

DECENTRALISATION AND CIVIL SERVICE EFFICIENCY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Viewing civil service as a supporting strategy for decentralising government operations for quality service and greater accountability, this study analysed the relationship between decentralisation and the effective performance of civil service in Nigeria. However, the study obtained information from secondary data which include; official documents and official websites of governmental institutions in Nigeria, academic journals, and Newspapers. The study revealed that decentralisation policy has not translated to civil service efficiency in terms of quality service delivery and greater accountability. The study further revealed that decentralising administrative responsibilities to lower governmental levels should be encouraged with less political interference. Therefore, proper accountability needs to be integrated into all aspects of the Nigerian civil service to provide efficient services to the citizens. The study concludes that unless the government strengthens the enforcement phases of accountability, the objective of decentralisation in Nigeria may not be fully actualised.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Civil Service, Accountability, and Service Delivery

INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation has been reconsidered as an appropriate form of governance. Today, the majority of the African countries claimed to have undertaken decentralisation as part of their reforms for quality service and greater accountability of their civil service. However, the World Bank (2013) sees decentralising governance as a form of transferring authority, as well as parts of the responsibilities of the key government's functions to sub-units of governments. It is a process of transferring powers from the government at the center to the lower levels, this includes - the state, local governments, and civil service as in the case of Nigeria. To Omar, Satu, Anthony, Patrick, and Diana (2004), decentralisation is a form of governance that helps to promote accountability of the civil service and ways of reducing corrupt practices among the units of government. Various studies on decentralisation tend to overemphasise the

transfer of political, administrative, and fiscal power from the center to local governments or sub-units of governments. Because of (Makara 2018), decentralisation may not produce good governance results in a country's civil service. To him, good governance is not just about decentralising authority and responsibility, but rather, it is a broad milieu of how the federal, state, local, and civil servants relate among themselves for ensuring respect for human rights, citizens' participation, and the overall administrative functions for effective service delivery.

No doubt, the Nigerian civil service is seen as a machinery of the government that provides a supportive and strategic approach for implementing decentralising functions. Suffice to say that, the essence of decentralising the civil service is to provide support to the government for ensuring the efficiency of its services. That is why civil service as an institution is being referred to as indispensable machinery, through which governmental activities are being carried out, or as an instrument that the government uses to fulfill its constitutional duties and responsibilities to the people. Thus, decentralising governmental functions through its civil service can either be good or bad; this depends on the typology of decentralisation practices in the country which are; deconcentration that is, establishing sub-units of central governments, delegation - contracting of functions of the central government to a lower unit of government, and devolution i.e., creating of elected local councils or governments with autonomous powers (Smoke, 2015). Whichever forms of decentralisation may take, so far it is well-structured, well operated, coordinated, and regulated, it has the tendency and capacity to bring about efficient and effective services. Therefore, this study analysed the relationship between decentralisation and civil service with the view to determine whether decentralisation brings efficiency into the Nigerian civil service.

Conceptual Clarification

Decentralisation

Scholars have offered different definitions as to what they perceived to be the meaning of decentralisation. However, in a concrete terms, decentralisation has to do with creating or establishing a sort of dealings of responsibility among the citizenry, service providers, sub-units of governments, as well as the government at the central. The essence of the dealings of responsibility is to make all the aforementioned accountable in handling governmental businesses (World Bank, 2008).

To Rondinelli (1999) decentralisation has to do with authority redistribution, responsibility rearrangement, and appropriate disbursement of financial resources for the provision of public services between/among various units/levels of government. In other words, Rondinelli sees decentralisation from the perspective of transferring responsibility for proper planning, adequate financing, and effective management of public functions from the government at the central down to the component units of government.

Olum (2014) sees decentralisation as a form of re-designing or restructuring the system of government in such a way that, the central government will have to transfer some of its responsibilities, decision-making power, as well as finances to other components units of government. In other words, it is a sort of dispersing powers and functions of government from the central government to the lower entities of government, or institutions or agencies of government. Through this process, governmental services will be enhanced, and effective service delivery will be attained for the benefit of the citizenry. Olum went further to identify three sets of decentralisation namely; "developmentalist", "democratising" and "centralist". Developmentalist is at the core or mainstream of a country's development, who believes in and supports the implementation of decentralisation, through which government and its activities (services) are brought closer to the citizenry. Thus, decentralisation is expected to enhance and facilitate improved delivery of services, assist in educating the people to be responsible, and encourage their full participation in governance, and its activities especially, in the rural areas. Decentralisation is equally expected to facilitate an improved public policy, through which local economies are more developed. It was to this extent, that the democratiser believes that the people should be encouraged to participate, or be well-involved in decentralising governance, as this will go a long way in enhancing government responsiveness, accountability, legitimacy, and acceptability among the citizenry, especially that local officials have local knowledge of local areas which the officials of the central government are lacking. On the other hand, the centralists think that decentralisation helps to transfer social contracts, responsibilities as well as funds to the lower tiers of government to share the burden of governance of the government at the centre.

Civil Service

Civil service can be seen as a subdivision of a government, typically grouped or associated with the Executive branch of government. It is an indispensable part of the executive, without which the government cannot operate or perform its constitutional duties. The constitutional provision for the establishment of the Civil Service/Public

Service is enshrined and documented in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended). Sections 169, 171, 206, 208, and 318 and Section 10 of the “Third Schedule of the 1999 Constitution expressly provided for the establishment of the Civil Service/Public Service of Nigeria. These aforementioned sections of Nigeria’s constitution recognise the public service of the federation, which includes the local government council services (Innocent and Andrew, 2013).

However, according to Section 318 of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution (as amended), the civil service of the federation is defined as:

Service of the federation in a civil capacity as staff of the office of the President, the Vice President, Ministry or Department of the government of the federation assigned with the responsibility for any business of the Government of the Federation (1999 Constitution).

In essence, Sections 169, 170, and 171 of the Constitution, gave their backing to the above definition of the federal civil service. In addition to this, Nigeria’s constitution, in its “Third Schedule” precisely under section 10 expressly provided for the establishment of the Federal Civil Service Commission. The Federal Civil Service Commission is saddled with the power and responsibilities to appoint or employ persons to various departments or offices in the Federal Civil Service. The Federal Civil Service Commission equally has the power to dismiss, as well as to exercise control and discipline any person in various offices of the government, under the control of the Commission.

Accountability

Accountability otherwise referred to as answerability in the civil service is an important avenue to check excesses in governmental offices and to bring about good governance. This can be seen as a part of activities to guarantee and restore public confidence in government and its activities. Therefore, accountability in the civil service is about making the employees of government and those that occupy governmental offices to be accountable and answerable to the people for their actions and inactions while they are in the public offices and after they might have left public offices. In other words, the government representatives and employees of the government are expected to be accountable and make their activities open to the public. That is, governmental activities should be made open, such that, people can scrutinise the activities of government and demand explanation from the government representatives on any anomaly noticed in the course of serving under any institution of government. However, services that have to do with the corporate existence of the country and those that bother the country’s security may not be made open (Bovens, 2007). Patton (1992) argued that accountability implies the need to report both financial and non-financial information.

Patton further explains that financial information is in the form of existing financial statements and non-financial information could be reported using exploratory narratives.

Accountability in line with Igbokwe – Ibetu, Osakede, and Nwobi (2020) is an essential tool for the efficiency of any civil service, it involves three parties vis-à-vis: a steward or an accountant (civil servant), the principal or accountee (government/citizens), and the codes (institutions). The steward is the party to whom the stewardship or accountability is given, and who is obliged to present an account of its execution. The principal is the party entrusting the responsibility to the steward, and to whom the account is presented. And the codes are based on which the stewardship is struck, and by which it is maintained and adjudicated. Therefore, on or before the stipulated period of the steward in office, an accountant (civil servant) is obliged to render an account of conduct by effecting his/her responsibilities in the office. The account is being presented and examined following the codes by which the stewardship was struck. These follow the adjudication judgment made by the principal that the steward has satisfactorily or unsatisfactorily discharged his/her responsibility and based on which the relationship between the three parties is confirmed, modified, or terminated.

According to Ejere (2012), accountability is strongly intertwined with democratic practice. In other words, a democratic government can only be sustained when the government is accountable to the citizenry. This is because accountability remains one of the basic principles on which an ideal democracy is built. Another feature of an ideal democracy that works along with accountability is the rule of law, this and other principles are what facilitate good governance. If peradventure, these principles of an ideal democracy are not followed, there is the likelihood that there will be a misuse of power, and anomaly in governmental offices will set in, where this occurs, the public trust is already betrayed, and accountability is compromised, and thus there can be no delivery of public services to the people.

Service Delivery

The state has many services expected to be delivered to the public. These services range from justice and security to other important services for different citizens, as well as private enterprises. These are in addition to traditional public services being provided by the government which includes - health care services and education services among others. Service delivery has to do with the provision of satisfying services to the populace, by daily improving on services rendered for them, to make them live better and decent lives.

According to OECD (2020), service delivery could be seen as any form of contact with the public during which the government and its representatives seek, provide and handle people's affairs through performing their duties in form of rendering services to the people effectively. To OECD, any service that is worth it must be delivered in an efficient, effective, and expectable manner. To Riekert (2001), service delivery is “the provision of a product or service, by a government or government body to a community that it was promised to, or which is expected by that community” (Riekert (2001, p. 90, cited in Crous, 2002).

Service delivery to Oyedele (2012), is those services provided by the government and its institutions or agencies for the betterment and welfare of the people. According to Adegami and Nofiu (2013), the welfare and wellbeing of the people have been the purpose and benefits of delivering services to the people by the government. Accordingly, Adegami and Nofiu asserted that “without basic facilities, there will be no meaningful living” for the people. To them, essential services to the people include, health care services delivery, good roads, decent housing units, portable water, toilet, waste disposable facilities, and electricity among others. Therefore, to provide essential services to the people, a set of principles, standards, as well as policies must be designed, developed, and deployed.

Civil Service and Efficient Service Delivery

Civil service has become an essential part of the government. In essence, civil service could be seen as an institution that gives life to the citizens, as well as governmental businesses. Civil service is reputed to have the power of creating easy access to governmental services and providing needed information about governmental activities through its various channels. The impact of the civil service is felt in different sectors of government which include: telecommunication, education, health services, agriculture, and transportation among others (Adejuwon, 2012). Civil service could be said to have been one of the important reasons for decentralising the public sector. Thus, for decades, civil service has continued to involve in the delivery of the core and non-core services to the people. Civil servants, who are the employees of the government are saddled with the basic responsibilities of rendering efficient services that are necessary and met the populace's needs and expectations. In his study, Majekodunmi (2012), states that effectual delivery of services has to do with the provision of quality services to the people.

Olowu (2002) categorizes government services into two, i.e., self-financed services are, services that can finance themselves via charges imposed on the users, these are called, utility services which include electricity and water supply, as well as sewage disposal systems, among other services. The second category of services as mentioned by Olowu are those that are financed through taxes, that is, public services. It is usually provided by the government to serve all members of a community regardless of their financial income, physical ability, or mental acuity e.g., construction of roads and bridges, health centres and educational services, etc. It is thus pertinent to ask that, out of “Utilities” or “Public” Services, which one has been efficiently delivered by the Nigerian civil service”? The answer to this question is not far-fetched, a critical observation and assessment of various communities in Nigeria will reveal that utilities and public services have not been well-delivered. Put differently, public service delivery in Nigeria is poorly planned and thus remains unsatisfactory, despite several reforms of the public service in Nigeria.

As a result of epileptic services delivery by the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Nigeria, Service Compact with All Nigerians (SERVICOM) was introduced. This is with the intent of serving the citizen in an honest, transparent, and effective manner. To this extent, SERVICOM was officially launched in 2004 following a three-day retreat to properly introduce the nitty-gritty of SERVICOM to the operators, that is, the civil servants. The administration of President Obasanjo who introduced the SEVICOM collaborated with the British government, in some strategic areas for the successful implementation of SERVICOM. Civil servants are thus expected to ensure a measurable standard, and how services would be delivered by the service provider (government/civil servants) to the service takers (citizens). With this provision, both the services provider and service takers were armed with the knowledge of what services are to be provided and what services to get respectively at a given time and place. With this step and strategy of the government, one would have expected a turnaround services delivery system. However, this step has failed to yield positive returns in terms of service delivery in Nigeria, and in the various sectors of Nigeria’s economy including education and health among other necessary services to the humanities (<https://www.sunnewsonline.com/challenges-of-service-delivery-in-nigeria/>). It was as a result of this, that Oyedele (2015) described services provided by the Nigerian civil service as disordered, epileptic, appalling, and unsatisfactory. It is not news that most parts of the Nigerian state lack basic infrastructure facilities needed for the daily survival of the people, and in some areas where there are some infrastructures, they are in a state of disrepair (Lawal, 2014). Most often than not, services provided by the government through the civil service are not reliable and sometimes inaccessible.

From the foregoing, there is a clear agreement that the civil servants /public servants have not developed their capacity to properly serve as key factors for development in decentralised areas of Nigeria. Thus, improving the efficiency of civil service has been a major challenge in Nigeria, thereby, quality services delivery by the civil service, which is supposed to be a key determinant of quality governance in the country has been of low quality.

Accountability and Efficient Service Delivery

Accountability and service delivery could be conceived to be a process by which the people hold services providers responsible for the inadequacy and ineffective services they have provided for the people. Accountability to Adejuwon (2012), the origin of accountability is traceable to Rome, where the concept denotes "to stand forth and be counted". This implies that a public official should be able to stand uprightly. It also means that public officials should be able to provide a detailed analysis of his/her actions and inactions. He/she should be able to furnish the people with a satisfactory analysis of his/her stewardship, and be able to offer explanations of his/her activities in the course of discharging his/her responsibilities in the public office (Ola and Effiong, 1999).

Accountability involves two different phases: these are "answerability" and "enforcement". Answerability can be seen as the responsibility of the government, and its representatives including the public servants in providing adequate information on various decisions made on different services to be provided for the public. Government representatives as part of accountability measures are expected to communicate the necessary actions put in place for the realisation of those planned services, and justify their importance to the public and the institutions saddled to guarantee accountability. On the other side, the enforcement phase of accountability implies that the institutions, such as - the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) who are responsible for ensuring accountability and expected to monitor the ethical conduct of public officials, do the needful to guarantee effective delivery of services to the people.

To Schilleman (2008) accountability and efficient service delivery has become one of the keys determining factor for effective performance and good government. This because accountability is a propelling forces to improve the governance and administrative system of a country. Accountability has to do with judicious utilisation and management of public resources for quality/ efficient service delivery. For that reason, Allen and Tommansi (2006) argued that proper public accountability would go a long way to assist

the government in achieving the best performance that would lead to an improved and quality delivery of service. To this extent, the citizens must have easy access to information about governance activities, and be armed with facts and figures of the actions and activities of government to be able to participate meaningfully in making decisions for the betterment of the country. Adenugba (2013) affirms that accountability is the requirement needed to hold public officials answerable and responsible for their various activities at the public offices by those (the citizens) they are representing. To him, the concept of accountability emphasizes the duties and responsibilities of officeholders to accomplish the peoples' expectations of his office. Accountability is also conceived to be a measure of the activities and performance of officeholders while in office. Therefore, accountability is a guiding condition for any government that is determined to be free from corruption to be able to deliver essential services to the populace effectively.

Evolving from the above, it has shown that the accountability of government officials is an important condition to prevent corruption and other forms of abuse of office, for the purpose of ensuring that power and state resources are deployed towards achieving transparency in governance that will enhance effective delivery of services to the populace. In line with this, Bello (2019) asserted that decades after Nigeria's independence, efficient service delivery remain a great challenge. To date, the level of accountability in Nigeria's public offices and the provision of public services have continued to decline. In a similar vein, the existing public utilities have continued to deteriorate, this has added to prevalent youths' unemployment and a growing rate of poverty in the country. The lack of proper accountability on the part of the government officials has extremely hindered efficient service delivery in Nigeria. Similarly, the lack of accountability of the civil service has manifested in the ways and manner of handling public projects. For example, uncompleted projects such as road constructions, bridges, and erected buildings are seen all over the country without any explanation as to what led to the abandonment of those projects, at their various enforcement phases. Thus, the government and officeholders (civil servants) have not been holding responsible for the mismanagement of public resources as expected by the citizenry, as many of these citizens remain gullible and believe all the propaganda of government as daily reported by the government media.

The Accountability Movement of Nigeria (AMN) has decried the ineffective services being rendered to the populace, just as she agreed that the poor services delivery system in Nigeria is the aftermath of official corruption, mismanagement of resources,

and poor quality of governance. That is, the unaccountable use of public resources by those in the public offices have continued to bring untold hardship on the people, as the basic necessities of lives were not adequately provided (see <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/12/lack-accountability-bane-good-governance-nigeria-rights-group/>). In the submission of Okekeocha (2013) Nigeria has a large number of natural resources for providing efficient and effective services in all ramifications for peoples benefits, but lack of proper accountability measures by the government has impinged on efficient service delivery in Nigeria.

Nexus between Decentralisation and Service Delivery in Nigeria

Decentralising the civil service is one of the major steps taken by the modern state for the purpose of delivering effective services to the people. In principles, decentralisation is conceived to be a step toward bringing an improvement to the public service to make it more efficient and responsive in its daily activities. Thus, transferring some powers to the lower levels of government (state, and local government), is believed that it will lead to improved delivery of services. The World Bank (2001) sees decentralisation as an avenue of creating a conducive environment for the promotion of accountability and development in the civil/public services. For most African countries, decentralisation is perceived as a strategic way for the mobilisation of local resources and inventiveness for national development. In as much that the federal and state governments in Nigeria cannot provide the developmental needs at the local levels, it thus becomes important for power, authority as well as responsibilities to be assigned to the local government to enhance holistic service delivery at the local areas (Fatile and Ejalonibu, 2015).

Without mincing words, service delivery will have a great impact on human development if it is well-delivered. Services such as - electricity, security, quality education, health, potable water, and environmental sanitation will go a long way in contributing to human development. Thus, service delivery has the capacity of promoting necessary conditions for human growth and development. Besley and Ghatak (2007) argued that public service delivery including a good education, health services, and basic infrastructure, such as water, and electricity among other services, should be made available to the people, and the people should have unrestricted access to these services. Service delivery according to Nash and Nash (2004), is referred to the provision of services to different people, that will meet their expectations in terms of quality. In other words, service delivery is about rendering services that match peoples' needs and expectations. This notion emanated from the need to treat the people well in terms of provision of basic services to them in a business-like manner (Fagbemi, 2006).

In the case of Nigeria, the decentralisation of its civil service has not improved its service delivery. Rather, there has been a deterioration in services provided by the Nigerian civil service. This is attributed to different factors which include: the seeming autocratic, patron-client relations, the civil servants' involvement in private businesses, poor welfare packages and poor conditions of service, and a low number of professionals in the civil service among others. To Wendy (2004) issues such as inadequate and poor management of resources, inadequate staff motivation, low technical competence, poor and obsolete work materials, unwarranted government interference, as well as corruption are major challenges hindering the Nigerian civil service from rendering effective services. Akhakpe (2008) identified factors such as nepotism, favoritism, inadequate infrastructures, issues attached to the federal character principle, the poor attitude of civil servants to government's work, and poor human resource management as other challenges mitigating against effective service delivery by the civil service. Another great challenge that precipitated poor service delivery is corruption. As a result of prevalent corruption, and other unethical behaviour of public officers, one may doubt if there is any control mechanism for the enforcement of accountability in Nigeria. Although the country has many quasi-legal and legal instruments, anti-corruption agencies, and institutions established for the purpose of checkmating, controlling, and enforcing public service ethics and accountability, however, all these have not helped in checkmating corruption in public offices.

According to the Guardian Newspaper reported by Adedeji (2016), Nigeria is still suffering from poor service delivery notwithstanding the abundant resources the country is blessed with, and despite various reforms, as well as many policy initiatives put in place to address the issue of poor service delivery in the country. Emanating from this, many have agreed to the posser that the appalling service delivery in Nigeria is largely due to corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, as well as lack of integrity on the part of the public officials, hence they could not deliver any meaningful services to the people. Of course, these are true, but other factors that have led to the problem of "poor service delivery", especially from the angle of political officeholders who work hands-in-hands with civil servants include – poor recruitment pattern via faulty electoral process; appointment of unqualified candidates to the public offices through godfatherism, and poor attitudes of officials to work among others. In addition to this, is the poor recruitment pattern of public officials by the Public Service Commission (PSC). On several occasions, it has been alleged that, recruitment and selection of public officials are based on "people who know someone" and not on competency and merit. To render efficient services, competent people should be employed, based on merit. In a situation where these are compromised, efficient service delivery will not be achieved

(<https://guardian.ng/opinion/service-delivery-in-nigeria-a-prognosis/>), and when this happened, the essence of decentralisation is been defeated.

Therefore, defective services provided by the government have made the people have low or no confidence in the Nigerian public service. As part of poor service, the country has enmeshed in security and other associated challenges. This has resulted in a series of protests which include a more recent "EndSARS" protest. The "EndSARS" protest is more than an agitation to end police brutality, but it came out of growing frustration among the Nigerians, especially the youths who were not happy with the state of the economy, and poor service delivery system of the country. The majority of the protesters are youths, with an average age of 30, and who have never seen any sector of the Nigerian economy working in terms of service rendered and general development of the country. The "EndSARS" protest championed by the youths although not end as desired, the youths were able to make their voices heard regarding erratic power supply, high rate of youths' unemployment, poor health care services, steady decline and fall in the standard of the educational system as a result of incessant strikes, especially by the university's staff. (<https://nairametrics.com/2020/10/15/the-endsars-protests-and-the-problem-of-police-reform-in-nigeria/>). By this, one can understand the growing frustrations of Nigerians, that despite the decentralising governance, there has not been a satisfactory development in different decentralised areas of the country.

CONCLUSION

Decentralisation is meant to improve the efficiency and productivity of the civil service in Nigeria, and to be able to render appropriate services for the benefit of the citizens. This has made civil servants be indispensable agents or representatives of the government at federal, state, and local governments. No doubt, efficient service delivery by the Nigerian service providers (civil service) is a key determinant to a quality life, a parameter for poverty reduction, and contributes to promoting human development. To attain these, a high level of accountability and transparency is required in the civil service. But the study revealed that decentralisation policy has not really translated to civil service efficiency in terms of quality service delivery and greater accountability. To fully actualised the objective of decentralisation and civil service efficiency in Nigeria, the following recommendations are put forward:

Firstly, the Nigerian civil service can only be effective to render efficient services if there is less political interference in the local government civil service. Besides, proper accountability needs to be integrated into all aspects of the Nigerian civil service. Such that, all persons in public offices must demonstrate high moral standards and

demonstrate leadership by example. Failure to exhibit these qualities should be sanctioned in accordance with the law.

Secondly, enforcement phases of accountability i.e. (ICPC, EFCC, and Code of Conduct Bureau) and SERVICOM institutions should be strengthened. Hence, logistics that could enhance both institutions' services should be adequately provided.

Thirdly, for efficient service delivery, the process of recruitment must be merit-based; civil service personnel must be subjected to training and retraining on regular basis, while their welfare packages and conditions of service be made attractive, and salary is regularly and timely paid.

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