible deliveries. Government did not show sufficient commitment to the full implementation of the national budgets and its developmental plans as articulated in the 1st National Implementation Plan of Nigeria Vision 20:2020 to meet the basic needs of the people. Hence, government seems to lack necessary

commitment, budgetary discipline and the political will to create the desired positive impact and better the lives of Nigerians. What then should be done? It is the recommendation of this paper that the following steps be taken:

1. Adoption of a popular and public oriented participatory process in needs articulation at all tiers of government as part of the planning and budgeting process.
2. Institutionalization of a robust and result oriented monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the extent of programs and project implementation at all tiers of government and to use the M&E report as an input to new policies or correcting existing ones.
3. Instituting a monitoring and evaluation culture involving government, private sector and CSOs.
4. The Federal Character Commission (FCC) should be adequately empowered to enforce the provision of its Act that mandated it to ensure even and equitable distribution of developmental projects and social amenities across all parts and sections of the country.
5. Furthermore, the government should endeavor to give “legal teeth” to the implementation of the SERVICOM in order to make it effective. Public servants who contravene the principle of SERVICOM should be sanctioned under the law by a law court. The National Assembly should enact a law in this regard. This is necessary because as at today, there is no report of any civil servant who has been punished for non-compliance with the provisions of SERVICOM.
6. In order to ensure proper implementation of SERVICOM, the public must be more demanding in respect of the quality of services they enjoy, and they must pressure government to develop mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of the services being delivered by the various Agencies. They should encourage the government to adopt measures that increase the citizens’ input in the formulation and implementation of policies on public service delivery (Adamolekun, 2005).
7. Public Private Partnership should also be adopted by the government to increase efficiency in the area of public service delivery.

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