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Public Administration Reform Through E-Governance in Nigeria: The Journey So Far

Jacob Olufemi Fatile &
Kehinde David Adejuwon

There is growing interest in the debate over whether or not e-governance has a transformational impact on government performance, governance, and public administration. It examines the relationship between public administration reform through e-governance and actual government performance. The paper suggest that while e-governance initiatives can make important contributions to improving public services they can best do so by helping improving overall relationships between governments and citizens. The paper makes an important contribution to the growing e-government literature on the transformational impact of e-government particularly on public administration reform.

Introduction

Over the past decade, fundamental changes have been transforming societies all over the world. There has been a significant shift within the field of public administration. Traditional values and norms have been undermined in a number of ways. The role and the institutional character of the state and of the public sector have been under pressure to be more market oriented and private sector oriented, initially in the developed societies and later in some developing countries. There have been hosts of reform initiatives to bring about changes in the government delivery system with a view to providing efficient and responsible service to the citizens. These reforms have been concentrated on areas of creating an efficient public administration focused on the need for provision of high quality service to the public (Burgalman and Clements, 2003). These changes include the development of a global economy, the end of the Cold War, and the rapid progress and widespread adoption of information technology.

Many developing countries are now realizing the need for e-Governance in order to provide customer-focused, cost effective, and easy to use services for citizens and businesses and to improve the internal workings of government. Public administration has always been the tool available to African governments for the implementation of developmental goals and objectives. It is seen as a pivot for growth of African economies. It is responsible for the creation of an appropriate and conducive environment in which all sectors of the economy can

perform optionally and it is this catalyst of public administration that propelled government all over the world to search continuously for better ways to deliver their services (Chatfield, 2009).

In many African countries, the design and implementation of e-government strategies convey a new vision for the entire public sector. It has been suggested that e-government has the potential to transform governance and the relationship between state, citizens and businesses. However, as considerable amount of public funds are invested in e-government projects, the outcomes of their implementation in terms of values for money, public values, and overall contribution to good governance remain unclear. Perhaps more importantly, the very strategic goals of e-government are often blurred by a screen of hype and catch-all concept such as information society or modernization (Baptista, 2005:167). Information technology has been included as one of the key strategies for public service reforms. It is now seen as essential facilitator of services improvement particularly when government worldwide are facing an increasing trends towards knowledge based on production and telecommunication revolution (ECA,2007:26).

Governments now realize that e-Governance is more than just floating government websites on the Internet. The definition for the purposes of this paper is to characterize e-Governance as a process to make simpler and improve democratic government and business aspects of governance through an application of electronic means in the interaction between citizens and government and businesses and government and also in internal government operations (Backus, 2001). E-Governance represents a significant opportunity to move forward with qualitative, cost effective government services and a better relationship between citizens and government (Fang, 2002). However, effective implementation of e-Governance initiatives demands sound ICT (Information and Communications Technology) infrastructure and sustained strategic commitment. For these reasons the potential of e-Governance in developing countries remains largely unexploited (Ndou, 2004). E-government, whether seen as a component of New Public Management (NPM) or as an extension of NPM, should be seen to encompass all ICTs in all activities of the public sector.

Conceptual Issues

There are four major concepts to be conceptualized in this paper. These are: Public Administration, Administrative Reforms; Information Technology and E-Governance.

The word "Public Administration" is very often used, but very difficult to define. This is because the boundaries of the field have never

been precisely delineated. In recent years they have even become increasingly indeterminate as both practitioners and scholars have considerably broadened their concepts of what public administration covers (Olaopa, 2008:8). This problem notwithstanding public administration has been variously defined by numerous thinkers. To Eneanya, (2009:16), public administration concerned with the management of government activities, while Adebayo (2000:4) says that:

When "Administration" is qualified by the word "Public", it simply means the practice of administration in a particular segment of society; that of the public sector. Public Administration is therefore governmental administration and operation in the particular sphere of government. It is the machinery for implementing government policy.

Nnoli (2000:45) in an attempt to explain the concept of Public Administration provide a comprehensive, overarching definition, putting within Public Administration every conceivable part of the public sector. According to him;

Public Administration is the machinery as well as the integral process through which the government perform its functions. It is a network of human relationship and associated activities extending from the government to the lowest paid of powerless individuals charged with keeping in dialing touch with all resources, natural and human, and all the aspect of the life of the society with which the government is concerned. It is a system of roles and role relationship which defines in as clear and practicable term as possible and as much detail as possible the intention and programmes of government; the means available internally and externally to accomplish them; where, when and how they are to be accomplished; who is to be benefit from them; and, finally, it is a system that cause these intentions and programmes to be realized in real life. It is a pattern of routinized activities, involving decision making, planning, advising, co-coordinating, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, command and data gathering, through which the government carries out its responsibilities.

All these definitions manifest one fact, that Public Administration is government in action. They point out that the term "Public Administration" has been used in two senses. In the wider sense it includes all the activities of the government whether falling in the sphere of the legislative, executives or judicial branch of government. The wider

view has been taken by scholars like L.D White (1926), Woodrow Wilson (1987), Pfifer (1960) and Marshall Dimock (1937). In the narrow sense, public administration is concerned with the activities of the executive branch only. This view has been taken by Gulick (1947), Simon (1947), Willoughby (1927) and Fayol (1949). From the foregoing it is appropriate to conclude that Public Administration as stated by Fatile (2007:3) deals with the study of how the administration of a state is organized and its functions are carried out. Given its roles as a channel through which government policies are executed, the study must engender the most efficient ways of organizing the executive branch of government, as well as its institution and procedures.

Administrative reform is a process that can be broken down into distinct phases from the perception of problems to their implementation and evaluation. It seeks to remove organizational pathologies as well as accelerate productivity and enhance efficiency. An overhaul of the administrative system becomes necessary when it is proved to be capable of facing the magnitude of problem involved in national development (Eneaya 2009:79). Administrative reform according to Caiden (1978:110) has four distinct phases. These are:

- * Awareness of need for administrative changes;
- * Formulation of goals and objectives, strategies and tactics;
- * Implementation of reforms; and
- * Evaluation of reforms in terms of reformers objectives.

Administrative reforms are thus viewed as the primary vehicle for removing bottlenecks and for providing an efficient and effective delivery of service to the citizens. It has become a wide spread challenge to national and sub-national government around the globe.

Information technology is a set of tools that help you to work with information and perform tasks related to information processing. While information and communication technology (ICT) are used to describe a wide range of new technologies and their application such as telephone, internet, World Wide Web, e-mail etc. These new technologies showcase the human ability to record, access, manipulate and communicate information (Amoke, 2009:45), For the purpose of this study, the definition of information and communication technologies is given here as a broad based technology, including its methods, management and application, that supports the creation, storage, manipulation and communication of information.

Today, information technology is changing the way we work, play, learn, travel and govern. Throughout the world, information and communication technologies are generating a new industrial revolution

already as significant and far reaching as those of the past. It is a revolution based on information, itself the expression of human knowledge. This revolution adds huge new expatriates for human intellectual and constitutes resources which enhance the way we work together and the way we live together (Bakare, 2004).

E-government, like its counterpart e-business, is running government business affairs electronically. E-government refers to the use of information and communication technologies, particularly the internet to deliver government information and services (ANOA, 2006). E-government can therefore be defined as a process of providing public access via the internet to government service and transforming internal efficiency of government departments (Peter and Pierre, 2007:235). The definition provided by the European Commission Communication (2003:7) asserted that:

E-government is the use of information and communication technologies in public administration combined with organizational change and new skills in order to improve public service and democratic process and strengthened support to public policies.

For the purpose of this paper, the above definition is considered appropriate. This definition from the viewpoint of Batista (2003:168) is quite wide and includes aspects that are fundamental for successful use of ICT, such as organizational change and user skills. It does not assign a value to ICT or e-government per se, but relates them to a wider effort to support public policies.

Public Administration and Sustainable E-Government

E-government has been included as one of the key strategies for public service reform. It is now seen as essential facilitators of service improvement particularly when governments worldwide are facing an increasing trend towards knowledge based production and the communications revolution. Expenditures by governments on computers and management information system have risen rapidly in many countries and now represent major items in their budgets.

In term of public administration reform, the strategic goals of the e-government agenda was closely derived from the "New Public Management" (NPM) theory developed and refined since the 1970's. Its main concept, managerialism, implies the use of private sector technologies, practices and philosophy in the activities of the government in order to make more with less (Baptista, 2005:171). The

direct relationship between e-government and the NPM agenda has been clearly established by the European Commission (European Commission, 2003:20).

The change toward an organization according to the concept that the user is at the center (customer orientation) which was already at the heart of the New Public Management approach, is reinforced by e-government and made visible at the front-office in personalized online service, a one-step approach and a life (or business) event orientation.

There are growing numbers of e-government project in Africa, some of which are contributing to public sector reform and delivering efficiency gains in service delivery. E-citizen and service, for example, deal particularly with the relationship between government and citizens; either as voter/stakeholders from whom the African public sector should derived its legitimacy, or as customers who consume public services (Heeks, 2002). E-government, whether seen as a component of NPM or an extension of NPM, should be seen to encompass all ICTs in all activities of the public sector.

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by government from the viewpoint of Baptista (2005:167) seems to be currently driven by five main goals: these are:

- * Transforming public administration: improving the efficiency of public administrations, reducing their size, and cutting costs.
- * Putting service online; delivering government service over the internet and other electronic channels.
- * Improving the image of government; increasing the transparency of the public sector and creating a more open, participative decision making process.
- * Increasing government control over society; re-enforcing control over citizens, business and taking action against perceived security threats.
- * Providing a symbolic direction for society; appear to be modern; working toward progress by following existing technological trends.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) therefore is pivotal to modern government and fundamental to the strategies for public service reform. The creation of new information and communication systems are seen as an essential component in the creation of accountability. When a decision is taken, information about that decision and its outcomes must flow to all those to whom the decision maker is accountable (Heeks, 1998). Without such an information flow, and without the information system to carry that flow,

there can be no accountability because there can be no knowledge of the decision.

However, because public administrations are not private sector businesses and thus not mainly driven by profit i.e. they have to take into account public interest factors and the creation of public value – the economic and business primacy proclaimed by managerialists carries the risk of undermining public interest and the rights associated with democratic citizenship and civic engagement (Deleon and Denchardt, 2000). It must be noted that, in general terms, the diffusion of e-Government in Nigeria has been slow. It is a fact that Nigerian government has fewer e-government initiatives than industrialized countries; make less use of ICTs in their work than industrialized countries; and use older generations of technology than industrialized countries (ECA, 2007:28).

It is important to note that current investments in e-Government in Nigeria are not sustainable in the medium term if their effectiveness is not clearly demonstrated. The effectiveness and success of e-Government initiatives in the view of Kearns (2004) should thus be measured against a complex set of criteria. These according to include:

the provision of services that are widely used, increased level of user satisfaction, increased information and choice available to service users, greater focus on the services that the public believes are the most important, increased focusing of new and innovative services on those most in need, reduced costs of service provision, improved delivery of desired outcomes, and a contribution to improved levels of trust between citizens and public institution.

The successful implementation of e-government project will bring benefits to the wider public service and its customers. The benefits according to Baptista (2005) include:

- * Enhanced transparency and accountability;
- * Reduction of unnecessary bureaucratic red tape;
- * Reduction in information redundancy;
- * Improved efficiency of public sector workers;
- * Improved response times to investor communiqués;
- * Readily available information;
- * Effective linkages relating to the investment process between ministries and departments; and
- * Improved customer service by the public sector agency to the international community.

It is instructive to note that the Lagos State government in Nigeria now runs its business using Oracle Enterprise Resource Planning (OERP), using OERP to run government affairs means, among others, that government personnel, Payroll, Fixed Assets, Account payables, Account Receivables, Cash Management, General Ledger, Purchasing inventory etc will be processed electronically. The result therefore for human resources is that government will be able to end the era of ghost workers as all of them will be detected by the system, and new ones rejected. Any new ones that stay there will be discovered within a short period and detected. The payment roll will ensure personnel are paid for salaries that match their status only, electronic payment will end the era of phantom contracts and abandoned contracts as the system ensures payment only for jobs done and completed according to specification. Also tax defaulters have no hiding place. There will be no room for "Halliburton gate" (*The Comet*, August 6, 2004).

In addition through e-government, the reports of transactions can be run easily throwing up useful information. For instance, statistical data of all employees in a ministry can be obtained within 30 minutes. When access to information through accurate data becomes easy, accurate planning can be made, and implementation practicable. It is noteworthy that some government parastatals like Central Bank, NITEL are already in the process of implementing OERP to run their business. If Lagos State can implement full e-government, federal and other state governments can do likewise.

Challenges to E-Government in Nigeria

In Nigerian public administration, e-government has faced a number of challenges that have limited the scope, speed and quality of service rendered. There is no doubt that there are observable limits to the ability of e-government to solve all economic and social problems. Nevertheless, there is a consensus that public administration particularly in the area of e-government, need to be improved.

The United Nation Organization recently conducted an annual e-government survey which included a section titled "e-government readiness". It was a comparative ranking of the countries of the world according to two primary indicators; the state of e-government readiness; and the extent of e-participation. Constructing a model for the measurement of digitized service, the survey assessed the 191 member states of the UN economy to a quantitative composite index of e-government readiness based on websites assessment, telecommunication infrastructure and human resources endowment. Nigeria was not in the UN reckoning of the 50 top e-government ready

member nations for the years 2008 (Opara, 2009:21). This shows that e-government in Nigeria is still at its crawling stage, and is yet to fully achieve its aim and purpose.

Although e-government is expected to establish adequate local governments for effective accomplishment of the Millennium Development machinery at all level of government. The e-government in Nigeria was yet to be attained fully. No wonder, Odunfa (2009) revealed that "What we actually run in the country is e-manual since we have most of the government offices still dealing with papers".

Today, many private firms now, especially multinational firms and Banks run their businesses electronically using Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). In this age of information superhighway, Nigerian government cannot continue to run their businesses with the colonial method of file pursing, with its resultant file disappearing, records alteration, record missing, and record mutilation. This colonial system has over the years been the bane of the public administration efficiency, and lack of information and data necessary for adequate policy planning and implementation (The Comet, August 6, 2004:17). What inhibited Nigeria from truly having an e-government include the infrastructure which is not available for the project to run smoothly, the epileptic power supply in the country was another inhibitor for the smooth running of the e-government. It is noteworthy to state that accessing ICT borne data requires a whole range of overt resources including a telecommunication infrastructure to provide network access, an electrical infrastructure to make the ICTs work, a skill infrastructure to keep all the technology working, money to buy or access the ICTs, usage skills to use the ICTs, and literacy skill to read the content. Nigeria simply does not have these resources. A country where the highest percentage of the population has no access to reliable telecommunications, and no access to stable electricity, it is hardly surprising that the introduction of e-government and its various applications has been slow in Nigeria. Odunfa (2009) also noted that the factor inhibiting the slow level of e-government includes the level of e-literacy and education, legal and regulatory framework, low awareness, stakeholders' readiness and complexity of the process.

Other challenges of e-government in Nigeria includes, uncoordinated service delivery and support, training of manpower and capacity planning, zero network as well as information security. Also, there were too many loopholes for cyber attacks to steal or tamper with government information.

Future Directions for E-Government in Nigeria

While e-Governance holds great promise in many developing countries, substantial challenges need to be faced. Many ICT projects fail because of insufficient planning capacity and political instability. In order to overcome these challenges, successful implementation requires matching the right technologies with capable and progressive reformers and government systems.

E-Governance, reformers aspire to reinforce the connection between public officials and communities thereby leading to a stronger, more accountable and inclusive democracy. The success of e-Governance requires fundamental changes in how government works and how people view the provisions through which government is helping them. Governments need to undertake e-Governance initiatives actively, strategically and resourcefully (Moon, 2002). Governments in Nigeria should improve partnerships with the private sector to enhance the transfer of competitive skills from the private sector to the public sector. Delivery of services can be contracted under the marketing testing technique.

The Nigerian Governments should also take necessary actions to accelerate the development of electrical power and other infrastructure related to the development of ICTs, in order to achieve successful implementation of e-government project. In order to address the problem of illiteracy, which can hinders effectiveness of e-government, the policy and legal environment should be conducive to the development of public and private training centres. Possibilities of including computer science in curricula schools should be explored.

For e-government to be most effective, access to information must be in the language most accessible to the public user. "Cyber laws" should be available to the public so that ICT systems and information stored in the systems will have the same legal validity as documents stored on paper. In addition, government should commit themselves individually and collectively to creating an enabling environment for the development of ICTs, including broadcasting of government, private sector, civil society organization and international level. Also, government should set up productivity units to monitor performance and render periodic report to the executive, the legislature and the public.

Conclusion

It is obvious that in this 21st century, e-government is the theme of public administration. This is because it brings continual change to public organizations, Information Communication Technology through the internet and web-based technologies, has transformed government-

citizen and government-business relationships. The development of web-based technologies is the central operating tool of organizations, opening up of government agencies to the public, who would be involved in decision making, while accountability would be enhanced (Eneanya, 2009:206). It is however well understood and acknowledged that application of the New Public Management tools cannot be possible without the information and communication technologies. Indeed, information should flow freely and timely from one institution to another and within institutions in order to be treated and analyzed for policy formulation and decision making at all levels of management. In this respect, e-government policies will need to take more account of demand side realities and societal factors if they are to lead to the successful take-up of e-government services (Burgelman and Clements, 2003). Therefore delivery of significant value and service improvements is also the key to increasing take-up of public electronic services by users.

Thus, if e-government fail to render a better public administration that provides citizens and business with demonstrable, measurable value, the use of ICT in government could become what Toonen (2001) describe as the symbolic reform ideology of our times, similar to the ideology of scientific management in the 1930's and 1940's. Success will require innovative transformational programmes that motivate rather than alienate civil servant at all hierarchical levels.

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