Corruption and service delivery: the case of Nigerian public service

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Globally, corruption has been identified as one of the major problems that have negative consequences on the socio-economic development of many nations. In Nigeria, corruption is visible in all sectors of the economy, the Public Service inclusive. This paper exposes the effects of corruption on effective service delivery in the Nigeria Public Service to the citizenry. It is a known fact in Nigeria, that corruption has negatively affected the ability of government to provide essential services in education, health, water, electricity and other infrastructure facilities. Using mainly qualitative data derived from secondary sources, the paper concludes that corruption in the Public Service is a major impediment to effective service delivery to the Nigerian populace. Adopting the ‘Principal- Agent Model’ as a theoretical basis, the paper argued that due to the privileged position of the Public Servants (Agents) to public resources and information, they tend to abuse these privileges to the detriment of the ‘Principals’ (Nigerian citizens). The paper therefore among others recommends a culture of relative openness, effective supervision/monitoring of programmes geared towards provision of essential public goods and services.

Key words: Corruption, Nigerian public service, service delivery.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is no doubt a global phenomenon that has threatened and still continues to threaten the developmental efforts in many nations. In Nigeria, eradicating corruption has been a major concern of successive government in the country because of its negative impact on good governance and effective service delivery. According to Adamu (2007), corruption exists in one form or the order in all societies. The major difference in the case of Nigeria is the extent of its pervasiveness and its implication for good governance, its value system and political culture in particular. To him (Adamu, 2007), an average Nigerians has accepted corruption as inevitable and uncontrollable, believing that the society as a whole is corrupt and beyond remedy. Additionally, Nigerians believed that nothing meaningful will ever get done to correct or punish those perpetuating these crimes.

At the inception of the Fourth democratic era in 1999, corruption had reached such an alarming rate and had eaten deep into every facet of Nigerian society. It has indeed become an integral part of the administrative, political, socio-economic and cultural system as well as a way of life of the citizenry. The situation in the Nigeria Public Service was succinctly described thus: Government officials had become progressively indifferent to propriety of conduct and showed little commitment to promoting the general welfare of the people and the public goods. Government and all its agencies had become thoroughly corrupt and reckless. Members of the public have had to bribe their way through in ministries and parastatals to get attention and government had to bribe another government agency to obtain the release of their statutory allocation of funds (Obasanjo, 1999).

Despite the structures (reforms) put in place to combat the malaise or at least reduce it to its barest minimum, corruption stills continues to be endemic, particularly in the Nigerian Public Service with its attendant implications for effective service delivery and welfare of the people. The effect of this is that majority of Nigerians are yet to
enjoy the dividends of democracy and good governance. The question is what is the magnitude and dimension of corruption in Nigeria, specifically in the Nigeria Public Service? Does it have any implication for effective service delivery?

The main objective of this study is to examine the magnitude of corruption in the Public Service and its attendant implications. Specifically, the paper examines the dimensions and magnitude of corruption in the Nigerian Public Service and its implications for effective service delivery and the welfare of the people.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Corruption

The concept of corruption can be seen from various perspectives and depends on how it is being perpetuated or practiced. According to Adisa (2003) corruption or corrupt practices has to do with fraudulent activities especially siphoning of funds that are meant for the general populace for ones aggrandisement only. In line with this, Osoba (1996) defines corruption as an anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms and which undermines the authority’s ability to improve the living condition of the people. A concise definition is given by AusAID (2003:3) that corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private gain. From the definitions, we see that corruption is a selfish and dishonest act that deprives a vast majority (apart from the perpetrators and their cohorts) of desire benefits i.e. social, economic, political, and other legitimate benefits.

Our definition of corruption has emphasis on personal interest as against the public interest/good. The Principal-Agent theory thus will help in espousing how the perpetration of this selfish interest has affected the ability of the Agent (government, bureaucracy) in providing the necessary services to the consumers (i.e. Principals/Public), in an effective and efficient manner, in the right quantity and quality, in the right place and as at when necessary.

The concern for this paper therefore is to examine the extent to which service delivery has been affected by the malaise of corruption perpetuated in the Nigerian Public Service and its consequences on the citizens.

Thucorruption is looked at here from the political and bureaucratic perspective. Political corruption occurs at the highest level of political authority amongst politicians and political decision makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws in the name of the people.

These people thus make and formulate policies and legislated laws that are intended to benefit themselves. It is characterised by greed because it affects the manner in which decisions are made, as it manipulate political institutions, rules of procedure and distorts the institutions of government.

The bureaucratic corruption on the other hand, occurs in the Public Administration or the implementation end of politics. In Nigeria, this type of corruption occurs daily in places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing offices, police, and tax offices etc where citizens must have to offer bribes to access what they are legally entitled to. The other variant is the outright embezzlement of public fund by public officials in their places of assignments. According to Dike (2010), in Nigeria, the embezzlement of public funds is one of the most common ways of economic accumulation, perhaps due to lack of strict regulatory systems.

Service delivery

Service here implies tangible and intangible goods and services provided by the government in order to improve the well being of the citizenry. Carlson et al. (2005) conceptualised service delivery as the relationship between policy makers, service providers and poor people. According to them, it encompasses services and their supporting systems that are typically regarded as a state responsibility. These include social services (primary education and basic health services), infrastructure (water, sanitation, roads and bridges) and services that promote personal security (justice, police etc).

In Nigeria, government constitutes the major service provider through the Public Service. The Public Service refers to all organisations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivering services that are of value to the citizens. It is a mandatory institution of the state under the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria.

The Nigerian Public Service includes the Civil Service, often referred to as core service, consisting of line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies; the Public bureaucracy or the enlarged Public Service made up of service of the State and National Assembly, the Judiciary, the Armed Forces, the Police and other security agencies, paramilitary services (i.e. Customs, Immigration, Prisons Services, Civil-Defence Corps etc); parastatals and agencies i.e. regulatory agencies, educational institutions, research institutions, social services, commercially oriented agencies etc. It is also used to refer to Public Servant who are direct employees of those ministries, extra-ministerial agencies, parastatals, corporations and institutions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The adoption of theoretical framework in the management and social sciences greatly helps in the
analysis and even understanding of concepts from some theoretical point of view and/or orientation. Therefore, the theoretical framework of analysis adopted in this paper is the Principal-Agent theory.

The Principal-Agent theory adopted from Batley (2004:38) examines organisational relationships as a tension between the “Principal” who demands a service and the “Agent” who provides it. The model assumes that actors are motivated by rational self-interest. The issue in connection with this paper is how the Principal (in this case, the Nigerian citizens) can manage the self-interest of those empowered to act on their behalf (i.e. the Agents: government officials, politicians, legislators, bureaucrats etc) so that it is aligned with the purposes that they (the Principal) wish to achieve.

The problem arises not just from conflict of interest but also from the privileged access of the agents to information: the problem of asymmetric information. The agents who have been employed to provide a service will tend to use their superior knowledge to divert benefits in their own direction.

Hague (1996) here asserts that Public Administration itself is susceptible to corruption, since officials exercise a substantial amount of power. There are possibilities for acquiring improper benefits by interpreting or bending rules in favour of certain groups or individuals. All government seek to have in place a number of safeguards for deterring and dealing with corruption within administrative agencies.

At the same time, Public Administration has to develop ways and means to prevent and detect corruption in other section of society. Much of the benefit of rapid economic growth or a stable political order may be lost in the growing tide of corruption.

In a democratic polity, the ultimate Principals are the citizens who are the consumers of specific services provided by the government. In the Principal-Agent theory, they are Principal in the sense that politicians as Agents seek their mandate from and act as the representatives of the public.

In their turn, appointed officials (Public Servants) are in theory, the agents of political leaders in executing the programmes and policies of the government. Each of these players has a measure of autonomy and their own interests to advance.

The likelihood of the Principal effectively controlling the Agent depends on how much information the Principal has about the performance of the Agent, and how far the Principal can structure the relationship so as to control the Agent or give incentives so as to make the Agents' interest correspond to the Principals.

This paper relies wholly on secondary data collected from official documents of the federal government, journals, magazine and Newspapers and reports and other publications of local and international non-governmental agencies. The content analysis method was adopted in analysing the data.

**IMPEDEMENTS FROM CORRUPTION TO EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY**

The Public Service constitutes the major service provider in Nigeria. It is the machinery charged with the responsibility of implementing government policies and programmes geared towards providing essential services for the people. The demands of globalisation, MDGs among other international agenda has placed the Public Service in a more pressing pressure to provide/render these services more effectively and efficiently. However, corruption in Nigeria has continued to be a major impediment hindering the Public Service ability to provide these services.

Corruption in Nigeria is more endemic in the Nigerian Public Service with its attendant implication for effective service delivery as substantiated by Obasanjo (1999) as quoted in Adegoroye (2006 b:12)

Our beloved nation has been virtually on the brink of collapse. At least, the past one and a half decades have been characterised by calamitous retrogression in almost every conceivable sphere of life. Nigerians have, indeed, passed through harrowing times and watched their standards of living plummet drastically, just as their human rights are steadily eroded. Life became almost short, brutish and nasty. Those were surely the most difficult days for Nigeria since the end of the civil war in 1970…. .There are many things crying for attention. Our battered national economy is certainly one of them…..

The grim condition of many of our citizens was worsened by the deterioration of the Public Services where access to pipe borne water and affordable healthcare became a pipe dream and the supply of electricity became epileptic and unreliable in an era in which globalisation has made such services ubiquitous and cheap.

The above assertion shows the scenario of the failure of the Nigerian Public Service (as Agent), in providing essential services to the citizenry.

Transparency International (T.I) has consistently rated the country high in terms of corruption. Nigeria was ranked first most corrupt country in the world in 1996 and 1997, 4th position in 1998, slipped again to second position in 1999. 1st again in 2000, 2nd in 2001, 2002 and 2003, 3rd position in 2004 and 2005. There was a slight improvement in 2006 when it was ranked the 5th most corrupt country in the world (Aluko, 2006). In 2009 Nigeria was ranked 13th most corrupt country and 12th position in 2010. In 2011, the country was ranked 37th most corrupt country in the world out of 183 countries surveyed.

In 2012, Transparency International ranked Nigeria 35th most corrupt country out of 176 countries surveyed. The above ranking within 2009 - 2012 does not represent much significant reduction in corruption in Nigeria. Rather, it was due to the fact that many other countries are tied on the same ranking, which makes the position of Nigeria in the index to be on the high side. The reports
from 2009-2012 concludes that Nigeria still remains one of the most corrupt countries in the world. (Awolusi, 2009, Awolusi, 2010; Yishau, 2011; Premium Times, 2012; Wikipedia, 2012). Much of these corruptions are perpetuated in or in connivance with the Public Service. For instance in 2007, Nigeria corruption index revealed that the Nigeria Police, the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN), the Nigeria Custom Service and the Ministry of Education, (particularly higher institutions and examination bodies) are the most corrupt Public Institutions in Nigeria (The Punch:2007).

The survey was designed to highlight the magnitude of corruption and its effects on democracy, development, and good governance. The yardstick used to measure the malaise in the project included severity, size and financial/social cost of corruption. According to the Nigeria Corruption Index (NCI), these institutions of government received the most bribes from those to whom they are providing services (Principal). It further asserts that corruption is one of the factors that drives the average Nigerian to the depth of despair because the experience of having to offer bribes (whether in cash or in kind), in order to access basic social services or what rightly belongs to one has serious psychological implication for many Nigerians.

These institutions, no doubt are some of the major service providers in the country. Ranis (1971) notes that “government in developing areas have become the goal setter or change agent for society; producer and distributor of goods and services; regulator of the political and economic behaviour of the people”. But corruption has hindered the ability of the government to carry on these developmental roles and particularly the provision of effective service to her principal.

The relationship between corruption and service delivery was rightly captured by Obasanjo (1999) quoted in Shehu (2011:17) in his inaugural speech thus:

The impact of official corruption is so rampant and has earned Nigeria a very bad image at home and abroad. Besides, it has distorted and caused a setback for development efforts in the nation. Our infrastructures-NEPA, NITEL, Roads, railways, education, housing and other social services were allowed to decay and collapse. All these have brought a situation of chaos and despair. This is the challenge for us.

Despite previous reforms especially the anti-corruption initiatives of the Obasanjo regime, (1999-2007) and others put in place to reform the Public Service, not much results have been achieved. The populace has continued to suffer neglect and lack of access to essential social services that would enhance their well-being. To corroborate this further, Adegoroye (2006:1b) had criticised former reforms for not being specifically linked to ensuring service delivery improvements and nothing much has changed, if not worse now.


Furthermore, a Report by US-based group, Global Financial Integrity (GFI) indicates that Nigeria might have lost 130 billion dollars from 2000 to 2008 due to illicit financial flows. The Report showed that Nigeria has the 10th highest measured illicit outflows in the developing countries/world, an average of 150 billion dollars per year. The Report also showed the annual outflows for each country and breaks outflows down into two categories of drivers: trade mispricing and “others” which includes “kick-backs, bribes, embezzlement and other forms of official corruption”. Other countries in the top 10 list are Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Venezuela, and Qatar. What makes the case of Nigeria unique is that the reasons for the illicit outflows are mainly attributed to corruption and corrupt acts i.e. kickbacks, bribes, embezzlement, and other forms of official corruption as indicated in “other” categories of drivers (Global Financial Integrity, 2013).

The concomitant effect of corruption in the Public Service is the lack or inadequate provision of services that would enhance the standard of living of Nigerians. The deteriorating standard of living of majority of Nigerians is an evidence of the lack of basic necessities of life i.e. food, shelter and clothing and low access to essential services like health, education, power, water, transportation etc. Abubakar (2007) also espoused the view that there is a concord that corruption retards significant variables for social and economic development by making impotent the very institutions and human resources that are designed to help them grow.

Statistics in Table 1 below has shown that government spending on the provision of social services and infrastructural development has mostly been significant. From 2001 to 2008 the federal government alone spent the sum of 2752.4 billion for these services without any tangible corresponding evident on ground to show the impact on the populace. Apart from this, the states and local government also allocate and expend fund on the provision of similar services.

Despite all these expenditures, statistics has further shown that the level of poverty in the country is still very appalling. 70% of Nigerians are still very poor at 2011 (Sanusi: 2011). Also, the 2011 International Human Development indicators classified Nigeria as one of the poorest countries of the world, with a multi dimensional poverty index of 0.310 and a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.459 which compares unfavourable to the world.
The problem of effective service delivery is the major implementer of government policies and programmes geared towards providing essential services that impact on the well-being of the general citizenry. It is however unfortunate that the citizens that are suppose to enjoy the benefits of these services are rather subjected to all forms of ridicule and frustration. For example, public officials collect bribes from the citizens before accessing some of the services. They are equally, ridiculed and frustrated should they refuse to give the bribes. Beside the skeletal nature of the services provided, they are also most times denied even services they pay for (i.e electricity, water, health and other essential services).

Principal-Agent relationship which is suppose to bring improvement in the well being of the citizens, has rather brought about degeneration in the quality of life of the citizenry. Thus there is a symbiotic relationship between corruption in the Public Service and effective service delivery. The paper therefore recommends the following:

- The government should imbibe a strong political will to combating corruption in the Public Service and of a necessity punish offenders regardless of who is involved.
- The citizens should be involved in the process of monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects geared towards their wellbeing.
- Beneficiaries should insist on getting the right quality of services from government and/or other service providers.
- Subsequent reforms should be specifically linked to the issue of effective service delivery. It should be “Principal” (clients) focused.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 1. FGN Capital Expenditure on Economic, Social and Community, 2001-2008 (N Billion).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture and Natural Resources</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>106.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>48.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>96.9</td>
<td>97.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads and Construction</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>89.1</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>105.7</td>
<td>126.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Communication</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>174.5</td>
<td>140.7</td>
<td>99.9</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>102.4</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>313.1</td>
<td>247.8</td>
<td>153.7</td>
<td>194.8</td>
<td>336.3</td>
<td>340.9</td>
<td>509.3</td>
<td>656.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% expenditure of ESCS Funds for Education</td>
<td>6.34%</td>
<td>3.72%</td>
<td>9.55%</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td>9.49%</td>
<td>9.59%</td>
<td>9.19%</td>
<td>7.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Culled from Ifenkwe (2013:13)

HDI average of 0.682 and 0.463 for sub-Sahara Africa. The HDI placed the country at 156 out of 187 countries with comparable data (UNDP, 2011).

Furthermore, other socio-economic indicators have shown that infant mortality rate is still high; life expectancy is still low (between 47 to 51 years) and adult literacy is still very low due to low access to education (UNDP, 2011). The Gender in Nigeria Report (2012: VI) show that Nigeria has one of the highest rate of maternal mortality. One Nigerian woman dies in childbirth in every 10 minutes. The main reason adduced for this is the poor access to safe childbirth services, and lack of adequate and affordable Emergency Obstetric Care (EMDC).

As at 2007, the population of Nigerians living without sustainable access to an improved water source was 53 percent. Namibia is only 7.00 percent while Ghana is only 20 percent (Analysis Magazine, 2010). The problem of inefficient service delivery also reflected in the power sector. With a population about 160 million people, the power generation capacity in the country is below 4000 megawatts, compared with South Africa with a population of only 45 million but generates 42,000 megawatts.

This situation, to say the least is very pathetic, considering the fact that, apart from power needed for domestic, power is a major requirement for industrial development and the overall socio-economic development of the country. Thus the epileptic power supply is a major factor adduced for low industrialisation and/or relocation of many industries to other neighbour countries. The implication here suggests a serious underlying crisis in the nation, the failure of leadership and surge in corruption. This is against the backdrop of the fact that corruption as it affects effective service delivery in the Public Service which cannot be divorced from the political angle. This is because;

- The Public Service (i.e. ministries, parastatals, agencies etc) are headed by appointed politicians while the bureaucrats are the Accounting Officers.
- Every act of corruption in these agencies is with the connivance of both the bureaucrat and politicians. These are inseparable in discussing the issue of corruption as it affects effective service delivery in Nigeria.

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