



The Problematics of Service Delivery in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service



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Abstract

The Nigerian Civil Service has been unable to re-position itself for qualitative service delivery to the long-suffering citizens of the country. The despicable situation of the country's federal bureaucracy is a product of several years of leadership failure and the concomitant erosion of public service values which together with other factors have contributed to the decay that has become the palpable identity of the country's federal civil service. Poor service delivery or the absence of service delivery by the federal civil service is a consequence of the persistent problems that have been bedeviling it. The problems are conceptual, attitudinal and operational. Previous efforts aimed at positioning the Nigerian public sector for improved service delivery since 2004 have only scratched the surface of the problems in the federal civil service. The problems of poor service delivery are deep-rooted than what the SERVICOM palliative could handle. Yet, unless and until these problems are fully and comprehensively solved, the country's federal civil service will remain handicapped and unable to render quality services in any significant way.

Keywords: Service delivery; Federal civil service; Service improvement; Organizational efficiency; Service failure

Introduction

The Nigerian government like other governments is justifiably in existence to render service to the citizenry. Any government that fails in this regard has not only lost the basis of its legitimacy but also its existence is questionable. The Public Service, out of which the Federal civil service is a subset, is the arena of service for the attainment of public good by a good number of the citizenry. Government exists for the people, and without the people, the goal or objective of government would be circumscribed and highly restricted.

Over the years, the Public Sector of the economy seemed to have lost its fervor for service as most government agencies and parastatals became synonymous with inefficiency, corruption, poor service delivery or no service at all. Yet, salaries are drawn by non-performing government officials and funds for capital projects that were never executed or at best poorly executed were wasted without any scruples. This sad commentary on Nigerian Public Sector was the general reality that the citizenry had to contend with in all sectors of the economy until March, 2004 when the Federal Government took conscious step to reinvigorate the Public Sector through the introduction of the SERVICOM regime which entails the signing of service compact by government agencies with Nigerians. The SERVICOM initiative means that

government would be held more accountable on grounds of its expected services to the citizenry.

This article seeks to examine the import of Service Compact (SERVICOM) and to expose the constraining factors that would not allow it to achieve the objective that informed its introduction into the Federal Civil Service. The necessity of focusing on service-content of the Federal Civil Service has regained a renewed salience in the face of the persistent problem of service failure which has become endemic in the country's public sector in general. What are the essential elements of SERVICOM regime? What objective does SERVICOM aim at achieving? In what ways would SERVICOM impact positively on the quality of service delivery in the public sector? In answering these interrelated questions, an understanding of what service delivery entails and how to promote it would be illuminating. In addition, the problems of service delivery would be unearthed.

There are five sections in this article. The first section provides a definitional explanation of the concept of 'service delivery'. The justifications for focusing on service delivery in the light of its centrality to public service existence are detailed in the second section. The efforts of the government in promoting service-consciousness in the federal civil service are chronicled in the

third section. The fourth section is a critique of the quality of service delivery in the Nigerian federal civil service despite the SERVICOM initiative. The fifth section concludes the article.

What is service delivery?

Service Delivery is a primary element in good governance. Indeed, efficient and effective delivery of good services is the *raison d'être* of Government [1]. No government can claim to be thoroughly representative when it is not driven by the citizens' well-being. The tonic for governmental action ought to be the desire to satisfy the yearnings of the people in terms of the expected public good or deliverables. Governments seek to meet the needs of the citizens through its differentiated structures and institutions of service. Public institutions, ministries, agencies and parastatals are creations of government which are essentially service- propelled and driven.

Service delivery means what it says. It means provision of services to those who require them. It is not enough to provide services; such services must be well-delivered. This talks about the capacity for delivering service in a predetermined way. Poor service delivery indicates low efficiency of governmental machinery while good service delivery depicts high efficiency on the part of governmental machinery. When government institutions find it difficult to deliver services to such an extent expected of them, then something could be terribly wrong with the system of operations in such organizational entities. The source of the problem could be the personnel, processes, equipment, environment, policies, or a combination of these factors.

Every government enterprise is aimed at achieving some objectives. These objectives are the services or public goods they are meant to deliver. The continuing relevance of these entities is a function of their ability to keep delivering those public goods or services with ever-increasing efficiency and effectiveness. The distinction between public goods and private goods is necessary at this point. Public goods are goods or services in which the possibility of market failure is great, and are therefore the political and social prerogative of the government to deliver to the citizens. Thus, as Dele Olowu asserts, the primary responsibility of any public administration system is to deliver services that the private sector may or may not deliver at all, or to deliver services to those who cannot afford the market price of the product (Olowu, Chapter 9 P. 192).

In contemporary times, modern governments especially in developing countries have recognized the fact that they do not need to dominate the provision of services. They now see their role as purely facilitative in ensuring the creation of enabling environment for other actors, especially the private sector to provide needed services (Olowu, pp. 194-195). This new realization has its origins in the influences of the forces of globalization that are impinging on the economies of the world evident in their debilitating effects on the capacity of governments

in relation to other actors across countries of the world. The effects of globalization are more pronounced in African countries with weak public service institutions and with histories of seemingly entrenched governmental incapacity. The alibi often thrown-up by inefficient African governments is that 'governments have no business in business' But, 'business' here is conceived as the process of producing or delivering those public goods which governments have over the years been unable to deliver efficiently due to lack of capacity and corruption. And in a bid to divest itself of the responsibility of delivering such public goods, the governments have had to co-opt the private sector into a series of partnership arrangements depending on the nature of the public goods in question. It would be shown that this resort to private sector involvement in the production and delivery of public goods or services has continued to deepen the incapacitation of public service institutions in Nigeria.

Why this focus on service delivery?

With a clear understanding of the concept of 'Service Delivery' as x-rayed above, it is apparent that no government can claim to exist for the citizens when it does not feel any urge to render service to the public. The first indication of the need for administrative reforms is often reflected in the poor quality of services delivered by the public service (Adamolekun, chapter 11, p. 258). Thus, the ultimate result expected from improved public management performance is improved service delivery. Therefore, focusing on the quality of service delivery in the public service drives home the point that government exists to deliver public goods, which it must seek to deliver efficiently, effectively and qualitatively. Other reasons why service delivery should be focused on are chronicled hereunder:

a) The focus provides a yardstick for assessing the government: Every government worth its salt seeks to serve the people, and any assessment of the capability of the government is demonstrably portrayed by the services it delivers to the public. The quality, the efficiency and the timeliness of such deliveries would go a long way in defining the nature and character of the government.

b) It emplaces feedback mechanism which empowers the recipients of public good to input demand pressure for service improvement, where necessary, into the governmental machinery. Where services are delivered at quality and quantity at the right time, the people could still input support pressure into the governmental machinery through the feedback network.

c) It enables the people to engage government in a productive exchange or interaction which ultimately create the basis for the institutionalization of a given or specific activity of government. After all, institutionalization is the process through which an organization attains value and stability overtime;

d) It helps in insisting on the delivery of quality services at the right time by governmental institutions. Services delivered

poorly or at the wrong time or belatedly are ineffectively and inefficiently delivered;

e) To amplify the key ingredients of corporate and good governance as they relate in all ramifications to service delivery. In actual fact, such attributes as selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, and patriotism are essential leadership values that would make the public sector deliver services promptly and perfectly;

f) To make democracy dividends available to the citizenry. No matter how well-funded a public institution is, if it does not deliver the expected public good, it has failed. A focus on service delivery puts government institutions on their toes as they are pressured to perform;

g) It helps in plugging loopholes that are corruptly exploited in governmental organizations. To be sure, the root cause of service failure is corruption. Therefore, a focus on service delivery is an inquisition into ways of tackling corruption which has been inhibiting service delivery in the Federal civil service and indeed in the public sector as a whole. (see paper delivered on Service Delivery...).

What is the quality of services being delivered by government's ministries, agencies and parastatals?

There are visible signs that the ministries, agencies and parastatals of government in Nigeria's federal bureaucracy are not delivering services as expected of them, and this shortfall has been the subject of several reform initiatives in the past. The following are the different manifestations of the service-dilemma in the country's public sector generally:

a) Poor or low quality Services: The low quality services being delivered by the public sector including the federal civil service are an indication of the existence of both structural and cultural or attitudinal problems which have continued to stand in the way of measures taken to address the situation. The federal civil service being a policy making and implementing organ of the federal executive has over the years found it difficult to function effectively as a result of some contradictions inherent in its own operations. Wrong staffing, lack of training or absence of capacity-building programmes for its employees, lack of motivation, lack of understanding or appreciation of organizational objectives, operational defects, etc., are some of the predisposing factors responsible for poor service delivery.

b) Lack of service: This is an indication of total loss of purpose by governmental organization, and this situation is often the precursor of institutional decay. In a good number of ministries, agencies, and parastatals, there are some departments and offices that were created without any realizable functions. The personnel in such departments and offices are idling away delivering zero-service. The growing politicization of the federal civil service in which recruitment of personnel has been turned into a patronage system that panders to the whims and caprices

of powerful politicians has led over time to the over bloating of the Service with the consequence of creating needless offices to accommodate the excess personnel. Lack of service is a portrayal of a deeper crisis that is seething through the Nigerian Federal Civil Service in which less than 10% of its employees is saddled with its workload while the remainder of its personnel is afflicted with the virus of indolence and docility. The organizational structure and operational methods are implicated in this seemingly ingrained problem of exclusivity where production and delivery of services are concentrated in few hands and their private sector partners in situations where certain functions are ceded or outsourced to the private sector.

c) Service failures: Services fail when services are not delivered at the right time and with the right quality. This indicates shoddiness and tardiness in service delivery. Wrong directives, bureaucratic delays in processing requisite approvals, non-availability of needed resources at the right time, lack of target-setting with timelines, corruption, and indiscipline are some of the reasons why services do fail in the Nigerian federal civil service. In a sense, the causation of service failure in the country's federal civil service has its root in its institutional constraints which are evident in the palpable absence of organizational coherence and organizational cohesiveness which are required for its operations to attain value and stability. The diffusion of responsibilities and structures with its implications and resultant jurisdictional conflicts among different institutions in the Nigerian Public service system have only complicated the problem of public service delivery.

The Nigerian federal civil service has been buffeted and it is still being buffeted by any of the above service dilemmas in spite of efforts at improving public service delivery.

Steps taken by Government to Promote Service Delivery

Establishment of SERVICOM unit to drive service delivery in an organization

The Federal Government in 2004 directed all government organizations to establish SERVICOM Units in their organizations to help minimize service failures. SERVICOM which is the acronym for service compact with all Nigerians, is a tool for the discovery of new and more efficient processes and procedures for delivering services to the teeming population of Nigerians whose right to quality service is regarded by the government as inalienable and non-negotiable [2]. Consequently, the ministries, departments and agencies of government in the country established SERVICOM units to drive the desirable improvement in their organizations' service delivery performance. A central office to coordinate the activities of all the SERVICOM units across the public service was established and domiciled in the Presidency. This central SERVICOM office and the complementary SERVICOM Institute which are supposed to be responsible for the programming, regulation and supervision of the diverse SERVICOM units in the

country's public service have overtime become hamstrung by funding constraints. Following this state of affairs, the SERVICOM units are left to operate with inconsequential or no intervention of the central SERVICOM institutions thereby leaving the fate of each SERVICOM unit to the internal dynamics of its immediate operational milieu.

Staff sensitization on the imperative of SERVICOM

It is the responsibility of each organization, through its SERVICOM Unit, to consciously sensitize its staff on the essentials of service delivery. Each ministry, department, and agency of government has been directed by the authority of a Circular in 2004 to give requisite support to SERVICOM unit in order to ensure that the unit discharges the mandate of its creation. It is noteworthy to point out that the creation of SERVICOM units across government's offices was in recognition of the awful and abysmal level of public service delivery which the Nigerian government felt a strong need to address as at 2004 when the service delivery initiative was introduced. This service compact (SERVICOM) which the Nigerian government struck with her citizens during the Obasanjo administration in 2004 was based on the realization that the country would only develop if the citizens receive prompt and efficient services which are their entitlements [3]. The contents of SERVICOM sensitization programmes are designed to equip serving public personnel with the right attitudinal and behavioural characteristics that would conduce to improved public service delivery. Thus, such courses as Customer Service relations, total quality management, emotional intelligence, productivity enhancement, service improvement strategies, customer-driven performance, etc. are some of the subjects of the quarterly SERVICOM sensitization workshops organized in ministries, departments and agencies of government [4].

Development of SERVICOM charter

Every organization is expected to design its own SERVICOM Charter with its own customer requirements in view. This charter is a documented statement of services that the service provider intends to deliver with customers' satisfaction in view. In other words, the Charter highlights the responsibilities of the service provider as well as customer's expectations. The Charter should be publicized to enable customers to have access to information that guides their expectation, and this enhances service improvement. It is often advised that service providers have to exercise caution in ensuring that promises reflected in their Charters are those that can be realized immediately or in the short term [5]. The fact that the Charter is amenable to amendment shows that service delivery is an evolving process that could be improved upon [6].

Poor Performance Assessment in the Federal Civil Service

Productivity in the Federal Civil Service is related to the performance assessment system that is in existence. An officer's productivity is greatly influenced by the reward system that

encourages performance and punishes non-performance. In the Nigerian Federal Civil Service, performance assessment is problematic because of some of the factors alluded to earlier. The following are some additional reasons for poor performance as well as the difficulties of assessing staff performance.

Overdependence on hierarchy and promotion examination

The Nigerian civil service is not as productive as it ought to be because of some structural and cultural factors. Its overdependence on hierarchical structure of control has negative effects on creativity and productivity. There is no rig-proof system for assessing staff performance in the Nigerian civil service in which particularistic and subjective criteria hold sway in the evaluation of staff performance. The situation is such that on-job assessment does not, in any significant way, determine the promotability of serving officers, and this means that a good number of very productive, efficient and hardworking officers could stagnate on the same grade without promotion for years on grounds that they were assessed to have failed some promotion examination which their indolent, inefficient and unproductive colleagues had passed. The truth of the matter is that the so-called promotion examinations being conducted by the FCSC are subjective as they are ridden with all forms of corrupt practices including favoritism, nepotism, bribery and some other forms of particularistic considerations. For instance, the 2014 FCSC Promotion Examination for Directorate level Officers threw up a number of controversies regarding the credibility and integrity of its results [7]. The pervasive belief that what you know is not as important as who you know in the determination of your career prospects in the Nigerian civil service is a disincentive for excellence and productivity. The reification of persons at the expense of processes and institutions is inhibiting operations in the service. Duties ought and should be assigned to officers with the requisite competences. In addition, adherence to hierarchy in the country's civil service has robbed the civil service of the tremendous benefits of accessing bottom-up initiatives that could emanate from brilliant and highly creative officers in the lower rung of the ladder of authority. There is no current effort to identify and nurture gifted officers at whatever level of operation in the service with a view to encouraging them to actualise their potentials [8].

Absence of systematic training

This problem is responsible for capacity gaps in most MDAs. The need for building staff capacity cannot be overemphasized in contemporary times when knowledge capital drives operations of organizations. The growing complexity of organizational methods and procedure means that staffers have no option for improving on their performance other than resolving to expose themselves to the new ways of doing things. This trend underlines the importance of ensuring that the Nigerian civil service proactively responds to the training needs of its officers to enable them fit

properly into the new operational requirements of their schedules. It is on record that since the inception of the fourth republic in 1999, there was only one service-wide centralised induction programme which was held in 2002 to expose all serving officers to the new reality of operating in a democratic environment. Just as the OHCSF has been unable to organise service-wide training programmes, as regularly as necessary since 2002, so also have most MDAs found it difficult to carry out requisite training for their staff. The ready alibi for not training staff is the claim by MDAs that they lack funds, while in most cases such excuses are untenable as they are unjustifiable. There is no MDA that does not receive yearly allocation of training funds for staff development and capacity building. The funds for staff training and capacity building are in the recurrent expenditure vote of the annual appropriation of each MDA. The problem is not so much that of paucity of funds or lack of funds but of willful and criminal diversion of the training funds into other uses by the accounting officers. This illegal diversion of funds from the original vote head into another vote head is in violation of the Fiscal Responsibility Act, 2007 which ought to attract sanctions from the National Assembly. In all of these, lack of relevant training for staff remains the predisposing factor for the poor quality and low level of service delivery in the Nigerian federal civil service [9].

Poor conditions of service and low remuneration

This is a recurring problem of the Nigerian civil service, but it is not peculiar to Nigeria. There is the impression that most African countries seemed to have lost the capacity to pay for a high-quality civil service due to the poverty that ravages their economies, the structure of politics and administration, globalisation and wrong-headed reform programmes [10]. To say low remuneration still remains an important issue in the Nigerian civil service in contemporary times does not mean that steps had not been taken in the past to address the problem. In 2003, after a prolonged negotiation with the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and other allied trade unions, the government agreed to increase salaries of workers in the public service generally, and it was done ('Presidential Committee', 2005). In addition, the Shonekan Presidential Committee on the Consolidation of Emoluments in the Public Sector which was set up on 1 November 2005 clearly recommended an increase in salary by 25 per cent and an annual increase of 10 per cent with cost of living adjustments over a period of 10 years, subject, however, to ability to pay. However, the government rejected Shonekan Committee's recommendation and implemented instead a 15 per cent pay increase in 2007. The government did not also accept the timeframe proposed by the committee for future negotiations with workers' unions on pay increase ('Presidential Committee', 2007). The implication is that wage reviews remained unstructured, thus indicating that government's unrestrained power to effect wage increases with or without due reference to the inputs of workers' unions. It is noteworthy that since 2007, there has not been any wage review

though an effort was made in 2012 to commence the negotiation process with the inauguration of a 12-member committee which was headed by the Head of Civil Service of the Federation. However, since its inauguration, the committee which seemingly has gone into extinction did not achieve anything and has not submitted any report. There is a growing sense among civil servants that the Nigerian government may have become disinterested in workers' conditions of service including incessant agitations for salary or wage increase. The federal government needs to bridge the relativity gaps among the divergent salary structures. While 80 per cent of government workers especially in the civil service earn a pittance, staffers in such agencies as Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and government parastatals in the country's oil and gas industry including Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), among others, are receiving humongous emoluments which are unjustifiable [11].

Incompetent leadership

Leadership recruitment in the civil service is problematic, and there seems to be no solution in sight until drastic steps are taken to restructure both the OHCSF and FCSC. These two institutions have become highly politicized and have become overtime opposed, through their conduct, to the core values of the service they hypocritically profess. Through the twin evils of indiscriminate transfer of inexperienced personnel from other services into the federal civil service, and the promotion of officers to higher positions beyond their levels of competence for reasons unrelated to merit, the OHCSF and FCSC have continued to erode the time-honored principle of professionalism, and by so doing, erecting a leadership structure that would culminate in the implosion of the civil service. There had been reported cases of politicians influencing these two institutions in the civil service to promote, upgrade or 'properly place' their cronies to higher levels far above their contemporaries and even superiors. It is the prevalence and indeed the frequency of these malpractices that has continued to recreate incompetent and uninspiring leadership across the MDAs in the country's public service [12].

Outsourcing of certain services and programmes

The belief that public service is inefficient in the delivery of certain services and projects has led to the transfer of such services and projects to the private sector. This policy which is known as outsourcing is hinged on the understanding that government could even plug loopholes of corruption which were being exploited by unscrupulous civil servants whose major concern was not service delivery but profiteering. However, despite the good intention of the policy of outsourcing, its unintended consequences have beclouded its perceived benefits, as the policy is implicated in the evidently visible inactivity that currently pervades most of the MDAs in Nigeria's federal civil service. The argument that outsourcing saves the government huge financial resources that would have been lost to civil servants' inefficiency

has been found to be untrue. In actual fact, government spends more to get results from private concessionaire, consultants and commissionaire, thereby raising the question whether or not if the civil servants were given similar condition, they would not have performed better. Currently, in some MDAs, private consultants are contracted to design programmes and projects, write reports of official events and to even draft speeches for the ministers at enormous cost to government. These are functions that could easily be performed by officers of the Departments of Planning, Research and Statistics, and Human Resource Management of any ministry at very minimal cost to government [13].

Haphazard deployment of personnel

Deployment of personnel in the federal civil service does not accord with any known well-thought-out policy but done in disorderly manner. There had been allegations of corruption surrounding staff deployment which the different pools coordinate. Currently, in the OHCSF, the Department of Career Management Office (CMO) is responsible for the deployment of administrative officers to the MDAs. However, in carrying out this function, the department is not guided by the qualifications and competences of the officers it deploys to the MDAs. The OHCSF does not have any reliable data on all the staff under its pool, and that explains why when an administrative officer with a good background in economics was needed in the Ministry of Finance to handle the country's trade negotiations, an administrative officer that studied history was deployed to that schedule—a case of a round peg in a square hole. Yet, there are so many good graduates of economics and other related specialists who are in the administrative officers cadre in the service, but who will never be deployed to schedules of their competence because of the defective deployment policy of the OHCSF. This is the way staff deployment in the service has been, and there is no visible effort aimed at correcting it [14].

Promotion examination: an unreliable performance assessment mechanism

The Nigerian civil service is overly dependent on written examination for the determination of officers' eligibility for promotion. This dependence on examination resulted from the extreme pervasion that was evident in the use of the Annual Performance Evaluation Report (APER) which in the past was a sufficient mode for assessing officers for promotion. The APER was considered weak and subjective, and very open to all forms of manipulations. However, the promotion option is not any better because it has become over time corrupted by the pervasive fraudulent influences in the Nigerian society. There were reports that some candidates paid N5 million each in bribe to relevant officials of the FCSC to be promoted to the post of director (administration) [15]. Lack of transparency and vacancy constraints have both conspired to create an environment of uncertainty around the FCSC promotion examination for directorate cadre officers, thereby making serving officers in the directorate cadre to be desperate in their quest for promotion.

Why the SERVICOM Regime has been Ineffective?

As it might have become apparent from the foregoing, anything which would not enhance service delivery is bound to hinder it. Thus, some of the following factors could be implicated in service failure:

a) Procedural and institutional challenges: Any organization where there is no clear-cut procedure for achieving results or where the institutions are handicapped is certainly one meant to experience service failure.

b) Lack of Service-orientation: The absence of service-consciousness in the staff hinders service delivery because in such organization, services if delivered at all would be inefficiently and ineffectively delivered.

c) Operational challenges: The lack of requisite resources including funding inadvertently would have negative impact on organizational productivity.

d) Poor Working Environment: There is a strong relationship between the environmental condition of the organization and the output of staff. Where a conducive environment exists for staff to excel, their productivity is unhindered. A poor working environment inhibits productivity.

e) Lack of understanding of organizational objectives by staff: When the purpose of a thing is unknown, abuse of it is inevitable. When staff members are not made to buy-in into the vision and mission of an organization, there is every probability that they could be working unknowingly against their own organization.

f) Ineffective SERVICOM Unit: When the SERVICOM Unit is hamstrung and ineffective; it would be unable to serve as a tool for driving service improvement within the organization.

g) Corruption and Indiscipline: Service Failure is the consequence of the twin evils of corruption and indiscipline. The resultant effect of these evils is organizational inefficiency.

Conclusion

Service Delivery should be enhanced and promoted in our public Sector organizations. This is the right thing to do to justify the confidence reposed in us as public servants. All the problems that militate against service delivery must be corrected and all the strategies that would institutionalize SERVICOM regime in the organization should be explored. These strategies may include constant and continuous capacity-building programmes for SERVICOM officials to equip them with requisite knowledge for driving service delivery initiative in the organization. In addition, proper funding of SERVICOM activities in the organization which are designed from time to time by the National SERVICOM Office should be encouraged.

If the Management of the organization has and shows the

political will to promote service delivery, SERVICOM Unit in the organization would be a partner in progress. The ball is in the court of the Management to take necessary and desirable steps to institutionalize the SERVICOM regime in the organization.

In addition, all those factors inhibiting performance should be corrected, removed or done away with so that the right atmospherics for efficient and effective service delivery can be created for the Nigerian Public Service to thrive.

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