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A REVIEW OF E-GOVERNMENT AS A TOOL FOR BUILDING CITIZENS TRUST IN THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

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Abstract
Citizens' trust in government worldwide has been declining over the years though not in a uniform pattern. Nigerians' mistrust in government has been accumulating over the years by range of disappointments from the past and present government administrations. Successive administrations and regimes have always promised improved provision of public service and infrastructural development for the Nigerian masses as a basis for introducing reforms, policies and programmes. However, most of them ended up worsening the situation of the people. The objective of this study is to explore how e-government can be used to correct the public trust deficiency in government in Nigeria. The paper adopts available data and reviews of literature on the subject of inquiry. The review was carried out in carefully designed sub-themes to address the important aspects of this paper. The paper found out that there is a gap in the literature available on this topic in the past as little efforts had been geared towards linking the field of e-government to trust in government in Nigeria. The paper further established that mistrust in the Nigerian government was mainly due to by the high level of corruption, poor public service delivery, poverty and unemployment. The paper therefore concludes that the mistrust is not limited to military government alone. But surfaces in the civilian regimes thereby putting the legitimacy of the government into question. The paper recommends that the involvement of ICT in government should be offered in terms of participation and service delivery as a means to correct the trust deficiency as it creates avenue for efficient and effective public service delivery, mass participation in policy process, transparency in public procurement and elections. More so, the government must show strong political and financial will to support the growth of e-government system.

Keywords: E-government, public trust, corruption, public service delivery, transparency.

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1.0 Introduction

Citizens' trust in government worldwide has been declining over the years (Parent et al 2005; Cheema, 2006) though not in a uniform pattern (Moti, 2013). It becomes a widespread concern as citizens have lost faith in the performance of the public institutions due to corruption, poor public service delivery and lack of representation. In 2005, a global survey conducted by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Gallup International revealed a global public dissatisfaction index by various regions of the world. The Western Europe dissatisfaction index was 65%, 73% in Eastern and Central Europe, 60% in North America, 61% in Africa, 65% in Asia and the Pacific while 69% in Latin America (Raynold, 2005).

The state of the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public service provision, corruption management, level of transparency and accountability have all been highlighted as the major reasons for the advancement and withdrawal of trust in government (Norris, 1999; Bourne, et al 2010; Hetherington 1998; Blinder, 2000).

Nigerians mistrust in the government has been accumulating over the years by the disappointments from the past and present government administrations (Babalola, 2012) due to the level of corruption, worsening public service provision such as good road, electricity, potable water supply, quality education and health. Successive administrations and regimes have always promised improved provision of public service and infrastructural development for the Nigerian masses as a basis for introducing reforms, policies and programmes with hug, budget, most of them ended up worsening the situation of the people. Therefore, the review aims at exploring how e-government can be used to correct the public trust deficiency in government in Nigeria.
The paper begins with the review of conceptual issues related to public trust, its determinants and variants. It then goes to define e-government, rationale for the adoption and its multidimensionality. The paper further tried to link the two concepts of public trust and e-government with how e-government could facilitate public trust.

2.0 Conceptual Issues

2.1 Meaning of Public Trust

Several researches, conferences, workshops and seminars have been conducted all in the name of defining and discussing the concept of trust (Schoon & Cheng, 2011). Trust is a concept drawn from array of disciplines that is influenced by measurable and non- measurable factors. From the OECD (2000) perspective, [public] trust is the expectation of citizens from public servant (s) to function in the interest of the public [citizens] with fairness and to manage and distribute public resources properly without prejudice. Thus, a fair, reliable and equitable public services provision inspires public trust and create favourable environment for citizens and economy to prosper.

2.2 Determinants of Public Trust

There are varying reasons why citizens do or do not advance trust to their government institutions. These vary from geographical sub-region, economic performance, leadership style, transparency, as well as social demography (Norris, 1999; Hetherington 1998; Blinder 2000). Although, the institution does not matter in determining trust of citizens in all occasions rather the demographic characteristics of citizens do matter as well. This argument was presented by

Thomas in explaining the different ways by which citizen trust in government is shaped (Thomas, 1998).

2.2.1 State of the Economy

Evaluation of the economy is a critical factor in determining the level of trust citizens have for in government. An ever improving economic performance without recession is the expectation of the citizens (Mansbridge, 1997) which governments view as an impossible achievement. Tax and its reciprocity becomes a basis for the citizens' launch of trust for their government as citizens believe that tax paid should be commensurate with the level of public goods provision. Therefore, anything short of this feat shows an ineffective and inefficient government in managing the economy (Bok, 1997). In like manner, the ability of the government in tackling financial crisis is inherent in determining what level of trust the citizens are going to have in the government. It indicates that the time required for the government to react and solve economic problems determines what level of trust the government is set to earn. Moreover, political economy literatures have indicated that well-to-do economies with high income that translates in better welfare of the citizens and lesser gap of inequality enjoy higher level of trusts than poorer countries (Alesina &Wacziarg, 2000; Blind, 2006).

2.2.2 Level of Transparency

Corruption management is another determinant factor in determining the level of trust citizens have for their governments in corruption ridden countries. Hazan (2006) opines that corruption [management] stands as a yardstick used by citizens in accessing the level of confidence in socio-political institutions. It is not enough for public officials to claim they are fighting corruption; they shouldn't appear corrupt as well. Warren (2006), puts it as "officials are liable not just for their behaviour but also for how their conduct appears to the public". Corruption Management Bodies' performance is responsible for determining the level of trust to be garnered by the government. But more often than not they serve the interest of the highest level of government or the party in power in a democratic setting (Moti, 2013).

2.2.3 Social Demography

The quantity and quality of social capital available in the society also to a large extent affect the trust citizens have in their government. Social and demographic indices like age, literacy and income level all contribute to what level of trust a society bequest its government (Christensen & Laegreid, 2003). In the developing nations the older generation tends to be "tolerant with corrupt but democratic" regimes while the middle class get frustrated with corrupt administrations which serves as a basis for distrust. This serves as the basis for establishing trust or distrust in the government. Income level of members of the society also shapes what political trust will look like. As lower and middle income groups tend to display lower level of trust than the high income group. Clientele is believed to be the sole source of getting rich as higher income group pursue wealth from the government rather than creating wealth for the lower income groups (Lozano, 2002).

2.3 Meaning of E-Government

Several attempts have been made in the past to define E-Government as a concept of its own. A broad definition was offered by Signore (2005), as "the use of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) to improve the process of governance". From the European

Union Perspective, E-Government is defined as "the use of information and communication technologies in public administrations combined with organisational change and new skills in order to improve public services" (European Commission, 2003). Heichlinger (2004), defines "E-Government as set of activities supported by information systems with the aim of improving the relationships between government institutions and citizens" In the view of Olowu (2004), E-Government refer to as "all the information and communication technology platforms and applications in use in the public sector or the use of the internet for delivering government information and services to citizens".

The central argument for adopting E-Government as seen in the definitions above rallies round three basic tenets; the use of information technology, improving the relationship between government agencies and citizens, delivering of services and ensuring of efficiency and effectiveness. A new paradigm in changing the attitudes and perception of the citizens towards government can be improved through the adoption of an E-Government system. It further bridges the distant gap between the citizens and the government when information about the activities of the government is easily accessible by the citizens. Similarly, it breeds transparency which delimits the rate at which citizens perceive the public institutions as corrupt entities (Welch &Hinannt, 2003).

The world of globalisation informs that government world over is changing and improving the mode of interacting and providing services to the citizens, also, changing the manners of participation of citizens in decision making processes. Conventionally, the interactions between government and citizens are carried out in a formal arena or office, but with the emergence of e-government, offices can be located and businesses can be done at any time of the day from anywhere. Again, the emergence of E-Government serves as the spur for improving government's internal efficiency in terms of administration and establishing a quality mode of providing information and service (Fountain, 2001).

3.0 Discussion of Findings

E-government has been offered as a solution to the mistrust of citizens towards government, and having identified low transparency level, inefficient and ineffective public service delivery and misplacement of priorities as the major reasons why citizens have low degree of trust in government. Two approaches have been factored out to solve the impending problem through the use of information technology; they are entrepreneurial approach and the participatory approach (Chadwick & May, 2003; McNeal et al. 2003; Moon 2002; Weare & Hale, 2000). The two approaches were offered due to the encompassing nature of e-government in promoting the virtues of democracy and establishing good governance.

The entrepreneurial approach was crafted from the idea of reinventing government in the United States which also took its root from the New Public Management reforms. The main aim was to establish a common ground between the government and the citizens by breaking the barrier of excessive bureaucratic bottlenecks that have inhibited an effective public service delivery. This therefore guarantees the government providing the citizens with excellent 'customer service' like a replica of what is obtainable in the private sector. The idea of responsiveness to citizens' demand comes to play here with the provision of efficient service delivery round the clock. A major function of the government is to provide efficient and effective delivery of public service

to the citizens. Therefore, in an attempt to become effective and efficient, attention has been turned towards e-government. Digitalisation of government offers a new paradigm whereby the service portal of the government does not close and citizens can have access to government at any time of the day. More so, cost saving in service provision is another great attribute of e-government. The cost of service delivery can be eliminated via online medium and assures the citizens that government works better and saves more. The effectiveness of the government in providing services can be best achieved when unnecessary transactional costs are eliminated.

In the process of transforming government to a more transparent one, democratic principles must be adhered to and improved; efforts must be geared toward making such government participatory. The participatory model of trust building through e-government connotes that decision making in government must be all inclusive where citizens can contribute to policies that affect their lives. This cannot be done when information is inaccessible, and no channels of communication between the government and the citizens. E-government offers an avenue where "citizens can seek information at their own convenience, not just when government offices are open" (West, 2004). Therefore, e-government offers a platform where citizens have access to public information, become acquainted with the activities of the government, they engage with their elected representatives through chat rooms, social media and e-mails and ultimately make informed decisions.

3.1 The Nigerian Case

Nigeria being Africa's largest exporter, and the world's 10th largest oil producer, accounting for more than 2.5 million barrels a day in 2012. Oil revenues totaled $52.2 billion in 2012 and generated 70 percent of government revenues (Revenue Watch Institute, 2013). Ironically, in spite of the impressive macro- economic performance Olatunji (2013) argues that Nigeria has failed to translate its income to development.

National unemployment statistics in Nigeria indicate 164 million people between 15 and 35 years represented by 60 percent. Unemployment in rural areas is 35 percent and unemployment in urban areas is 17 percent, unemployment growth rate per annum is 16 percent. Corruption has been a major problem facing Nigerian society since independence. Although, corruption is a major problem in Africa, it is not peculiar to the continent alone and the depth of the problem varies from region to region, between and among states and across time (Oganye, 2009; Bolarinwa & Aderogba, 2009). The traditional role of government which is social service delivery has to a great extent been curtailed by the gross mismanagement of public resources. Abdullahi (2010) while examining the genesis of corruption in Nigeria noted that;

> *"In Nigeria, successive governments failed to properly manage petroleum and other human and natural resources available in the country. Indeed, the transformation of the economy during the oil-boom era was imperative. However, rather than investing in self-financing capital projects, the leaders then went on a spending-spree, constructing gigantic structures, hosting international jamborees like the FESTAC (Black Festival of Arts and Culture) doubling of workers' salaries (Udoji Salary Award), etc. Indeed, there was confusion between income and wealth. Before you know what hit the nation, corruption has been born".*

In a similar vein, Oganye (2009) comments that "since Nigeria attained political independence in 1960, one decimal that has remained recurrent in her national life is the incidence of political corruption. Awolowo said, *"Corruption had not only flourished but also had almost become an accepted way of life in our society*" (Fagbamigbe, 1981). Another major factor that facilitated a decline in the trust in government is the entrenchment of corrupt practices in Nigeria that resulted from the inaccessible nature of government transactions and operations.

It is apparent that a productive society or nation is reliant on a high degree of public trust in government and its institutions. Cynicism among Nigerians is rampant as Nigerians don't trust the government in any respect. The former Minister of Finance and the Coordinating Minister for the Economy, Dr Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala was quoted in the Punch Newspaper of January 8 2012, to have said that *"I really agree on this issue of mistrust; I think it is part of the problem(s) governments faced over the years. Nigerians have not seen their governments fulfilling promises"* (Baiyewu., 2012). The minister's argument was corroborated by a lawyer and human rights activist, Femi Falana who was quoted to have said *"We have lost trust because what we are hearing now what the government intends to do with the funds from subsidy removal is not new…* (Nnodium, 2012)

Nigerians distrust in the government has been a fairy long tale, accumulated over the years by ranges of disappointments from the past and present government administrations (Babalola, 2012). Successive administrations and regimes have always promised better life and infrastructural development for the Nigerian masses as a basis for introducing reforms, policies and programmes but, mostly ended up worsening the situation of the masses.

An historical trend into the lack of trust Nigerians have towards their government can be traced back to the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985- 1993) when the Structural Adjustment Programmes was introduced despite the masses disapproval. The program that was meant to rejuvenate the economy ended up throwing the masses into abject poverty (Anyawu, 1992). Increase in petroleum products is another regular policy of the government that Nigerians don't trust.

With much hope and aspirations, Nigerians welcome the present Fourth Republic (civilian administration) in the year 1999 after long years of military dictatorships only to be disappointed afterwards. The first civilian dispensation (1999- 2007) recorded increase in the price of petroleum products five times. Each occasion was supported by promises to enhance the quality of lives and infrastructural development, but all ended up with empty results (Salami O and Ayoola, 2010). The dearth of public trust in the Nigerian government was also witnessed during the 2007 general election where electoral fraud was glaring and resulted in a protest by voters and independent observers calling for electoral reforms (Iroghoma, 2012). Also, in the wake of January 1, 2012 government subsidies on petrol was removed which created an increment in the petroleum pump price by up to 91.65%. Nigerians took to the streets in protest of the development which grounded economic activities of the country for almost a week.

3.2 E-Government and the Future of Public Trust in Nigeria

Creating access to government information through the domestication of e-governance will make government to be more open, accessible and monitored. Government information such as

National budget, sharing of federal allocation, tender and procurement of contracts, remuneration of public officials are information that citizens should have access to. This will further increase the level of transparency and accountability. In the recent past, the erstwhile central bank governor challenged the national assembly of spending more than 25% of the national budget. This information was made available to Nigerians via ICT and subjected the national assembly to public scrutiny. More so, the just concluded 2015 general election showed the power of ICT in governance through the integration of the citizens into the electoral process.

Through the deployment of ICT in service delivery in Nigeria such as the new driver license, electronic passport, national ID card, the virtual learning programme of the Open University and many other e-services have made service delivery more open, transparent and efficient. Therefore, going by this development in the nearest future with more robust e-services, trust in government would increase.

E-government also allows for mass participation of politically minded electorates in shaping their perspective towards the public office holders. The role of social media has made e-government to be more apparent due to its multi-versatile nature where information can be wide spread with just a single click. With the advent of platforms like twitter and facebook etc. elected public officials now display their achievements to the electorates who can easily verify the authenticity of the claim.

All these will lead to a significant reduction in the menace of corruption in governance; improve service delivery, encourage citizens' participation in decision making and consequently, boost the extent of trust reposed in government officers and the system of governance.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper explored the relationship between e-government and trust in government. In the light of this, the paper examined the historical trend in the mistrust of citizens towards the Nigerian government over the years. The mistrust is not limited to military government alone; it surfaces in the civilian regimes as well. The mistrusts have been greatly influenced by low level of transparency and accountability, inefficient and ineffective public service delivery, bad state of the economy and inconsistent economic policies. To that extent, the legitimacy of the government has been questioned. E-government was however proposed as a panacea to correct the mistrust citizens have in the Nigerian government due to the promises it offered such as creating avenue for mass participation in policy and decision making, improved efficient public service delivery as well as wider consultations. In the same vein, it promoted transparency and accountability which also boost the confidence level of citizens in government.

5.0 Recommendations

Having highlighted the possible gains of e-government as a tool for building citizen trust in government, this paper therefore recommends the following:

i) that political institutions must strengthen their level of will and commitment both attitudinally and financially. The political institution needs to understand the benefits of moving the public service away from street level bureaucracy to server level bureaucracy. They need to double up efforts to ensure that e-government becomes a success tool for

the reformation of the decaying public sector which will invariably increase public confidence in the public service.

ii) good leadership skill is required for any successful e-government policy. Most e-service programmes fail because decision makers have no full understanding of e-government itself. The decision makers need a comprehensive understanding about the strategies to be employed in implementing e-government.

iii) Successful e-government programme is dependent on the sophistication and availability of ICT infrastructure. Government needs to employ a scheme that will make computers and internet affordable for the citizens to actively participate in the e-government programme.

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