

E- Governance and Corruption in Public Establishments: A Study of the Federal Ministry of Interior, Nigeria

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Abstract

From Nigeria's independence to this present time, the Nigerian public service has been governed by a well-organized code of conduct. However, the public service continues to witness cases of corruption and unethical behaviour among its officials. Bureaucratic corruption remains a serious impediment to socio-economic and political development in Nigeria. It has deeply infiltrated the fabric of the Nigerian federation and is rendering vital organs or institutions of the country ineffective in-service delivery. The introduction of e-governance in public service brings possibilities for improvement as it strengthens governance through information technology. It is against this background that this paper examines e-governance as a way to ameliorate corruption in public establishments with special reference to the federal Ministry of Interior. The central aim is to come up with ideas that will promote quality service delivery and reduce the occurrence of corruption in the public service. The paper relied largely on the qualitative method of analysis, in which relevant historical evidences, books, journals and newspaper reports were content analyzed. The institutional theory forms the theoretical frame work of the study. The findings show that e-governance helps to improve the efficiency level of traditional bureaucratic systems. This is achieved through the use of information technology to streamline government processes, performance measurement and accountability mechanisms thus reducing the incidence of corrupt practices. The paper recommends a paradigm shift from bureaucratic processes of decision-making that involve physical interactions to e-interaction relying on e-technology. Importantly, the requisite infrastructural instruments for e-governance utility are imperative.

Keywords: E-governance, corruption, bureaucracy, government.

Introduction

The public service is responsible for planning, advising, and implementing government programmes in any nation of the world. In Nigeria, the public service is governed by ethics in the conduct of government business, this notwithstanding, the public establishments continue to witness cases of corruption and unethical behaviours. Corruption remains a serious impediment to socio- economic and political development in Nigeria, it has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigeria federation and is rendering vital organs/Institutions of the country ineffective in-service delivery. Corruption Roses a threat to the stability and security of the society, undermining the institutions and values of democracy, ethical values, justice and jeopardizing sustainable development and the rule of law (Iqbal, Seo 2008). Recently, there has been much focus on the use of E-governance as one of the key tools to fight against

corruption by opening up government processes and enabling greater public access to information. E-government's potential to increase transparency and combat corruption in government administration is gaining popularity in communities of e-government practitioners and researchers (APDIP ,2006).

E-government and E-governance are not the same,e-government is the first step of e-governance. It is only when there is e-government that the e-governance can be. But, most time, they are used interchangeably. E-government is the use of information and communication Technology (ICT) by government agencies to transform relations with citizens (Government to citizens) (G2C),Business (Government to Business) (G2B), Government (Government to government) (G2G) and Employees (Government to Employees) (G2E). E-government refers to the use of Information and communication Technology (ICT) to promote more efficient and cost effective government, facilitate more convenient government services, allow greater access to information and make government accountable to the citizens. On the other hand, "E- governance is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies with the aims of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective" (<http://portal.unesco.org>). In essence, E-governance can be defined as conducts of government using information and communication technologies to disseminate information relating to government services to citizens, to enhance participation in government, leading to improved Citizens-government interaction, with the aim of cutting cost of governance, minimize bureaucratic procedures and processes, reduces contacts with mediating officials and thereby reduces possibility of corruption (Prabhu, 2012).

Public establishments in Nigeria are being managed by the bureaucrats, that are expected to be guided by professional commitment to the public interest and by the command structure of bureaucracy as well as bureaucratic ethics of neutrality, impersonality and fairness. This sense of duty of the bureaucrat stands him / her above personal preference. However, it is doubtful if these requirements are respected by our bureaucrats, be they elected or appointed officers in the discharge of their duties any longer, private interests, and social obligations have intended to impact more on their behaviour than ethical values (Agba et.al 2008). This act by public officials, which violates the accepted standard of behaviour for private gain, involves the purchase of state favour from bureaucrats who have been charge with the job of formulating and implementing natural development plans, enforcing state regulations, and protecting private property rights. Thus, in the course of carrying out their functions in their establishments, receives payment of bribes to obtain import and export licenses, foreign exchange permits and investment and production license, to minimize costs imposed on their enterprises by the state, owners of capital may bribe civil servants and other members of the enforcement community in order to receive favourable tax treatment. Civil servants are able to extort bribes from individuals and groups seeking access to government subsidized goods and services (Mbaku (2000). These corruption activities are largely made possible because of lack of transparency, accountability and personnel contacts in the process of service delivery.

The Federal Ministry of Interior is a Ministry of the Federal Government of Nigeria, tasked with providing complimentary internal security and other ancillary services within Nigeria. The ministry is headed by the Minister of Interior, a cabinet-level headed who report directly to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the current Minister of Interior is Dr. Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo. The ministry has the following agencies under it; The Nigerian Correctional Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Federal Fire Service, and Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps.

Thus, as a contribution, this work seeks to enhance the universal knowledge space of e-governance by reporting on a unique experience of Federal Ministry of Interior in Nigeria. This is particularly significant because within a short period of tenor of the current Minister, Dr Olubunmi Tunji-Ojo, the upgrading of E-governance in doing business in the ministry has brought about, transparency, accountability and reduction in human contact, that result to reduction in stress and eliminates the prospect of corruption.

Literature Review

The concept of e-governance can be defined as the use of information and communication technology (ICTs) by government, civic society, political institutions to engage citizens through dialogue and feedback to promote greater participation of citizens in process of governance of these institutions (Bhatnagar, 2003).

Governance is a broader concept which encompasses the state institutional arrangements, decision making processes, implementation capacity and relationship between government officials and the public (Bhatnagar 2003). According to Prabhu (2012) E-governance is a form of e-business in governance comprising of processes and structures involved in deliverance of electronic services to the public (citizen). It involves collaborating with business partners of the government by conducting electronic transactions with them, it entails the interaction of the general public and government through electronic means for getting the desired result. Gartner (2000) defines e-governance as the continuous optimization of service delivery, constituency participation and governance by transforming internal and external relationship through the internet and the news media. Optimization of service delivery in this definition means getting the best of service at speed without extra cost as a result of transparency involved. UNESCO defines e-governance as the public sector's use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective. When there is accountability and transparency, rules and procedures are standardized and made explicit, it reduces discretion and opportunity for arbitrary action available to the bureaucrats in dealing with every applicant on a case-by-case basis.

Okewu & Okewu, (2015); sees e-governance as strengthens government by the people by empowering citizens to make proposals online realtime on public policies, programmes, projects and services and forwarding same to concerned government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) for consideration. This definition supports participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector, such as civil society, non-governmental organizations and

community-based organizations to raise public awareness on government policies. This as well focus towards reduction in corruption in public offices.

In literature on e-governance, there is consensus that e-governance can reduce corruption (Bhatngar, 2003, Wescot, 2003, APDIP, 2006, Iqbal & Seo, 2008). If the right procedures are in place, e-governance is designed to bring about transparency, accountability, participation, reduce contact with public officials, eliminate middle men and facilitate equal treatment.

On corruption, one of the famous definitions of corruption is the one offered by Nye, (1989) “Behaviour which denates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or state gains; or violate rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence”. Here a corruption is identified as a behaviour which violates rule against the exercise of certain types of duties for private gains. Therefore, Bureaucrats, Citizens and Business men are considered as principal stake holders in corruption process and e-governance can limit this process by broadening transparency and participation (Iqbal, Seo, 2008). Corruption is an important development issue that undoubtedly cannot be ignored. In a number of emerging success stories, ICT is often one of the important component’s assisting these improvements in amelioration of corruptions along with other factors such as leadership, management, positive incentive and stake holders’ involvement (Iqbal, Seo, 2008). There are some debates about the anti-corruption effect of ICT, it is still in evident, that ICT as one of the enablers are regarded as alternative ways of minimizing corruption in service delivery and enhancing transparency (Bhatnagar, 2003). By providing an alternative to a department channel for service delivery, e-government introduces competition which improves service levels and lower corruption. Also web publishing of government information builds accountability by providing documentation to citizens to substantiate their complaints against corrupt practices (Bhatnagar, 2003).

Methodology

The study relies largely on the qualitative method of analysis to achieve the study’s purpose. Secondary sources of information such as relevant historical evidences, books, journals, newspapers and online platforms were used to gather data.

Theoretical Framework

This investigation is based on the theoretical framework of institutional theory that anchors analysis on the role of political institutions i.e. the executive, legislature, judiciary, civil service and its departments or ministries, political parties and party system (Onah, 2010). The theory helps to understand how social structures and institutions shape behaviour, attitude and outcomes and how they can be changed or reformed to promote positive socio-economic development. It examines existing institutions, laws and regulations that governs e-governance and identify areas vulnerable to corruption and analyse how e-governance initiatives can enhance the legitimacy of government institutions by increasing transparency, accountability and citizens participation. According to Seongcheol, Hyun and Heejin. (2009)., institutional theory helps to elucidate how a system of innovation is maintained and reproduce (that is institutionalized) particularly in the area of anti-corruption, where reforms for transparency can

be more strongly resisted and challenged by parties with vested interests, than in other areas of e-governance. Also, in their study they identifies three distinctive dimensions of institutionalization: regulatory/coercive, cognitive/ mimetics and normative, among the three institutional mechanisms, the regulatory one is the most effective in implementing anti-corruption systems, however, strong leadership is crucial to its success. Institutional theory uses country and government and government institutional characteristics such as pre-existing rule of law, well defined anti-corruption powers, to explain corruption in the Public sector. It examines the processes and mechanisms by which structures, schemas, rules and routines become established as authoritative guideline for social behaviour (Scott, 2004). According to (Luo, 2005).

Institutional theory brings in the social context and provides a taxonomy for understanding how corruption might become entrenched in organizations and in society despite the existence of anti-corruption framework. DiMaggio and Powell, (1983) identified three mechanisms of isomorphic process namely, Coercive, Mimetic and Normative that could influence organisations quest for change. The Coercive Isomorphism describes organizational change as a result of political decision introduced by the authority. In Public sector, an organization often must implement new regulation(s) initiated by the government. Mimetic Isomorphism refers to environment uncertainty and ambiguous goals that lead organization to imitate others, while Normative Isomorphism states that organisations and professions are subjected to change as a result of pressure from peers. All these mechanisms are important to bring about transparency and accountability required to ameliorate corruption in government. In a nutshell, institutional theory is a social science approach that examines how institutions e.g. Organisations, government, social norms shape individual behaviour, social structures and outcomes. It explores how institutions constrain and enable individual actions, shape preference and interests and influence social norms and culture, which helps to design e-governance system that reduce opportunities for corruption, increases transparency, promote accountability and citizens participation.

Findings and discussion

The Federal Ministry of Interior has the following agencies under it; the Nigerian Correctional Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Federal Fire Service and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corp. Out of these agencies, it is only Nigerian Immigration Service, whose duties are more of Information and Communication Technology, although the other agencies applies Information and Communications technology in their own little ways, however their duties relate to having contact with their respective clients. For instance, Nigerian Correctional Service Personnel must have physical contact with the inmates, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps must physically arrest criminals, notwithstanding the use of ICT to track criminals, while Fire Service must be on the spot of fire incident to perform their major duties.

Therefore, this discussion, focuses will be on Nigerian Immigration Service. The Nigerian Immigration Service perform the following major functions. The control of entry into and departure from Nigeria, Monitoring of Non-Nigerians in the country, Implementation of Nigeria's extant visa regime and Execution of deportation.

In recent times, the Nigerian immigration service upgraded and continues to improve the application of e-governance in doing business in their agency. First, in the Nigerian immigration service role of issuing and renewal of passport, investigation shows that, you fill your passport form online, payment is as well done online, without any additional charges. This is made possible because of e-governance [ICT] application which allows access to information on what is required to have a Nigerian passport, government services are available to citizens 24 hours a day from any place, elimination of middlemen, equal treatment from government officials, reduction of the rate of personal contact with public officials, and because citizens can complain against corrupt practices. This paper discovers that, the only time for contact is during capturing. However, investigation shows that all hands are on deck to ensure no appearance again, that through one's National Identification Number (NIN) you can be captured. Oral interview with a senior official of the agency shows that the reason why recapturing is done, during renewal is because as one is ageing there is tendency for one's finger print to change. Therefore, to forestall error in finger print, applicants must appear to be captured at least for the purpose of updating finger print. With the upgrading of information and communication technology in this agency the duration of issuance of passport has reduced drastically without extra cost. Second, this paper discovers the introduction of E-gate at international airports like Abuja, Lagos, Kano and Port Harcourt. Before now the process of entering to Nigeria through airports is cumbersome, passengers are not finding it easy to come in because of the manual nature of clearing passengers. This manual nature of clearing passengers has resulted into corruption, as those that are ready to induce the officials to compromise the system are attended to, while others that are not ready to bribe remain on the queue for several hours. However, with the introduction of E-gate there is no need to present your passport to any official on arrival, just place your passport on the machine, it will scan you and you will be cleared within minutes. While talking on the installation of E-gate at the Nigeria airports, the Minister reiterated that they are strictly for Nigerian passengers now, and intended to make travelling a seamless experience and to enhance national security. In justifying the need for e-gate, the Minister argued that no matter how well trained the official of Immigration service may be, it will be absolutely impossible for them to detect illegal immigrants by eyes, but can only work with information at their disposal. The Minister also disclosed that the government is interested in opening the Nigeria space to make visa application easy for legitimate visitors (Imohimi, 2024).

Regarding foreign expert quotas and monitoring of borders, full application of information and communication technology is process. As of now foreign expert must appear before the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) official for scrutiny, these personal contacts with officials usually leads to corruption because it increases the discretion and opportunities for arbitrary action available to the immigration officials in dealing with every applicant on a case-by-case basis. On monitoring of borders, the agency has not done anything special, but efforts are ongoing to integrate technology into border monitoring.

Conclusion

The introduction of ICT (e-governance) can reduce corruption by improving rule enforcement, limiting the discretion of officials and increasing transparency and accountability. However, officials may resist a new ICT system for fear of losing corrupt income, yet while ICT

eliminates many opportunities for corruption, it may open new one for those who understand the new system well enough to manipulate them. In essence, ICT permits an intergenerational shift in corruption and rent seeking (Heeks,1998). E-governance can make decisions traceable, as the possibility of exposure of wrong doing gets enhanced, the fear of consequent embarrassment can be a deterrent to corrupt practices. E-governance is hierarchical and sequential in nature when you consider the processes involved from increasing access to information, to presenting the information in a manner that leads to transparency of rules and their application in specific decision to increasing accountability by building the ability to trace decision/actions to individual civil servants represent the sequential stages in the hierarchy (Bhatnagar, 2003). Also, web publishing of government information builds accountability by providing documentation to citizens to substantiate their complaints against corrupt practices. Also, e-governance is one of the best ways to ensure participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector such as civil society, non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations, in the prevention of and the fight against corruption and to raise public awareness regarding the existence, causes and gravity of and the threat posed by corruption. Middle-men are central actors in the corruption transaction, Oldenburg (1987) explained the middle-men as a one significant element in the mechanism of corruption considering land consolidation in the giant North India State of Uttar Pradesh. Corruption is not simply a matter between donor and recipient, the middleman plays an important and sometimes crucial role. e-governance to a large extent reduces personal contact with government officials, thus enhances transparency and curb corruption. Finally, we can concluded that e-governance is an effective tool to ameliorate corruption, though other factors like education, culture, political stability, rule of law, economic and infrastructure etc. are also important.

Recommendations

This paper recommends a paradigm shift from bureaucratic processes of decision making that involves physical interactions to E-interaction, which relies on e-technology. However, for this to succeed, leaders must be on top of the game because as ICT eliminates many opportunities for corruption; it may open new ones for those who understand the new system well enough to manipulate them. It is important to supervise and monitor the performance of newly installed E- governance system until the norms of higher level of service behavior are firmly established and difficult to change in the civil servants. Also, extensive training coupled with a participatory style will help to diminish resistance. The proportion of citizens who are willing to be constantly engaged in the process of e- governance are very small. Conscious efforts are required to drive citizens to the portal through advertising, campaigns and education. There must be continuity in policies in agencies/departments to enhance sustainability of E-technology. Importantly, the requisite infrastructure investments for E-governance utility are imperative.

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