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Content

Contents

E-GOVERNANCE AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract

The logic of global interconnectivity demands that businesses, administration and management of human organisations should be conducted with integrity, speed, efficiency and effectiveness. These are some of the innovations E-governance brings to every human collectivity. In the era of information and communication technology, we live in - a highly competitive, integrated and technological driven world, Africa in general and Nigeria in particular cannot afford to lay back and watch the dynamics of e-governance go ahead of or elude them. Expediency action demands that government joins the e-governance race to fast-track sustainable socio- economic and political development. With the use of the theory of over developed states, the paper argued that Nigeria has not fully embraced the e-governance movement because of several factors. Some of which include: infrastructural deficit in the country, long years of authoritarian rule, negative attitude to change, paucity of funds, among others. It proffered some remedial steps which include: poverty reduction, empowering the people through technology driven educational system, fixing the power sector imbroglio and willingness of both leaders and followers to embrace changes in the public sector, among others.

Keywords: Governance, E-governance, Information and Communication Technology and Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Africa in general and Nigeria in particular paint a picture of an elephant that is too big to work on account of its weight. While Nigeria is considered to be big in size and resource endowment, these potentials have not been fully translated into development of the country and its people. It is no surprise therefore that Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world (The Economy, 2014). This paradox is yet to be fully unravelled by scholarly interrogations to ascertain forces behind the continued underdevelopment of the continent. Yet, the development of Nigeria could have a snowballing effect on the black race all over the world. It is looked up to in these areas of the world, to champion the course of the black race anywhere and everywhere on the face of the earth. But these expectations may not be realised because the "giant is crippled" (Osaghae, 2002).

Attempt to get the country out of this state of lethargy and stupor has been on for centuries. But every such effort has had to confront with certain obstacles. Electronic governance is one of such efforts. ICT-driven administration has made a dramatic entry into the political system of developing countries. Not a few of these countries have embraced it and it is making steady, even if, slow progress into virtually all sectors of their societies. It is seen as having the potentials to fast-track the process of development in the country by making interaction between the government and the governed easy. It avails the people opportunities to get information about government activities, ask questions about matters that affect them and contribute to the whole process of engineering a new paradigm of development where the hitherto alienated citizens become the pacesetters, trail-braziers and pathfinders of this new vision of development.

Yet, the e-governance system is still much in its infancy. Perhaps it may take a long time for it to take root in the country particularly when viewed against the backdrop of the infrastructural deficit and other sundry challenges bedevilling the polity. It is against this background, the study seeks to unravel the bifurcated nature ofdevelopment and

underdevelopment in Nigeria. To be sure, the country has made some progress since flag independence in 1960. But this has not been substantial enough to progressively raise the living standard of the people. E-governance, it would appear, provide a new venter of hope for development in Nigeria as is likely to bring the people into the thick of the process of development as active participants as is the case in Europe and America. But in the context of Nigeria, what are the features of e-governance what efforts have been made so far to entrench the system in the public sector? What are its challenges vis-a-vis socio-economic development? This forms the crux of the study.

Conceptual and Theoretical Insight

The world today is increasingly concerned with improving the welfare and well-being of the people and the environment they leave in. For this reason modern governments are in the business of fashioning out ways of making the citizenry not just recipients of the end products of government's policies and programmes but active participants in the initiation, formulation, implementation, evaluation and decision about the future of public policies. This practice has advanced and is breaking new grounds no public sector management in Europe and North America. But same cannot be said of countries in Africa and other developing areas of the world, where the citizenry are still largely alienated from their governments, thereby leading to poor public service delivery, inefficiency and ineffective (Nkwe, 2012).

Thus, the emergence of Information and Telecommunication Technology (ICT) as an instrument or tool for executing governmental activities, facilitating citizens' participation in and collaborating with government, has immensely improved the activities of government in relation to the people. We are therefore in the era of the e-government, e-administration, e-learning, e-democracy, e-citizen, among other subset of the ICT revolution. E-governance is not just the use of computer to carry out government activities but it is more of the interaction of government with the people

and vis-visa (Sharma, Sadana and Kaur, 2012). In most developing societies, government is still far removed from the people, leading to feelings of alienation with dare consequences for development and democratic sustenance. Again, governance according to Hassan (2013:5) "is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs, including citizen articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations".

What comes to the fore from the view expressed above is that governance involves all stakeholders in the polity operating within the ambit of the law in other to manage efficiently and effectively resources of the state. E-governance is to extend this frontier by using the electronic medium to facilitate an efficient, speedy and transparent process of disseminating information to members of the public and other agencies and for performing governmental administrative responsibilities (Hassan, 2013). The paradigm shift that E-governance has brought to public sector management would not have been possible without E-government leading the way. E-government itself, an off-shoot of the ICT revolution, has brought immense leverage into how government carries out its activities.

African governments have appropriated and understood this imperative and at the 4111 Africa Development Forum in 2004, (in Nkwe, 2012) it noted the role of e-government thus:

> E-government.... is an important innovation for enhancing good governance and strengthening the democratic process and can also facilitate access to information, freedom of expression, greater equity, efficiency, productivity, growth and social inclusion, successful E-government initiative can have demonstrable and tangible impact in improving citizens participation and quality of life as a result of effective multi-stakeholders partnership. Africa governments need to develop policy framework

supported by legislation for E-governance that are linked to strategic development objectives.

It is clear from the foregoing that the traditional paradigm of development hitherto practiced in Africa was faulty and there is the pressing need to re-engineer a model that can fast-track and sustain an all-inclusive development process. E-governance appears to have the magic-wand to realise this goal. It seeks to prioritise the citizen as the engine of growth and development of itself and society as against the hitherto method that sees him or her as mere object of governance. E-governance has the potential of bringing a lot of positive changes into public service delivery particularly in the areas of poverty reduction and sustainable development.

However, development as a multi-dimensional and configurative process has to be problematised in order to contextualise it for better analysis. As a concept, development is not a settled conceptual variable. It has been used differently by different scholars. But there is a growing consensus that development is about the people who are the means and end of its agenda. Taking a holistic view of the concept, Todaro (1986) sees development as a multi-dimensional process encompassing socio-economic and political development of the people and society. Rudeback (1997) on his part, focuses on the people as the center-piece of any development process with their culture as the pivot of its progressive change to every new stage. Gboyega's (2003) views are apt in this regard. According to him, development is "an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications" (Ibid).

For the purpose of this study, we shall adopt the theory of the over-developed state which posits that at independence, most African states were paradoxically over-developed though they appear weak in carrying out basic functions like maintaining law and order and provision of social amenities. In the word of Replay (2007) "the new ruling elites took over a state that was over-developed, suspended above society and

separated from it. But scholars have actually argued that the state is weak rather than being over-developed because it is failing in very important aspects of governance: transparency, accountability, popular participation, legitimacy, among others. It is on the basis of this account that perhaps neo-classical economic theorists are advocating the rolling back of the state in Africa in order to allow the private sector drive socio economic development. Hence, in the new public sector management, privatisation, governance, among others, is prominent features. But can the state in Nigeria really stay away from socio-economic development issues unlike its counterparts in the developed West? This question can only be answered after careful review of the state, governance and socio-economic development in Nigeria. Our focus shall be directed at these issues in the next part of the study. The State, Governance and Socio-Economic Development: An Overview The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, declares inter alia that: "The security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government".

This clearly commits the state, through its agency government to pursue the welfare and well-being of the people as its primary responsibility. Indeed, this goal in the developed world is assumed as a given. This is because over time, it would seem that their citizen have been able to take propriety right over the state and its agency government. But this state of affairs in the developed world has to be contextualised and historicised in order to come to grips with its very nature and character! Unlike their homologue in Africa, the European nation-states substantially emerged from civil society and as a result, they are constrained by the moral order of the larger civil society. Overtime, this has come to serve as bulwark against the totalising effects of the nation-states. Civil society organisationsregularly conflate and at the same time collaborate with the state to achieve the goal of governance. However, this was what obtained in Africa prior to the advent of colonialism. Prior to colonial rule in Africa, government and governance were informed by the need to cater for the people. This explained why those who rule associated service to the people. Accountability was associated with service and

authority with responsibility (Political Bureau Report, 1986). It was as a result of this governance order that the people in the pre-colonial times in Africa became interested in obligation to their community than their rights over it. Communal way of life became the norm as the people gave their life in service to one another. This became the basis for social, economic and political development that were suited for the exigencies of that period.

However, the advent of colonialism truncated this natural evolution of these African societies as it strove vary hard to impose the cultural values of the imperial power on their captured people! In the course of this project, the colonial power(s) imposed an alien state system on African societies. This alien entity continued to lack the moral basis for its existence. The people in response alienated themselves from it leading to what Ekeh (1975) called the "Two Publics" - the civic and primordial publics. These two realms have since developed their own moral values which have made them distinctly different. The state therefore has become a contested terrain for power among the various social forces and hegemonic classes in the society. This has serious implications for governance and development in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular!

Consequently, the state disconnected from the people has not been able to achieve development due to its failure to embed itself in the peoples' collective aspirations and heritages. Thus, what looks like development plans and efforts in Nigeria, hardly make impact on the people because they are cut-off from them. Ake (1996) has rightly noted that:

> Strategies and policies are made and managed by a government in office and a political
> elite in power in a historical state and under a particular configuration of social forces.
> One cannot understand government policies and strategies let alone the possibility of

development without referring constantly to the nature of the state and the dynamics of
the social forces in which it is embedded.

The nature of the state therefore has thrown up its own variant of leaders that cannot formulate and implement policies and strategies of development that will put the people and the society on the part of irreversible material upliftment and overall development. The nature of the state in Nigeria then becomes a burden that its leaders would have to carry for as much as it remains "captive" to hegemonic social forces involved in intense struggle to control the state. It is not surprising therefore that the state suffers from limited autonomy. In articulating this feature of the post-colonial state in Nigeria, Ake (1998) posits that:

> Limited autonomization means that the African state is extremely weak to perform
> adequately the essential functions of the state. The African state hampers the realisation
> of the law of value and the development of the productive forces. It hampers them
> because it is in no position to mediate the conflicts between social classes and between
> particular capital. The development of the state within the social formation remains at a
> level not much higher than the state of primitive assimilation, with massive intervention
> of force in the labour process to the detriment of the realisation of the law of value.

The limited autonomization of the Nigerian state makes it tendentiously unstable and unable to perform its basic functions of provision of social services to the people. Rather, it is preoccupied with mediating conflicts between social classes and within them (Agagu, 2004). This is not unrelated to the attractiveness of the state as means of capital accumulation for omnibus groups in the society. As a result of this, there is zero-sum approach to political contestation thereby abandoning its role of mobilising for and promoting the development of the people and society. The result of this is clear for all to see. In the words of Nzongola-Ntalaja (1997):

> Africa (and Nigeria) is still afflicted with the woes of tribalism and the negative effects
> of misguided economic policies such as costly white elephant (projects), a deteriorating

social infrastructure, a declining standard of living, growing inequality, the reappearance of epidemics that had apparently disappeared (e.g. sleeping sickness, bubonic plague) together with the emergence of deadly new ones (Illy, Ebola and general misery among the ordinary people).

It is in the light of the above unfortunate situation that the quest for lasting solution to Nigeria's development quagmire must be doggedly pursued on all fronts. E-governance is one of this measures that could bring the much sought after solution to the country's development crisis. What is the exact nature of E-governance and its relationship with socio-economic development? To this question, we now seek answers to in the section that follows:

The Nature of E-Governance and Socio-Economic Development

A factor which determines how well a country can develop will depend on "quality of the public and private institutions which in turn is related to how decisions get made and in whose interest" (Stighitz, 2007:10). Development cannot take place without the people having a say in what is to be done, how and why. Prioritising the citizen has become the vogue in global governance. This is why governments all over the world are striving to transform themselves in order to conform with more service oriented approach to its activities. This is a paradigm shift in the orientation of government by bringing changes in the way citizens interact with their governments. In this new paradigm of conducting government business, the citizenry are increasingly being transformed from human entities to "entities commonly referred to in the literature as e-citizens" (Al-Khouri, 2013:20).

This practice is aided by the rapid advancement and revolutionary changes in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Consequently, government can now take proactive steps in transforming the socio-economic aspects of society (Al-Khouri, 2013). E- governance has some deliverables which make government

activities better, faster, cheaper and transparent. Besides, National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) (2007), contends that the public sector can harvest enough dividends from E-governance as it could lead to better employees productivity, job and wealth creation and improve the citizens understanding of the workings of government by virtue of better information it avails them, among others. E-governance covers several areas of government activities. Three distinct areas have being identified, for example, government-to-government (G to G), government to citizens (G to C) and government to business (G to B) (Monga in Hassan, 2013). E-governance if properly implemented can solve the development puzzle in the country. It will help to curb corruption by checking financial malfeasance and other forms of waste going on in public administration (Mistry and Jalal, 2012). It will bring the citizens to the development equation as active participant not recipients of finished goods and services that may not meet their expectations. In much of Africa development plans and strategies tend to leave the people out of the process. Under military rule, it was worst, as command and obey method dominated the process of governance. Consequently, the citizens see the state as an alien force that has little or no meaning to them. With E-democracy and e-participation, e-political mobilization of the citizens' sensitization and participation in governance is bound to increase.

E-citizen makes government interaction with its clienteles easy. In Nigeria, the Freedom of Information Act will bring government activities closer to the public domain. Government can no longer hide anywhere to perpetuate bad governance. Better service delivery is assured as the citizen charter empowers them to demand their rights to better services from public institutions (Fagbemi, 2006). If truly the people are the essence of government, they should be able to take charge of matters that affects them.

E-governance brings government to the doorstep of the people. Governments are now in the eyes of the public, as the people can access information and interact with

government in order to be part and parcel of its processes. Wimmer and Traumuller (2001) note that the main objectives of E-governance include the following:

a)   "restructuring administrative functions and process"

b)   "reducing and overcoming barriers to coordination and cooperation within public administration" and

c)   "the monitoring of government performance".

The above benefits ascribed to E-governance in the pursuit of socio-economic development remains largely in the realm of theory. In practice, this may not be translated into socio-economic development particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. This could be due to structural, institutional and behavioural factors. These challenges are the subject of analysis in the next section.

Impediments   to E-Governance Role in Promoting Socio-Economic Development

The issue of government commitment to any public policy has always being a problematic one. Government has always failed to commit itself to successful implementation of any national policy. Although government has shown some level of commitment to the implementation of an ICT policy. Yet, Nigeria is not among the first three countries in Africa on the ICT rating. The United Nations (2003) notes that Nigeria has an E-governance development index of 1.02, which is below the UN's benchmark measure of development at an index of 1.62 (Fatile, 2012). While government has developed its website, some of its effects have been uncoordinated and only a few agencies with the needed resources have established online presence although the government continues to seek policies and strategies that will accelerate the deployment of the necessary infrastructure for its proper utilisation (Fatile, 2012).

Also, government funding of education has continued to fall below the benchmark of 28 percent of the country's annual budgets. Over time, about ten million children are said to be out of school in the Northern part of Nigeria (The Economy 2013). Existing schools across the length and breadth of Nigeria, lack basic teaching aids. Also, most public (federal and state universities) are without internet facilities. Thus, for many Nigerians, internet usage or online transactions is still alien!

Matters are made worst when one considers the high rate of illiteracy in the country, put in the neighbourhood of 65 percent and above. Users of the online device must first be literate before they can understand its methods and modus operandi.

Closely related to the above point is the high rate of poverty in the country. Poverty in the midst of plenty has become the paradoxical state of the Nigerian policy and society. Conservative figures put the level of poverty in Nigeria at 71% with almost the same figure is living on less than one dollar per day (The Economy, 2014). The larger implication of this is that many Nigerians cannot afford to buy personal computers let alone avail themselves with the opportunity to use the internet and participate in the e-governance movement. To a large extent, the electronic transaction in the public sector still remains elitist as only the well-educated can use it maximally (The Economy, 2013).

Power supply is critical to the performance of E-governance in the country. The power sector has been plagued by policy failure, lack of technical knowhow, sabotage, theft of electrical appliances and lack of political will to achieve targets government sets for itself in this sector. The present administration had promised to raise power generation and distribution to the tune of 10,000MW by 2014. But this has not been realised up to half this figure, as the present power generation and distribution capacity hovers around 2,000 to 3,000MW.

Under this condition, the ICT system cannot function efficiently and effectively (see, The Punch January, 9, 2015 and The Guardian, April 25, 2015). Furthermore, the challenge

of building capacity in the e-governance system both human and material remains daunting in Nigeria. While the country may boast of experts in ICT, most of them have gone outside the country in search of greener pastures. Those left in the country hardly have the necessary tools to work with. The will power by Nigeria to be on top of the game in the information technology practice, is perhaps not there presently in the public sector because of the various disincentives that clog the wheel of progress in this field of human endeavour that is changing the way government and administration are practised (see Sharma, Sadana and Kaur, 2011).

Following from the above challenge is the related issue of organisational capacity.

According to Yadav and Singh (2012) this include: "lack of integrated services, lack of population and different languages". While the country has a large population, its language differences may be a huge barrier to the use of E-governance to achieve socio-economic development in the country. Information dissemination is more effective where there is communality of language. In the case of Nigeria, a lot of linguistic differences, translations and interpretation may have to be carried out which may be at prohibitive cost.

Also, it may be imperative for some kind of adaptation to be made in the ICT system because some of its precepts and techniques that developed in the west would need to be domesticated for them to make meaning to people of different cultures and traditions. The major medium of communication in Nigeria is English. Yet, not many Nigerians are proficient in written and spoken English. For e-governance to promote socio-economic development, translations of ICT devices have to be made into the major languages in Nigeria. It is doubtful if this can be done given the present level of development in the country.

E-Governance for Socio-Economic Development: The Road Map to Development There is an imperative need for Nigeria and Nigerians to embrace science and technology as a

lifestyle. This is one of the pillars of western wisdom that place them where they are today as some of the most developed countries in the world (Mahbubani, 2008). Asia, once seen as one of the backward continent of the world with a people thought not to have: a belief in the idea of human "progress", a natural deference to authority and lack of critical questioning" have since turned a new leaf (Ibid). According to Mahbubani (2008):

> . . . it is stunning to see the degree to which Asians have come to dominate research in science and technology. The Asian mind which once appeared to be handicapped in this area, has overwhelmingly taken to science and technology research.

This handicap was overcome not by mere wishes or propaganda but by massive investment in this sector. As has been observed: "Asian nations have dramatically increased their government spending on science and technology between 1995-2005 (Mahbubani, 2008). China more than doubled the percentage of its GDP invested in research and development. From US$9.8 billion in 1994 to US$19.4 billion in 2004 (ibid). Such cash infusions have lured back many seasoned Asian researchers from the west where science budgets are stagnating or in some countries, even dwindling (Mahbubani, 2008). This has also been the story in the United States which is one of the front runners in ICT (Morris, 2011). The governments in Nigeria must borrow a leaf from these countries by investing massively in science and technology in order to achieve sustainable development via the instrumentality of e-governance.

Better funding of education is key to e-governance usage for socio-economic development. This will demand that all hands must be on desk to achieve this goal. Public servants have a way of sabotaging well intentioned policies of government. Attitudinal changes are therefore, needed for the success of this new paradigm in development administration (Umar, 2007). Also, more experts are needed in the area of e-governance and IT system in Nigeria. This is an area that most young men do not

fancy much. They have to be encouraged right from the grassroots through better instructions on its practice.

Institutional framework for the operation of e-governance has to be in place for e-governance to promote socio-economic development in Nigeria. This point is succinctly made by Hyden (2000) when he argues that:

> The study of policy: whether formulation, decision, implementation or evaluation is, inevitably associated with the activities of the public organ i.e. the state. Most of such studies tend to focus on the specifics of the policy using the methodologies that highlight such aspect of policy making as its efficiency (cost and benefit) (and effectiveness impact). They rarely include reference to the institutional framework within which policy is made. In recent years, however, there are increasing calls for the need to transcend these narrow parameters so as to include references to how this framework facilitates or impede successful implementation of policy.

It follows therefore that to formulate an ICT policy is not enough. The institutional framework within which it can operate is also of paramount importance to its successful implementation or otherwise. This explains why it is necessary to pay particular attention to the institutional framework for realising the e-governance agenda. Strong and autonomous institutions are needed to get public policy to realise their goals. These variables should be in place in the country if it wishes to achieve development through the e-governance platform. Government at all levels should prioritize education particularly ICT-driven educational system. From all indications, government is not committing enough funds into the educational system to bring back its lost glory and launch it on the path of sustainable development. The e-governance model can only thrive where there is a robust and virile educational sector. If governments at all levels are serious about fast-tracking socio-economic development through the e-governance initiatives, it is incumbent on them to pump massive funds into the project and commit itself to realizing it.

Conclusion

E-governance has the potentials for fast-tracking socio-economic development in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. The crisis of development can eventually be resolved by the application of e-government model. It holds a lot of promises especially in bringing the citizenry closer to their governments and helping to facilitate its operations. But all these can only take place where the enabling environment is created for its efficient and effective operations. Some of the things that need to be in place in Nigeria include: constant power supply, reduction in poverty among the people, increase in literacy, an assembly of IT experts and specialists, better funding of the ICT projects, among many others. These enablements will empower the people to be active participants in the processes of development rather than being mere end products of the process. These steps will help resolve the development quagmire in Nigeria.

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