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ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES AND THE CHALLENGES OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN BUREAUCRACY

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Abstract

This paper examines the effect of bureaucracy, administrative processes and procedures on service delivery in Nigeria. This article view bureaucracy as a process and standard operating procedures established for the conduct of the government business; which has significantly affected service delivery in the Nigerian public sector. This work attempts to comprehend how the existing rigid bureaucracy (institutionalized holdup) has thwarted the deliverance of democratic dividends in Nigeria. Findings show that various administrative bottlenecks and strict adherence to bureaucratic procedures are attributable to some of the failed policies, programmes and incidences' of abandoned projects in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the article argue that, since administrators are saddled with the task of implementing programmes and policies of government, they must observe all the laid down rules, regulations and at the same time possess some level of flexibility as the situations demand. The paper concludes that the Public service rules and regulations should be structurally flexible to address critical cases and emergency situations.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Efficiency, Policy, Programme, Public Service.

Introduction

Over the years, the debate on the effect of bureaucracy and administrative processes on service delivery has remained unabated. Felix (2011) averred that governments all over the world are faced with the challenges of citizen's satisfaction in terms of efficient and timely delivery of essential goods and services namely: good roads, affordable housing, stable electricity, functional health care services, waste disposal, education, and efficient communication facilities. For a country to develop, its government must be ready at all times to provide goods and services in an efficient manner. However, many countries (most especially developing) have continued to experience backwardness in their developmental agenda and national development attributable to administrative bottleneck(s) that often characterize the implementation of government policies,

programmes and projects. Since the return to democratic governance in Nigeria, successive governments have made concerted efforts at delivering the dividends of democracy to all Nigerians including the provision of security and welfare for all its citizens which is the primary purpose of any government and for Nigeria as enshrined in the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State policy of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Moreover, the need for quality service delivery appears to have been appreciated and wholeheartedly acknowledged by governments despite the doubting challenges. Understanding the enormity of service delivery in recent times, has invariably forced governments to embrace the public private partnership (PPP) approach to service delivery. For a concise understanding of the term “Bureaucracy” as used in this paper, it is well to accept Max Weber (1864-1920) an apostle of bureaucracy’s contention that the only way for a modern society to operate effectively was by organizing expertly trained, functional specialists in bureaucracies. In addition, the essence of bureaucracy is to enable large organizations to be properly managed, achieve efficiency and be more accountable to the people. Furthermore, bureaucracy entails the coordination of organization’s activities for effective, efficient and economical provision of services by public organization. Adebayo, (2007) laid credence to this position and averred that if kept within a limit, bureaucracy and bureaucratic practices are functionally necessary for the operation of a large administrative apparatus. The administrators must keep themselves abreast of organizational laid down rules, regulations and procedures, whilst executing government programmes and policies aimed at meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the entire citizens. The existence of such operational rules, regulations and procedures has given room for a rigid bureaucracy and bureaucratic practices in the Nigerian Public Service thereby thwarting the achievement of government’s developmental objectives.

The aim of this article is twofolds, first, to examine the effects of rigid administrative processes on prompt response to citizens’ demand in terms of service delivery. Many studies on how public administration can be vibrant, result-oriented, and functioning of contemporary bureaucracy as a centre point, with a focus on the reform of the civil service to guarantee efficient and effective service delivery in Nigeria (Olaopa, 2014; Ladipo, 2011), are urgently necessary to achieve efficient service delivery. The present article aims at providing analytical insight into the workings of bureaucratic procedures in Nigeria which are not indispensable in any organization established to achieve determined objectives.

Secondly, this paper is an attempt to underscore how strict adherence to administrative practices has hampered effective service delivery in Nigeria. The central questions that would provide the basis of our argument is that: Do rigidity in bureaucracy and administrative practices have negative impact on service delivery? In order to evaluate this, the paper attempts to analyze the underline principle behind bureaucracy alongside political leadership and their strong appetite to deliver service to the entire citizenry. This section concludes with a framework for analyzing administrative processes and procedures involved in the execution of governmental programmes, policies and projects and its attendant effects on service delivery. Bureaucracy, in the context of this paper, refers essentially to the processes and standard operating procedures established for the conduct of government business which are inevitable in every public sector.

Administration and Bureaucracy: A Conceptual Framework

Etymologically, the word administration is derived from the Latin words of “Ad” (to) “Ministre” (serve). This implies that administration simply mean ‘to serve’. To Vieg in Siraj & Lawal (2014) administration is a determined action taken in pursuit of a conscious purpose. Sharma and Sadana (2012) have the opinion that: *to some, administration is the sum total or the whole complex of*

activities; manual, clerical, technical and managerial which are undertaken to realize objectives in view. More importantly, the administrators' position in every organization or society as a whole is very strategic and pivotal; their existence can be felt in any organization set up for a defined purpose or objective(s), whether private or public i.e. Army, Church, Mosque, University, industrial or business concern or a purely social organization (Adebayo, 2011). Historically, Administrative system existed in ancient Egypt to administer irrigation from the annual flood of the Nile and to build the pyramids, and China in the Han dynasty (206BC to AD220). In Europe the various empires –Greek, Roman, Holy Roman, Spanish and so on - were, above all, administrative empires, controlled from the center by rule and procedures. The development of the “modern state” in the Middle Ages is argued by Weber to have developed concomitantly with bureaucratic structures (Gerth & Mills, 1970).

The crucial point is that, administration is a universal practice and also of universal importance. Therefore, there has to be administration because every organization consists of human beings in a hierarchical set up, making use of tools, equipments human and material resources all in the quest to attain the mandate of the organization. This has been clearly recognized in every sector of human endeavours as been the keystone to success and indeed existence (Augustus, 2007). This enviable position was recognized by Adebayo (2011) whilst making reference to the French experience (Franco-Prussian War of 1870). By the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, France had disintegrated to an extent which threatened the survival of the country as a World power. Henri Fayol (1841-1925) who was the principal consultant to the French government during the crisis of the First World War attributed this disintegration to lack of administrative ability and managerial efficiency, because the administration lack bureaucratic machinery or capacity that could guarantee responsive and purposeful service delivery.

Since the task of governance is concerned with the promotion of general welfare, provision of essential service i.e health, roads, water, electricity and happiness of the people within its jurisdiction. These services and facilities are indispensable to a good condition of living for all citizens therefore, the task of delivering these rests squarely on the shoulder of administrators who only require necessary directives and resources from the political leadership. In their bid to implement orders from the political overlords, administrators must be guided by rules and regulations in the conduct of their daily undertakings.

Bureaucracy like any other concept in the field of social sciences has defied a generally acceptable definition. This concept has emerged as a dominant feature of our contemporary world, and had become a perplexing term which has been subjected to many different interpretations. Sadana and Sharma (2012) noted that the term has caused so much controversies and confusions that scholars are of the opinion that the only reasonable approach is to avoid the use of the term bureaucracy while pursuing research in the areas in which it has been employed. Nevertheless, Hans Rosenberg, cited in Sadana and Sharma et al, (2012) has rightly observed that for good or evil an essential part of the present structure of governance consist of its far-flung system of professionalized administration and hierarchy of appointed officials upon whom the society is thoroughly dependent in the discharge of government functions. Sharma et al argues that, whether we live under the most totalitarian despotism or in a most liberal democracy, we are governed to a considerable extent by a bureaucracy of some kind.

Bengt Abrahamson in Harpreet and Sharma (2011) observed that the concept of bureaucracy is multisided but, however provided a more concise nub of bureaucracy, and maintained that bureaucracy has been identified with any of the following seven divisions: state administrators, group of officials, administrative autocracy, rational organization, organizational inefficiency, and

modern organization or modern society. Max Weber cited in Sharma (2012) perceived bureaucracy as a universal social phenomenon, and the means of carrying community action over into rationally ordered societal action. Nonetheless, this article views bureaucracy from the perspective of John Vieg in Sadana (2012) that bureaucracy in a free translation means “desk government” or management by bureaus. It further denotes sum total of personnel apparatus and procedures by which an organization manages its work and accomplishes its purposes. John Vieg’s conceptualization of bureaucracy has been seen to be most suitable to explicate the main thrust of this paper, which center on examining institutionalized procedures and apparatus for the execution of governmental programmes, policies and its attendant effect on service delivery in Nigeria. In view of Owen (2003) the bureaucratic organizations adopts fixed operating procedures but, in consequence, the achievement of results may become less important than maintaining the process and rules. Underscoring the importance of Bureaucracy Down (1967) in Okotoni (2003) states that:

It is ironic that bureaucracy is primarily a term of scorn. In reality, bureaus are among the most important institutions in every part of the world. Not only do they provide employment for a very significant fraction of the world’s population, but they also make critical decisions that shape the economic, educational, political, social, moral and even religious lives of nearly everyone on earth....The ability of bureau to outlive their real usefulness is part of mythology of bureaucracy...

However, Bureaucracies in the developing world often fail to fulfill this duty (Rogger, 2012)

Literature Review (Empirical)

In a study by International Growth Centre (2012), management practices of public sector bureaucrats affect the quantity and quality of service delivered in Nigeria. Many studies have provided a novel insight into how administrative processes (most especially in less developed countries) has constituted bottleneck to effective delivery of essential service by public sector institutions (Imran & Daniel 2015, Banergee, Chattopadhyay, Duflo, Keniston & Singh, 2014). However, Besley (2010), Gagliarducci & Nanniccini (2013) in their study express concern that despite the importance of government effectiveness for citizens’ welfare, economic analyses of incentives in the public sector have largely focused on the selection and motivation of politicians. Hyenet, Court & Mease (2003) averred that studies have demonstrated that there is significance relationship between bureaucratic rule and performance in socio-economic development. Nwanko (2004) position reinforce earlier view held by Banergee, Besley Gagliarducci and Duflo, when he said development entails good policy, strong institution and ability to implement the policy and quality of bureaucracy.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative method of analysis by collecting already documented materials; which implies that the study rely heavily on secondary source. The data used in the study were collected from books, journals, working paper and internet. Materials obtained from reports of survey research that have been conducted were also analyzed.

Extracted Features of Weber’s ideal Bureaucracy

Drawing from Weber’s perception of bureaucracy and empirical studies of ancient bureaucracies in Egypt, Rome China and Byzantine Empire as well as the modern ones emerging in Europe, the features can be summarized thus:

- i. Activities are regulated by general, consistent, abstract rules, the generality of these rules require the categorization of individual cases on the basis of objective criteria;
- ii. Official duties are conducted in a spirit of impersonality without hatred but also without affection;
- iii. A bureaucracy frequently has a non-bureaucratic head, while bureaucrats follow rules set for them;
- iv. Each office has a well defined sphere of competence with duties clearly marked off from those of other offices.

Apart from Weber, R.H Hall cited in Sharma (2011) also provided more insight into the essential features of bureaucracy that is related to the focus of this piece, where he identified the following:

- i. Rules which describe the duties and rights of officials;
- ii. A set of standard operating procedures.

Excessive Bureaucratic Practices are noticeable in the following ways:

- i Unnecessary delay in the processing of official documents, files etc;
- ii Solicitation for gratification or inducement of public officials (before carrying out official duties);
- iii Provision of inadequate, incorrect and inefficient services;
- iv Unfair treatment of citizens (discriminatory service delivery).

Censure against Bureaucracy and Bureaucratic Procedures

In spite of the argument on the importance of bureaucracy, in the recent years, bureaucratic process and procedures in Nigeria has attracted widespread criticism for been the bane of Nigeria's problem "poor service delivery" and hence scaled down the pace of development. According to Advance English Dictionary; Procedure entails an established or correct method of doing things. To provide an insight into criticism against bureaucracy Adebayo (2011) provided the following impression about the word "bureaucracy" which he said: *appears to have acquired an opprobrious meaning, an odious connotation. It is associated with inefficiency, lack of initiative, unintelligently rigid in the approach to human problems, undue fussiness and bossiness on the part of officials and downright stubbornness.* It is important to note that bureaucracy is not been unduly reviled by the series of criticism, if we can quantify the extent of its impairment on service delivery efforts in Nigeria, which has generated detestable reactions against the system.

Robert Merton cited in Owen (2003) argued that, rigid adherence to rules could anticipate consequences including a reduction in efficiency. He further averred that: *adherence to rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end-in-itself; there occurs the familiar process of displacement of goals whereby an instrumental value becomes a terminal value*". In other words, the rule themselves become what organizational effort is directed at achieving instead of fulfilling organisation's purpose. Micheal Crozier in Owen (2003) goes further to argue that bureaucratic organizations are axiomatically inefficient instead of being axiomatically efficient as Weber argued, since it is more often now regarded as axiomatically inefficient. Felix (2011) further raised concerns on the bureaucratic procedures and function of public organizations when he mentioned that excessive bureaucracy make public organizations more arthritic and self-serving, less able to achieve their core missions, and less responsive to service users (general public). Activities in public institutions are often characterized by red tapeism, excessive paper work, fear of innovation, poor service delivery, duplication of working procedures as well as strict adherence to laid down rules and procedures.

Result-oriented Bureaucracy and Efficient Service Delivery: the Nexus

The significance of vibrant and result-oriented bureaucracy to the success of every administration in this modern world cannot be overemphasized, because of their essential roles as major players in government drive for effective service delivery which cannot be downplayed. For an effective functioning of government, the bureaucracy matters a lot; since it is an important determinant of poverty, inequality and economic growth as stressed by the emergent literature on state capacity (Besley & Person 2010). And it can be further noted that a vibrant, effective and efficient public service capable of meeting the contemporary world and the challenge of service delivery also matters from a macro-economic perspective: programme evaluation of small scale interventions which assumes successful interventions can be scaled-up by government. Simon (1983) argued in support of autonomy for bureaucrats to provide better service, bureaucracy ought to be more flexible, public agencies should delegate some decision making to bureaucrats, relying on their professionalism to deliver efficient public service.

Bureaucracy and its implications on Service Delivery

From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there has been noticeable rigidity in standard operating procedure of organizations, which Weber and his disciples attributed to complexities of task to be performed by government. In addition, there is general increase in the functions of the state which necessitated growing bureaucratic apparatus. In every bureaucracy, decisions are governed by a consistent system of abstract rules, regulations and procedures, which the administrators must strictly adhere to and its routine undertaking must be devoid of any affections. Behaviour of these officials is subject to system discipline and control. Activities of large organizations are usually characterized by voluminous files and records that officials have to contend with daily, which often delay the execution of government policies and programmes. It is highly imperative to make a distinction between personal lapses and bureaucracy which has received widespread criticism from various quarters.

Poor performance of public administration, a display of ineptitude, inefficient, immoral behaviour, habitual lateness to work and deliberate delay in treating official document(s) has nothing to do with bureaucracy but, constitutes misconduct (PSR, 2009), too often, many people (in Nigeria) tend to lump all these together as such. Felix (2011) observed that when public institutions fail to meet the expectations of citizens in terms of providing service(s) arising from excessive bureaucracy, the ripple effects result in the grave consequences on political, social and economic growth of a state. The government in no time would lose public confidence and the consequences of such remain one of the main reasons for a critical appraisal of the impact of bureaucracy on service delivery.

To illustrate the effect of rigid bureaucratic principles on service delivery, a maritime expert, Captain Fola (2014) argued that the Nigerian Maritime sector exploited only 25 percent of the opportunity available in the sector due to bureaucracy and administrative challenges. Bureaucracy and rigid administrative procedure has also made corruption more endemic in Nigeria. A World Bank (1995) report stated that, "Nigeria's public sector lacks transparency and accountability". This assertion was further buttressed by a publication of Transparency International, which rated Nigeria as the second most corrupt country in the world (Nigerian Tribune October 3, 2002). Ernest Shonekan, the Former Head of Nigeria Interim National Government also raised serious concern on the level of corruption in Nigeria:

We can no longer ignore the issue of corruption which is now believed to be quite endemic in our country..... People abroad now believe that it is virtually impossible to undertake any form of transaction successfully in Nigeria today without bribery..... Government is especially concerned with the increasing advance free fraud code named '419', bank thefts, insider dealings, product counterfeiting etc. (Guardian February 28, 1993, cited in Olowu, 1996).

Okotoni (2003) in his submission rightly observed that in the area of service delivery, many citizens have lost confidence in the bureaucratic institutions charged with provision and delivery of public goods and service. He further expressed concern on the depressing state of public service delivery in Nigeria as was consequently e-x-rayed in a remarkable opinion of the *Guardian Newspaper* titled "A state in Gradual collapse" the paper enumerated the deplorable state of public utilities that have virtually collapsed, "white elephant" project abandoned in all states attributable to bureaucratic problems.

Felix (2011) reported that in Ghana (same is applicable as Nigeria), it is very disappointing seeking the supply of water, electricity and other essential services for domestic use. The citizens have to go through bureaucratic channels before approval is given and in most cases, corrupt officials often demand for facilitation fees and inducement before they hasten the processes of business registration, carrying out official duties etc. Felix illustration further exposed the cumbersome nature of bureaucratic processes which often make citizens, investors and the general public as most often frustrated in the quest for the provision of service to the citizens and in most cases abandon their business initiative and other engagement with government that is capable of providing the necessary support to boost the economic activities of the county. Rogger's studies on Nigeria revealed that more than half of all projects and programmes budgeted, and appropriated for by the National Assembly and never executed. World Bank (2004) studies cited in Rogers (2015) was of the view that public project are often left uncompleted or delivered to a poor quality, and failure to deliver these projects undermines citizen(s) welfare and leads to an estimated loss of US\$150billion per year in public resources. It is unarguable, that the administrative bottlenecks associated with service delivery have exposed bureaucracy to open criticisms by stakeholders in the business of governance because excessive bureaucracy inhibit productivity, efficiency and contribute immensely to poor service delivery in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendation

As governments worldwide continues to face pressure from its respective citizens to meet the yearnings and aspirations of the entire populace; which constitute the primary purpose of any responsible government, Nigeria's development agenda has experienced a major setback in the areas of service delivery with reasons attributable to unwieldy administrative processes. Notwithstanding, bureaucratic practices if kept within reasonable limit are functionally necessary for the operation of large administrative apparatus, this however should be a major concern for effective and efficient service delivery.

The ugly trends noticeable in public sectors response to citizen's demand has greatly necessitated the call for reforms of the sector so as to ensure that public institutions and service become more vibrant, result-oriented and capable of meeting the challenges of 21st century development. Acknowledging the inefficiency in this sector, government as part of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) came up with laudable mechanisms to

increase efficiency of service delivery which form the major thrust of the efforts to reposition the public sector to better serve the people of Nigeria. For the Nigerian bureaucracy to deliver better service, it is highly imperative to build the capacities and the capabilities of public servant through regular training and retraining programmes to keep them abreast of modern knowledge, approaches and service delivery methodologies in developing economies characterized by enormous development challenges. It is worthy of note that, a flexible, rational bureaucracy and procedures is *si-ne qua non* to effective, efficient and timely service delivery. Arising from the empirical illustrations, the paper recommends that:

Standard operating rules and procedures in government agencies, corporations and parastatals with the mandate of providing essential goods and service considered critical to wellbeing of the people should be structurally flexible to enable the respond promptly to emergency situations. Public service rules should be reviewed to address present day realities of service delivery. Public Officials in government executing agencies and parastatals should attend refreshers courses to build their skills and capacities.

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