

Public Accountability and Governance: Interrogating the Literature on Service Delivery in Nigeria

¹Kasikoro, Zideke, ²Nein, Godknows & ³Lawyerkeme Koffi Romeo

^{1,2&3}Department of Political Science,
Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island

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Abstract

The research examines public accountability and governance as a sine qua non for improving public service delivery in Nigeria. The central argument of this paper is that public office holder's hide under the guise of ethnicity to siphoned public treasury which hinders effective public service delivery in Nigeria. Thus, the research interrogates these basic questions: Does ethnicity discourage public accountability in Governance? Does the leadership discourage public accountability in governance? Does lack of public accountability affects governance in Nigeria? The paper adopts the survey research design and the data used was based on secondary data, and were sources from textbooks, newspapers, internet materials etc. The paper was analyzed using descriptive content analysis. One of the major findings of this research is that Ethnicization of politics affects governance and thereby public accountability suffers in Nigeria vis- a- viz improve public service delivery. The research recommends amongst others to improve service delivery in Nigeria; the Nigerian leadership class must have that National consciousness in the provision of public goods to the people.

Keywords: *Accountability, Ethnicity, Governance, Leadership, Service Delivery*

Corresponding Author: **Kasikoro, Zideke**

Background to the Study

The debate of accountability has been in the front burner of academic discourse in recent time both within the National and International arena. In spite of the enthronement of Democracy in Nigeria to fast-track public service delivery in order to better the standard of living of the citizens, the operators of public offices are still suffering from accountability crisis which undermine governance. Public office holders in Nigeria have been indulged in corrupt practices which has becoming threat to our nation's survival (Odeh, 2015). Thus, Public Accountability is a fundamental tenet of democracy (Cook, 1998).

The public officers are required by law to be accountable by exhibiting effective utilization of public assets and finances in the delivery of services and pursuit of government objectives (Obazee, 2006). Effective accountability mechanisms are powerful tools put in to improve service delivery by providing productive assessments and motivating policy makers to avoid negative external critiques (Olarinmoye, 2011). Since inception of the Nigeria State, the ideas of attaining the goals of development by the Nigerian government through the creation of public institutions have been undermined. This is occasioned by the lack of accountability on the part of corrupt operators of the system entrusted to manage governmental institutions. Moreso, the lack of trust on the part of the populace about government actions. Henshaw (2008; Okwuosa, 2022), argues that accountability request public officials who manage and control public institutions to be liable to the public - both in policies and actions. It has been observed that "Nigeria's failure to positively deal with most development challenges such as poverty, unemployment and terrible state of infrastructural decay have been principally ascribed to bad governance in all its implication" (Transformation agenda of the Federal Government of Nigeria TAFGN, 2011-2015).

There is no doubt that, the importance of public accountability in a democratic government cannot be underestimated, but governance in Nigeria has been confronted with certain challenges: these are among others: poor leadership, corruption, lack of transparency, electoral reforms, ethnicity, godfatherism, lack of security, unemployment. The above situation has undermined service delivery in Nigeria. Thus, the study finds out that there is a gap to be filled in literature because past researchers has not dwelled much on public accountability and governance specifically on service delivery in Nigeria hence the study contribute to enrich the literatures on this topic for future researchers and policy makers.

However, the study interrogates these basic questions: Does ethnicity discourages public accountability in Nigeria? Does poor leadership discourage public accountability in Nigeria? Does lack of accountability promotes bad governance in Nigeria which in turn affects service delivery? In this study, we relied on secondary data which were drawn mainly from secondary sources and the method of data analysis adopted was the descriptive content analysis. The study begins with an introduction and thereafter, research methodology. This is followed by definition of concepts, literature review and an analysis of the causes and consequences of corruption as they pertain to public sector accountability. Finally, the paper concluded and made some recommendations to assure effective accountability and governance, viz- a-viz improve service delivery in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The crisis of accountability and Governance viz-a-vis on poor service delivery in Nigeria has become a thing of concern to both the Nigerian electorates and international development partners in the fourth republic from 1999 to date. As acknowledged by Adejimi (2005) in Ejimabo (2013) that some policy makers as well as those involve in bribery, egoism, power and trade liberalization, for him, the situation they found themselves has made them to forget those national policies targeted at improving the qualities of the living standard of the citizens in the society. Also, Hargreves (2002) in Ejimabo (2013) in his discourse on improving service delivery contended that Nigeria previously known as the giant of Africa has lived short of this international recognition. The days of plutocratic repressive dictatorship and military rule, coupled with large scale corruption have led to neglect and deterioration of public service delivery in Nigeria. Despite we have embraced democracy as a mean of development; the above situation is a reoccurring decimal. Thus, the researchers are perturbed to interrogate these basic questions. Does ethnicity discourage public accountability in governance? Does the leadership discourage public accountability in governance? Does lack of public accountability affects governance in Nigeria?

Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this article is the survey design and the study relied on secondary data which were drawn mainly from secondary sources. In-depth literature studies were conducted to have a fundamental understanding of the issues raised in the study. The study is a theoretical examination of public accountability and governance for effective service delivery in the public service in Nigeria and the method of data analysis adopted is the descriptive content analysis.

Definition of Concepts

This section defined related concepts that are of relevant to this research such as accountability, governance, public service delivery

Accountability

According to Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi (2006) cited in Adenugba (2013), in a democratic setting, accountability can be attained in two major ways vis: the bureaucracy or government administrative machinery that are vital to government administration should be responsible to the elected political officers and secondly elected political officers are to be responsible to the electorates to whom the power of governance rightly lies on. This implies that elected officers are duty banned to be accountable to the electorates. To Laxmikanth (2001:193) in Adenugba (2013) 'the term accountability means the duty of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their responsibilities and the manner in which they have carry out the assigned tasks conferred on them. Its main aim is to check wrong and arbitrary actions in other to promote efficiency and effectiveness of administrative activities. Accountability for Adegbami and Adepoju (2017; Okoinemen and Okonoboh, 2021) means 'responsibility' and 'answerability', where public officers are expected to carry out their constitutional duties for the benefit of all the citizenry freely without discrimination. Accountability is about holding public officers accountable for their actions and inactions either while in the office or after

leaving the office. Accountability enforces on public officers to give accounts of their stewardship and being held responsible for mistake(s) committed while carrying out their duties as public officers. Accountability has to do with a public servant to be honest and uphold to integrity in doing governmental businesses. Accountability enhances the need for government and its agents to serve the public effectively and meticulously.

Governance

Governance is very difficult to define as a social science concept. Although, scholars had look at it from different viewpoint. Thus, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2007) view governance as the totality of exercise of control and management of a nation's economic, social, and political institutions in which institutions represent the organizational rules and routines, formal laws, and informal norms that collectively form the incentives of public policy-makers, overseers, and providers of public services.

Whereas, the United Nation Human Development Report (2004) contended that governance has two ingredients: first, the leadership must have responsibilities derived from the tenets of effective governmental organizations. Second, the governed, that is the general public, that is responsible for making fundamental inputs to the socio-economic and political affairs of the state. It implies the efficient management of governmental institutions. Put differently, governance is how people are ruled. Hirst and Thomas (1996) in Chiazor and Egharevba (2013) view governance as “the control of an activity by some means such that a range of desired outcomes is attained”. Thus, governance in a political standpoint is a more complex activity and also service oriented.

Governance for Chiazor and Egharevba (2013), they conceived from Lasswell traditional standpoint of politics of who get what, when and how and perhaps how much. Thus, governance has a lot to do with the authoritative allocation of values in the society, which is more or less large political in nature. However, for this study, the concern of Governance is the means of piloting the affairs of the state towards the attainment of the objective of the state. Vis-a-viz improving service delivery. However, Governance can be good and bad depending on whether or not it has the basic ingredients of what makes a system acceptable to the generality of the people. The ingredients of good governance include freedom, accountability, and participation (Sen, 1990 mentioned in Odo (2015).

The basic attributes of good governance capture the conduct of an inclusive management wherein all the vital stakeholders are allowed to have a voice in the decision-making process. It is instructive to note that, good governance is the process through which the affairs of the state are managed and directed effectively in order to attain public accountability, financial accountability, administrative and political accountability, responsiveness and transparency, all of which must show in the interest of the rulers and the ruled. This implies that good governance can only thrive in a democratic society; thus, to achieve good governance, the society must uphold to the tenets of democracy (Odo, 2015).

Public Service Delivery

The public service of any nation stands out as the most important mechanism through which government made use to formulate and implement public policies. The government does this by translating the plans and policy trust it tends to achieve into concrete public goods and services for the use of the electorate. Since public bureaucracy is much more of interest with public administration, the management of governmental affairs therefore anchors deeply on it (Oyedele, 2015). Okafor, Fatile and Ejalonibu (2014) in Abasilim, Gberevbie, and Ifaloye (2017) views public service delivery as “the result of the intentions, decision of government and government institutions, and the actions undertaken, and decision made by people employed in government institutions.” They contended that it is “the provision of public goods or social (education, health), economic (grants) or infrastructural (water, electricity) services to those who need (or demand) them.

Batho (2006:11) in Adejuwon (ND) argued that in the state everybody must have equal access to the services to which they desired. Thus, public service delivery can be viewed as one of the essential responsibilities for the creation of public bureaucracy. It is identified as “one of the vital functions of the public sector.” (Mitel, 2007) in Abasilim, et al (2017). Hence, the delivery of public service is aimed at improving on the life of the people.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for analyzing this research is the power- elite theory. The power-elite theoretical analysis of politics sees power as being monopolized by a small group of persons who exert considerable political influence on policy decisions and outcomes. Since people are unequal in terms of access to the resources of society, some would always have more capability than others, and would therefore occupy the elite positions in society. According to Mills (1956) in Chiazor and Egharevba (2013) only a small group of people effectively control the political machinery in most nations. They contended that the power elite stand to take the most important positions in society and hold 'command posts' in all sectors of the economy, government, and the military. Thus, the power elite moves from one sector to another, consolidating their power as they go. For the power elite theorists, the focuses of the wealth and power are in the hands of the few in any political system, they believed that democracy is too great for the voice of the average person to be heard. In the same vein, Mosca (1939) in Chiazor and Egharevba (2013) asserts that “The power of the minority is irresistible as against each of the single individual in the majority.” Most decisions that affect society are taken by the elite. Even in the most advance democratic societies, main policy decisions do reflect the interest of the elite rather than the wishes of the populace. Thus the majority of the people are being manipulated and controlled by the elite, As Ihonvbere (2009) puts it that the power elite not only control and dominate the commanding heights of the economy, they exercise legal monopoly over the means of coercion, dominate the structures and institutions of politics and economy, but also shape the ideological and philosophical direction of the society. It is the elite that dominate the economic and political life of the society because of their wealth and influence.

Mills further opined that in all societies, it is dominated by the power elite with 'unprecedented power and unaccountability'. They take decision with little or no consideration to the citizens. Despite the fact that such decisions will affect the generality of the community, the 'power elite' is not accountable for their actions either directly to the public or to anybody which represents the public interest. The significant of this theory to explain this work is that it will help us to understand the behavior of the power elite in our public service in Nigeria and the motive why accountability is illusive in Nigeria bureaucracy.

Literature Review

This section reviewed related literatures that are relevant to the discourse.

Ethnicization of Politics and Governance

Dudley (1973), has rightly captured one reason for the failure of governance in Nigeria to successfully promote democratic norms, this he called the phenomenon of 'ethnicity' which stands as basis for the appointment of leaders into political position. The inference is that people that lack the competence to adequately manage these institutions to enhanced performance are appointed to the detriment of merit. Where such people are appointed on the basis of ethnicity, they seem to be loyal to their tribes rather than the nation as a whole in the implementation of policies and programmes for democratic sustainability. According to Dudley (1973), what has been known as 'ethnicity' is seen to be part of the instrument through which the political elite sustain[s] themselves in power and exercises its influence. Hence it is a trait of elite behaviour ...the educated elite became the main proponents and purveyors of parochialism and particularistic principles. Ethnic interest overwhelms national interest, ethnicity against nationalism. Some politicians see ethnicity as an avenue to national resources through the exploitation of ethnic sentiments (Uwanne, 2017). The drive and push of government seeks to acquire as many properties and assets as possible and lip-service declarations for national development. This position is inferred by Ebegbulem (2009) in Imhonopi and Ugochukwu (2013) for them, these leaders "primitively accumulate wealth at the expense of national development without regard to the basic needs of the people.

Leadership and Governance

It is an agreement reality that the quality of leadership and overall governance in a country positively affects the level of political stability and development that such country enjoys. Bad governance and poor leadership could result to underdevelopment and political instability (Ologbenla, 2007). The nexus between leadership and good governance has made Othman and Rahman (2014) argued that governance is all about leadership. They contended that, the connection between leadership and governance is seen in the efficiency, probity, responsibility, transparency and accountability of the officials. Similarly, Nnablife (2010) inferred that good leadership shapes the tone and standard of governance. Buttressing on the nexus of leadership and good governance, Soludo (2007) opined that governance and leadership are so closely related that one circumscribes the other.

Governance and leadership have been acknowledged as indispensable for social change, economic growth and human development in any nation (Mangu, 2008). Iyoha, et al (2015) in

Omoregbe, et al (2016) under-estimate the issue of effective leadership in modern societies to the way in which politics is played as well as what the individuals who acquire power use it for in the long run shapes the outcomes of governance and development in the nation. For Ake, the strong grip to retain power by African leaders has made them to forget about governance and this has resulted to underdevelopment of the African nation.

Public Accountability and Governance in Nigeria

It is agreed that accountability is the hallmark of good governance. According to Ikeanyibe and Imhanlahimi (2006) in Adenugba (2013) accountability in a democratic government is attained in two major ways vis: the bureaucracy or government administrative machinery are vital to government administration should be responsible to the elected political officers and secondly elected political officers are to be responsible to the electorates to whom the power of governance rightly lies on. This implies that elected officers are duty bound to be accountable to the electorates. To Laxmikanth (2001:193) in Adenugba (2013) 'the term accountability means the duty of the administrators to give a satisfactory account of their responsibilities and the manner in which they have carry out the assigned tasks conferred on them. Its main aim is to check wrong and arbitrary actions in order to promote efficiency and effectiveness of administrative activities.

It is instructive to note that since the starting of the fourth republic in 1999 to date the actions of top civil servants, public servants and those that are holding elective offices are far away from the electorates. If not that, how can we juxtapose a situation where since 1999 to date recurrent expenditure has been allocated to be higher than capital expenditure at both the federal and state budget? This situation is pathetic, where most Nigerian has been placed in a state of misery following the Annual Misery Index 2018. Lack of accountability on the part of the leadership has put the nation into huge debt due to mismanagement of public resources as its debt profile has been projected to hit N77tn by June 2023 as rightly warned by the Nigeria Employers Consultative Association (NECA). Sunday Punch (2016) in Imoukhuede (2016), acknowledged that Nigeria has lost over N38 trillion due to mismanagement, embezzlement and money laundering under successive administrations since the present democratic phase from 1999. The figures were collected from the findings of anti-graft agencies and investigative panel reports on major economic scandals and financial crimes from 1999 – 2016 in Nigeria. It should be noted that from the N38 trillion stolen from the country's economy, crude oil theft, official corruption and electoral campaign funding were responsible for a huge percentage of the loss. However, if these funds were not stolen it would have been injected positively to improve on the living standard of the citizens.

Revelations from the probe of the office of the former National Security Adviser Col. Sambo Dasuki and others showed the weak chain of poor accountability in Governance. It is startling to note that the security situation in our dear country has been perverted due to high degree of corruption by our public officers and the resultant effect of this is that we can no longer sleep with our two eyes close. Our health sector is declining every day due to poor medical facilities, public officers in Nigeria now on regular bases due go to abroad for medical tourism in spite of the huge budgetary allocation. The 2023 Election has come and gone but many of the winner's

victory are being contested in election tribunal over cases of electoral irregularities making Nigerians to judge INEC has the most worsted public service delivery institution in Nigeria.

There is no doubt that public offices in Nigeria have been privatized for personal benefits against the general public. Which no doubt raises the cost of governance in Nigeria. In Nigeria, politics is a zero-sum game thus any ethnic group that is in power sees it has the only means for them to get their own fair share from the national cake. Hence vital appointments, staff recruitment and service delivery are designed to favor the ethnic group in power. This no doubt has made public officers to hide under the pretext of ethnicity to loot public treasury with impunity in Nigeria without recurs to accountability.

Conclusion

The research work has examined accountability and governance in Nigeria by interrogating the literature on service delivery. The analysis of the research deduced that public officers in Nigeria hide under the guise of ethnicity to loot public treasury with impunity which tends to undermine effective public service delivery in Nigeria. Thus, for effective public service delivery, the electorates must be fully ready to demand for accountability from their leaders. On this note, the research has hence recommended possible measures to address the challenges confronting effective service delivery in Nigeria.

Recommendations

With regard to effective delivery of service, the following recommendations become imperative.

The anti-corruption agencies need to be strengthened to do their work and also, the Government should have the political will to prosecute offenders without fear or favor for the fight against corruption to gain the needed result in the country.

1. The National Assembly is advised to carry out its over-sight function on interval basis to see if there are financial leakages in the system.
2. We called for total decentralization of the Federal structure to enhance public service delivery all over the nation.
3. The work advised that the National Assembly and State Assembly should be constitutionally designed as part-time bases.
4. The study admonished Nigerians to imbibe the spirit of National consciousness and discard away ethnic sentiment for effective service delivery.
5. Finally, the cost of governance should be reduced. i.e, downsizing of the number of political aids, car reduction, foreign trips allowance, and furniture allowances to Elected and top government officials.

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