

THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE AND SERVICE DELIVERY UNDER CIVIL RULE

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Abstract: *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. The paper however discovered that government reform adopted to improve service delivery has not changed the public service for the better as nation-wide service failure persists. What is responsible for this is the failure of a recent public service delivery reform called Service Compact with All Nigerians (SERVICOM) to achieve its objectives. This is because of unsustainable political will over time. Its operations are limited and uncoordinated. The paper infers that the tenets of SERVICOM should be widely publicized, coordinated and given "Legal teeth" to make it effective.*

Keywords: *Service delivery, Civil rule, Servicom, Public Service Reform, Renewal Programme.*

INTRODUCTION

The public service of any country stands out as the major machinery of government for the formulation and implementation of public policies. It does this by translating the plans and programmes of government into concrete public goods and services for the use of the citizenry. Since public bureaucracy is primarily concerned with public administration, the management of public affairs therefore rests heavily on it. Whatever the system of government in practice in a country, the public service is designed to be the prime mover of the social and economic development of a nation.

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 their 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 the working hands of government has had to service various regimes and administrations (Mimiko, 1999) and efficiently manage public affairs and ensure prompt and quality service delivery had always been called into questioning over the years. 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. One aspect of the major strategies designed to improve service delivery is SERVICOM.

The main focus of this paper is therefore on SERVICOM and public service delivery in Nigeria. The first section examines the critical importance of Public Service Delivery to the citizens of any country. The second section reviews the public service reforms in Nigeria under the current civilian government. The third section examines the level of public service delivery in Nigerian while the last section is the concluding remarks.

THE CRITICAL IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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. 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 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 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-tapsm; palpable negligence, inexcusable incompetence, unbridled corruption, favouratism, 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 critical importance of public service delivery to the citizens of any country, the need for effective delivery of these categories of services cannot be overstressed. 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).

A REVIEW OF PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA

In the light of the numerous weaknesses associated with the Nigerian public service over the years, reform is long overdue if it would be in the direction of making service delivery more customer friendly, more output and consumer-driven than power and privilege-driven (Okon 2008). Successive governments had embarked on a number of administrative reforms to address these problems. Essentially, administrative reforms are based on a deliberate attempt to change both the structure and procedures of the public service involved in order to promote organization effectiveness and attain national developmental goals (Quah, 1988). In a developing country such as Nigeria, it is pertinent to carry out administrative reforms in order to develop public service structures that will most efficiently and effectively facilitate the implementation of government policies and programmes as well as provide a veritable communication channel for mobilizing mass support for such policies and programmes. This is intended to bridge the gap between policy formulation and policy implementation in the running of public affairs (Abubakar, 1992). Indeed, the “inevitability” of the public service in the management of public affairs can be taken for granted. However, what cannot be taken for granted is the capacity of any given public service to efficiently and effectively “deliver the goods”. The constant need by government to “move” and to have the public service move along with it or even ahead of it often provides one of the strongest basis for administrative reforms (Abubakar, 1992). In short, the cardinal goal of reform, if it must satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of the public, must improve service delivery at minimum cost in the age of globalization characterized by international competitiveness (Okon, 2008).

To this extent, between 1954 and 1999, the public service generally in Nigeria has witnessed at least, seven major civil/public service review Commissions. These were the Gorsuch Commission in 1954, the Mbanefo commission in 1959, the Morgan Commission in 1964, the Elwood Commission in 1966, Adebo Commission in 1971, the Udoji Commission in 1974 and the 1988 reforms. In addition to this, at the return of the country to civil rule in 1999, the government has also embarked on another round of reforms in the civil service. All these reforms were embarked upon to further enhance the efficiency of the Nigerian public service. The reform from 1999 to 2007 under the civilian government of President Olusegun Obasanjo called the public service Renewal Programme is in focus here.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE RENEWAL PROGRAMME AND SERVICE DELIVERY (1999 – 2007)

This was a public service reform effort widely described as about the most comprehensive and far-reaching in the history of the Nigerian public service reforms. This reform was necessitated by the need to address the crisis in public management which led to serious deterioration in the quality of governance in the country brought about by several years of military rule. Thus, on assumption of office on 29 May, 1999,

President Obasanjo in his inauguration address identified the following aspects of the crisis his administration inherited as inefficiency in the delivery of social services; insensitivity to general welfare; indifference to the norms guiding the conduct of public officials and rampant corruption. According to the President;

‘Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service, government officials became progressively indifferent to propriety of conduct and showed little commitment to promoting the general welfare of the people and public good. Government and all its agencies became thoroughly corrupt and reckless. Members of the public had to bribe their way through in Ministries and Parastatals to get attention and one government agency had to bribe another government agency to obtain the release of their statutory allocation of funds’ (Inauguration speech by President Olusegun Obasanjo delivered on May 29, 1999.

Specifically, the reform programmes cover the following areas:

- i) Public Service Reform – This was to be implemented at three fronts namely, the general staff audit and pay roll clean up; restructuring of Ministries, Departments and Agencies/Parastatals and cross-cutting service wide changes.
- ii) Pay Reform – In order to improve public sector working condition, the national minimum wage was raised from N250 per month to N5,500 per month with effect from 1st May 2000.

Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS). This IT – enabled facility was put in place to establish a reliable and comprehensive database for the public service, facilitate manpower planning, eliminate record and payroll fraud, facilitate easy storage, update and retrieval of personnel records for administrative and pension processes and staff remuneration payment with minimal wastages and leakages.

Public Expenditure Management Reform - This is a change in Government’s budgeting and financial management philosophy and operation leading to firm policies, economic growth and management orientation, time discipline and predictability in resource allocation and funding releases.

Monetization of Fringe Benefits: As a way to reduce the cost of government and to eliminate or reduce sources of waste and leakages, this policy quantified in monetary terms, those fringe benefits provided for government workers as part of their conditions of service.

Pension Reform – This is a pension reform aimed at eliminating the problems associated with the pension scheme. This Pension Scheme is contributory, fully funded by both the employer and employee and based on individual accounts that are privately managed by Pension Fund Administrators with the pension fund assets held by Pension Assets Custodians.

Anti – Corruption: This necessitated the establishment of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and other measures to plug loopholes in the public service and expose and penalize corrupt officials and other citizens.

Statistical System Reform and Strengthening - This had to do with the development a medium - term master plan for the National Statistical System. The institutional platform

for statistical management was removed from the old bureaucratic federal office of statistics into the professionalized National Bureau of Statistics.

SERVICOM: Meaning, Origin and Rationale – This aspect of the reform has to do with public service delivery, which is the focus of this paper. This service delivery or SERVICOM Reform emanated from a technical assistance provided by the British Government through the DFID to the Federal Government (Olaopa 2008). According to a SERVICOM office publication, in view of government's concern for the poor quality of public service as well as the evils of inefficiency and corruption which have combined to constitute impediments of effective implementation of government policy, a report was commissioned by government to review service delivery in Nigeria. This included the institutional environment for service delivery, a reflection on people's views and experience of services and to draw roadmap for service Delivery Programme. A special Presidential Retreat subsequently deliberated on the report after which the President and the Ministers entered into SERVICE COMPACT WITH ALL NIGERIANS (SERVICOM) its core provision says: "we dedicate ourselves to providing the basic services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner".

THE OBJECTIVE OF SERVICOM

The singular objective of SERVICOM is to meet the challenge of nation-wide service failure as depicted in the diagnostic survey which had the following conclusion:

- a. Government services were not serving the people;
- b. Services were inaccessible, poor in quality and indifferent to citizen needs.

As the engine of the Federal Government's service delivery initiative, SERVICOM was to:

Make the Ministries, departments and Agencies more customer focused in their service delivery procedures and processes;

Heighten public awareness about damaging effects of service failure to the Nigerian society.

Promote attitudes by which citizens would recognize the need to challenge service failure as their civic rights as well as their civic responsibility. (SERVICOM office 2009).

SERVICOM seeks to introduce the "Customer orientation" through a "service compact with all Nigerians; (SERVICOM) The pact was adopted by President Obasanjo, the Federal Executive Council and representatives of civil societies in March, 2004 as part of the initiative to orientate the Nigerian public as service users to demand quality services as a matter of right, and service providers to deliver on agreed standard under contractual obligations that are formalized in the SERVICOM charter.

Under the charter, each Ministry, Department, Agency and Parastatals has a Ministerial SERVICOM unit. The SERVICOM unit is responsible for spear heading the strategy for SERVICOM compliance through a review and monitoring mechanism that relies on SERVICOM Index. There is also in place a customer Grievance Redress mechanism reinforced by the publishing of each Ministry or Departments performance.

Service delivery orientation has also provoked a role of state redefinition which revolved around a functional review that seeks to deregulate public service monopolies through delivery innovations and introduction of other delivery modes as franchising, outsourcing, management contracting, commercialization and sometimes outright privatization (Olaopa 2008).

Under SERVICOM, the civil service is expected to provide the basic services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner. SERVICOM implementation has involved training, workshops, seminars and retreats for senior officers in the public service in order to sensitize this supervisory category of staff to the new orientation for the civil service. Sanctions are to be imposed on public servants who fail to discharge their functions in accordance with established practice.

SERVICOM is based on five fundamental principles:

Conviction that Nigeria can only realize its full potential if citizens receive prompt and efficient services from the state.

Renewal of commitment to the service of the Nigerian Nation

Consideration for the needs and rights of all Nigerians to enjoy social and economic advancement.

A vow to deliver quality services based upon the needs of citizens.

Dedication to providing the basic services to which each citizen is entitled in a timely, fair, honest, effective and transparent manner.

In addition to the principles of SERVICOM, it has provided the following opportunities for both the civil service and the public servant. First, it is another opportunity for public servants in Nigeria to rededicate themselves for selfless service to their clients with courtesy and with grace. Second, it presents another opportunity for repositioning the public service for more effective service delivery. Third, now that the general public has been, or is about to be sensitized about its right to insist on qualitative service, and complaint – redress mechanisms abound, public servants will increasingly be conscious that public rating of their individual performance would form part of their performance evaluation.

EVALUATING NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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, planlessness, 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).

Consequent upon 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. In evaluating the Nigeria's public service delivery, the focus of this paper is on the reform of the civil service under public rule known as the public service Renewal Programme of the Obasanjo civilian administration. 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.

CHALLENGES OF SERVICOM

A number of lapses are inherent in the SERVICOM programme itself. Although the idea of SERVICOM was well conceived as a way to make the civil service transform into a service whose watchwords must be efficiency, effectiveness, competence and utmost commitment to service delivery to the people, a number of obstacles can be identified on its way to achieve its set objectives. One major obstacle to its success is the presence of obvious weaknesses in its implementation.

For instance, the then head of a Technical Team Secretariat on the implementation of the reform, Dr. Tunji Olaopa noted that there was really no baseline data that could elicit the "public" perception of the State of the Federal Civil Service as at 2003, and therefore, no benchmark for measuring the impact of the reform programmes being implemented on service delivery and overall system improvement in time series (Olaopa, 2008).

Another problem confronting its implementation has to do with the low level of publicity given to the reform efforts. The programme embarked on a massive public awareness campaign to sensitize the public on its rights to good service delivery in 2006. The opportunities provided by SERVICOM which guarantees the right of the citizens to be served right and promptly is not widely known to many citizens. Today, a large number of the Nigerian citizens do not know the details of what SERVICOM has for them especially their right to question service failure. This is partly due to the limited scope of SERVICOM. This is because SERVICOM's implementation is not extended to all tiers of government, but rather to only Federal Ministries, Departments Agencies and Parastatals. This has made it difficult for the citizens to be demanding in respect of the quality of services implementation they enjoy.

Moreover, SERVICOM reform effort has remained largely ineffective as a result of lack of continuity in the spirit and commitment to make it transform the lives of the citizens. This is because the programme was just gathering momentum on the eve of the Obasanjo administration's departure (Okon, 2005). The administration of Jonathan which succeeded Obasanjo has so far not shown any reasonable level of sustaining the momentum of its commitment to SERVICOM. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that reforms usually fail because of their attachment to reform. The risk that one has seen in current reform programme implementation is the deleterious effect of personalizing of

innovations through self attribution of every positive achievement on reform (Olaopa, 2008).

Moreover, delay in budget implementation constitutes another challenge to the effective implementation of SERVICOM. Although the programme requires that there should be inspection and supervision of Ministries, Departments Agencies and Parastatals and that the public should insist on their right to be served right, these bodies do not receive their budgetary allocations in good time in most cases. Hence, the inspection and supervision to ensure proper provision of services become difficult.

Another critical challenge to the effective implementation of SERVICOM programme is the low level of compliance with its tenets. For instance, public servants who do not operate according to the provisions of SERVICOM have not been sanctioned in any way in order to ensure strict compliance. There are no laws enacted to give legal teeth to enforce strict compliance by civil servants who do not comply. Till date, no public officer has been sanctioned or prosecuted by any law court or similar Agency for non-compliance with the provisions of SERVICOM.

Perhaps, this is because SERVICOM was not established by any law that includes sanction overall, the reform has remained ineffective to a large extent. This is closely related to the issue of collapse of infrastructures in the country. This important national issue has not been properly addressed since the inception of the civilian government. Eight years after, and after spending several billions of dollars on the power sector for instance, the country could not generate more than 3,000 megawatts of electricity. Similarly, eighteen years after the Federal government established the National Housing Funds, the scheme has been adjudged incapable of addressing the housing problems of Nigerian workers (The News Magazine Nov. 29, 2010).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper examined the critical importance of effective public service delivery to the people of Nigeria. The paper however discovered that public service delivery in Nigeria has remained largely ineffective during the several years of and military rule. In order to address this issue, the civilian government of President Obasanjo instituted a reform programme which included service delivery or SERVICOM reform with the aim of “service compact with all Nigerians”.

The service delivery reform was designed to make the public service truly a tool for the promotion, growth, stability and development of democracy. However, as noted earlier, the good intentions of this service delivery reform effort 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 programme, implementation across the arms and 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 constraints to the implementation of the reform. 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. Recommendations suggested that, in order to make the reform effective enough to ensure speedy and qualitative public service delivery, the Jonathan government should ensure continuity of the reform by sustaining the momentum of the commitment to the principles and objectives of SERVICOM.

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 sensitise 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.

Furthermore, the government should endeavour 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 have been punished for non-compliance with the provisions of SERVICOM.

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).

Public Private Partnership should also be adopted by the government to increase efficiency in the area of public service delivery.

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