

TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA: A FOCUS ON PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Public service constitutes the kernel of development in any society. Every nation must as a matter of emphasis, strive to ensure effective and efficient service delivery to enable the citizens experience qualitative and good life. Transparency and accountability play a vital the role in public service delivery as they combine to galvanize effective service delivery particularly in public sector. However, public service delivery in Nigeria has remained conspicuously poor and discouraging. The foregoing aptly informed the need for this paper. The paper utilized secondary data. The paper examined the practice of transparency and accountability in public sector and their attendant effects on service delivery. The paper found that lack of transparency and genuine accountability was responsible for poor and ineffective public service delivery. The paper suggested public enlightenment campaign, training and retraining of public servants, discipline, and the will to implement rules, as ways out of this ugly trend.

Keywords: *Accountability, Nigeria, Public Service, Service Delivery, Transparency*

Introduction

Public service serves as one of the agents of state designed to achieve the purpose and objectives of creating the state. State, anywhere in the world is created for good life and for the sake of development, where provision of basic services, protection and other good things are ensured and assured. But sadly, most states, particularly in developing world have failed to make these objectives realizable as a result of the failure on the part of their public service as agent of change and development. In Nigeria, the performance of public service is ridiculously low, service delivery is conspicuously poor due to lack of transparency and accountability.

According to Olowu (2002), the quest for accountability and transparency became popular when public sectors could no longer deliver effective services as a result of corruption and dwindling resources occasioned by the absence of transparency and accountability. The influence of international Non Governmental Organizations was also significant in the agitation for transparency and accountability, their influence became necessary based on the need to properly utilize funds given to low income countries by the these International NGOs for development purposes.

The continued increase in government expenditure over the years without much impact on the society has further necessitated the need for accountability and transparency in public service. This is because the more the services the more accountability and transparency required.

Transparency and accountability play a vital role in public service as they combine to galvanize effective service delivery particularly in public sector organizations.. They have a symbiotic relationship with governance. The need to ensure the effective practice of the duo, i.e. transparency and accountability in the public service to ensure optimum level of functioning and effective service delivery makes this paper imperative.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine critically the twin concepts of accountability and transparency and their influence on public service delivery. The paper also intends to assess holistically the level of public service delivery in Nigeria with a view to identifying the missing link between accountability, transparency and service delivery so as to make suggestions capable of entrenching accountability and transparency in public service.

Conceptual Analysis

Concept of Accountability

From the perspective of Olowu (2002a), conventionally, accountability refers to answerability for one's actions or behaviour. Formally, accountability involves the development of objective standards of evaluation to assist the owners of an organization to evaluate the performance of duties by individuals and units within the organization.

According to him, accountability has three crucial components; a clear definition of responsibility, reporting mechanisms and a system of review, rewards, and sanctions. Accountability flows in different directions; upward, downward between subordinates and superiors, and laterally among profession peers.

Aghayere and Alimi (2009) cited in Idada (2016) defined accountability as one of the five norms of good governance in a democratic regime. The other norms include efficiency transparency, predictability or rule of law and legitimacy or pluralism. Accountability is the requirement that those who hold public trust account for the use of that trust to the citizens of their representatives. The concept underscores the obligation of an office holder to fulfill the expectations of his office. It is understood to be a measure for the results of an office holder's actions (Aigboman, 2016).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that accountability is an arrangement based on principle that those in position of authority must report based on their activities for further review.

Therefore, accountability must as a matter of fact be measurable and should involve more than a party at least two parties.

Concept of Transparency

Adetoye (2002) views transparency as openness in the day to day operation of the civil servants on the one hand and the institution referred to as public service on the other. It simply translates to the fact that members of the public must be able to see and understand how decision concerning them are made and implemented. Vital aspects of the activities of the service must not be shrouded in secrecy especially those that are of public interest (Adetoye, 2002).

According to Kailasam (2004) transparency means sharing information and acting in an open manner. He is of the view that free access to information is a key element in promoting transparency. Such information must be timely, relevant, accurate and complete for its effective utilization.

Iyoha (2006) cited in Idada (2016) perceived transparency as openness, communication and accountability. He viewed transparency as sharing information and acting in an open manner.

It allows stakeholder to gather information that may be critical in uncovering abuses and defending that interest.

Theoretical Framework

The study is essentially on transparency, accountability and service delivery in public service. It examines the effects of the practice and application of transparency and accountability on public service delivery. As a result, the study will be discussed within the purview of good governance model. This is based on the fact that good governance model establishes the rule of law, enforces contracts and agreements between the individuals, maintains law and order and guarantees security to the people, economises on cost and resources, ensures efficiency and effectiveness, openness and responsiveness, protects the environment and properly delivers service to the society (Sharma et al, 2011).

Good governance includes the capacity of the government to design, formulate and implement policies which are development oriented and committed to improvement of quality of life of the people. It is also the capacity of the government and bureaucracy to cope with emerging challenges of the society.

The concept of good governance model places premium on adherence to principles of accountability, participation, transparency, rule of law, responsiveness efficiency, effectiveness and equitable distribution of resources (World Bank, 2002). Invariably, good economic outcomes and effective service delivery are derived from these principles. The model stresses the notion that the absence or partial existence of these stated principles in any given polity encourages and promotes poor service delivery. Good governance exists in those economies where the institutions of government have the capacity to formulate, implement and manage resources efficiently.

Fundamentally, good governance thrives where there is respect for the rules and norms of economic interaction and in which economic activity is unimpeded by corruption and other activities in consistent with public trust (Ogbuagu et al, 2014). Good governance is necessary in order to enhance the capacity of the state to deliver on its economic mandate. The state

capacity can only be enhanced by the presence and interplay of accountability and transparency in public service.

Public Service Delivery in Nigeria: An Overview

The Nigerian public service is the most critical instruments of the modern state and the working hands of government. It is saddled with the responsibility of implementing government policies and programmes for the attainment of sustainable development. The primary responsibility of any public service is to deliver services to citizens at affordable rate. The ability of a government to legitimately tax and govern people is premised on its capacity to deliver a range of service required by its population which no other player will provide (Olowu, 2002b). It is to be noted that the environment in which public service operates will no doubt, have a major effect on the service (Adetoye, 2002).

Olowu (2002) categorises services into two; one, goods and services that require exclusion, jointness of use of consumption, and not easily divisible are regarded as public goods and services. Services that can be financed by user charges are referred to as utilities, those that can only be financed by taxes are referred to as services. The fundamental question at this juncture is “Either Utilities or Services, which one has been effectively delivered in Nigeria”? The answer to this question is readily available. As a matter of emphasis, utilities and services have not been effectively delivered in Nigeria. Public service delivery is apparently poor, weak and stagnant. Despite all attempted reforms in the public service, the delivery capacity is still problematic and unimpressive. Oyedele (2015) described service delivery in Nigeria as chaotic, epileptic, unsatisfactory, shoddy, deplorable, inflexible, non-cost effective e.t.c.

Most of the cities, towns and villages in Nigeria are in a pathetic state of infrastructure delivery, some of these infrastructures where available, are left uncared for. The implication of this is that public service in Nigeria has been consistent over the years in its failure to enhance its capacity to deliver services effectively and responsibly to citizens. Roads are left unrepaired, electricity is in state of dilemma, health institutions are dilapidated with absence of drugs and necessary health personnel, boreholes and water pumps have no water, water scheme/projects are deserted (Lawal, 2014). In the recent time, services provided by public

sectors are unreliable and most time unavailable. From the foregoing, it is clear that there is a growing consensus that the public servants have failed to develop their capacity to serve as agents of development.

Transparency, Accountability and Public Service Delivery: The Missing Link

Transparency and accountability are two related concepts that ensure good practices and effective delivery of services, where the duo are lacking, performances and achievements become strained. Public service is traditionally designed to promote rapid economic and social development through the provision of basic and fundamental infrastructural facilities. This actually described the public service as engine of the state, because it helps the state in realizing its objectives. 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 service includes transportation, health, housing electricity/power, public enterprises and other public utilities in the interests of socio-economic development (Oyedele, 2015).

Be that as it may, public service is therefore expected to deliver effectively, quality services to its citizens at affordable rates. But sadly, accountability and transparency are nowhere to be found in Nigerian public service, which has also accounted for poor service delivery in public sector in the country. To be sure, public service in Nigeria has evidences of instruments of accountability such as rules and regulations with other regulatory mechanisms but the question is; how effective are these rules? How accountable are the operators and implementers of these rules? How obedient are the public servants to these rules? When these rules are breached, are there genuine punishments according to the stipulated rules? These and other questions will be attended to shortly in this discussion. But before that, there is need to also note at this point that transparency which has been described as openness and information sharing, particularly, those information that are of public interest, is also difficult to be located within the public service setting as a result of excessive confidentiality and unnecessary secrecy in service. It is usually difficult to get useful and vital information that could be used in controlling and checkmating the activities of the public servants. Once information is unavailable, then transparency becomes unachievable.

Of course, there are certain factors why rules are not obeyed, activities closed and information not shared in the public service. According to Idada (2016) transparency and accountability failed in Nigeria as a result of some ecological factors. These factors vary from corruption, bad leadership, political instability, ineffective pressure groups, low level of awareness to poor civic culture. Most citizens are kept ignorant of budgets, financial audit reports and the like. Even in some notable cases, the constitution is treated to be a highly confidential document (Olowu, 2002). In this regard responsibility, reporting, performance, openness and performance evaluation becomes difficult and unattainable.

There is also problem of weak institutions. The institutions set up to ensure accountability and transparency in Nigeria are fragile. Most of these agencies have failed to effectively carry out their assigned roles. For instance, economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have been severally alleged of corruption and other sharp practices. The same allegation is also applicable to the police, Judiciary, legislature and other similar agencies.

Another factor is the idea of get rich quick syndrome. As a result of unnecessary craze for wealth and influence, most Nigerians do not believe in hard work and the idea of gradual process of achievement but prefer to get themselves involved in shady and unethical practices to make easy and quick money, particularly in public sector organizations.

In addition, societal decadence also serves as a contributing factor to failure of accountability and transparency. The society celebrates wealthy people without concern for their source of wealth. Nigerians expect their friends, relations and associates in public offices to use such offices as avenue to make money rather than to serve the people and nation at large. In most cases, public office holders are wrongly advised to see his office as opportunity to make fortunes and become the mover and shaker of his community at the expense of the public. All these shameful act cannot guarantee accountability and transparency but constrain effective service delivery.

There is high level of confidentiality and excessive hoarding of information in public service. This tends to further encourage and assist the public servants to perpetrate unethical practices.

When information is unavailable to the public, there is little or nothing to be done in terms of whistle blowing. Information is a sine qua-non to accountability and transparency.

Importantly, public service rules and regulation are not effectively enforced. The public servants have over the years developed the belief and idea of “nothing will happen” and capitalize on it to get involved in illegal and unethical engagements which are detrimental to the objectives and philosophy of public service. Put differently, there is high level of impunity in public service. This goes a long way to negatively affect the performance of public service and consequently jeopardize effective service and probity as the culture of “everybody doing what he/she likes” is highly promoted.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The state is an entity which is saddled with the responsibility of providing for, and protecting the citizens. Public servants serve as agents or representatives of the state statutorily and traditionally designed to assist the state carry out its functions. Effective performance of these functions requires high level of accountability and transparency. Since accountability is about control, and state as an entity is unquestionably difficult to control either by its citizens or law, it is therefore imperative that the public servants, (representatives of the state) should be controlled and held accountable since they assist the state with direct function of public service delivery. It is this control that will ensure and guarantee effective service delivery.

For effective control and assurance of transparent and accountable public service, the following recommendations are put forth as policy options;

First, there is a great need for transformational leaders, particularly in the public sector. Leaders who have strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands. men of high integrity, whom the lust of office cannot overwhelm, whom the spoils of office cannot buy, who possess strong opinions and a will.

Honourable men who will not lie but deter corruption, exhibit ethical values, honesty, wisdom and devotion to human interest.

Second, the various institutions like Legislature, Judiciary, EACC, ICPC e.t.c designed to propel and ensure accountability and transparency should be made to work. The capacity of

these institutions must be strengthened. The personnel should be trained and retrained on regular basis, welfare packages must be attractive, the process of recruitment must be strictly based on merit and the salary must be regular. Logistics should be provided to enable the institutions carryout their responsibility as at when due. These institutions should be allowed to enjoy independence.

Third, there is also the need to promote discipline and hard work among the teaming youth and the working class. National Orientation Agency (NOA) can be sponsored to educate the people on the need to embrace hard work and shun laziness and greed.

Fourth, information should be made available for the people, particularly those that need to do with the public service. To make public servants accountable, the public needs information. It is difficult to give report or evaluate what is not know or esoteric in nature. Also, governments should reduce the areas where they can conveniently claim confidentiality so that the citizens can easily access information on areas where they can actually blow their whistle.

Fifth, the rules regulating public service must be strictly enforced in various offices. Adherence to these rules will reduce impunity among the public servants. Related to this is the permanence of laws, rules and regulations. Rules and regulations should be made for limited periods, and after the expiration of that period, the laws or rules should cease to operate unless renewed. Public service rules and laws generally must be reviewed and renewed from time to time to check their continued relevance and validity.

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