

Exploring Nigeria's Public Projects Prospects for the Wellbeing of Nigerians

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Abstract

Public projects that should facilitate wellbeing of Nigerians have suffered setbacks and not been able to do so. This study is a descriptive type and discussed the forces of projects failure, intrigues of public officers that subvert project outcomes, the expected roles of state actors in project pursuits, and prospects for public projects in Nigeria. The study found that paucity of funds, policy summersault, and inflation of projects costs, poor delivery of projects or outright abandonment by contractors, attitudes of the ruling regime, its successor and beneficiaries are forces that obstruct public projects. The study also found that corruption, use of direct labor, connivance; party politics, poor focus and maintenance, personalization of public project, misplaced priority are some of the intrigues of project initiators that subvert project outcomes in Nigeria. The study also found that numerous skilled bureaucrats, due process, procurement system, and supremacy of the constitution, multi-party politics, and the presidential system of government with democratic system that Nigeria practices are some of the opportunities open to the country on its public projects fortune. This study used secondary data sourced from journal articles, online materials, government gazettes, policy documents, and other publications. The data was content analyzed thematically. The study concluded that members of the public need to make attainable gains from numerous public project opportunities.

Keywords: project initiator, opportunities, public projects, masses, wellbeing of Nigerians

Introduction

The word prospect has a range of meanings. It is an idea of what might happen in the future. It is an act of looking forward, having a mental picture of something to come, or expectation that is likely to be beneficial. According to Ayo¹, prospects are available opportunities that are capable of effectively and efficiently bring about a breakthrough on certain encumbrances. For the purpose of this discourse, prospect is the potential for the formulation and implementation of public projects. For any public project to be credible, it must

¹ Ayo, E. J. (1985). Development Planning in Nigeria, Nigeria, Ibadan: University Press



influence the lives of the masses. According to Terry², members of the public should be the target for putting public projects in place. Some of the projects are to improve education, transportation, health, the economy, defense, power, agriculture and so on (Zeglod, 2021)³. Also, as part of government policy drive, school buildings, transformers, electric poles, solar lights, security apparatus, roads, hospitals, police stations, cars/buses, furniture, working tools, erosion control, and emergency needs could be put in place to make life better for the citizenry (Zatman, 2017)⁴.

At different times, the federal, state or local government executes public projects. The projects could also be in the area of the economy, agriculture, education, health, infrastructure provisions, and security. As revealed by Goulet⁵, annual budgetary provisions are required for public projects because they should make life better for the citizenry of the country. Party manifestoes translate into public projects. The public projects should also serve as a parameter with which a particular regime is measured. The projects should make life better for the citizenry of the country⁶. Thus, Yusuffetal⁷ and Wole⁸ note that members of the public could either praise a particular regime or criticize it based on what it puts in place to improve the life of the citizenry. Therefore, state actors must note that all public projects should provide cursor to the electorate that state actors are representing.

Unfortunately, most public projects with good intention to make life better for Nigerians have not sufficiently achieved the desired outcomes (public good). Many projects do not last long, some are out rightly abandoned, and others not handed over on the required quality quoted (Ajibola, 2019)⁹. According to Zeglod¹⁰, other public projects are combinations of being excellent, good, fair and poor when delivered. Several projects are partly good and bad. In the end, such projects do not meet peoples' needs. It is either that the contractor not competent or deliberately manipulates the execution of the project for personal gain or compromised standard because of kickbacks paid to contract-awardee.

As revealed by Akinola¹¹, poor project delivery is common in roads construction, building of school classrooms, supply of serviceable items like cars, machines and office equipment, consumables, such as biro, and refill inks for photocopier, and tires for government vehicles and so on. There are

² Terry, W. H. (2022). Award of Contract, Quality Control and Maintenance in Isreal, *A Journal of Opinion on World Affairs*, 9 (4), 31- 45

³ Zeglod, Y. O. (2021). Masquerade behind Public Project Scam, Lagos: Aderex Ltd

⁴ Zatman, D. J. (2017). A Collapsed State, *the Environmentalist*, 14 (3), 67 - 87

⁵ Goulet, R. U. (2021). Bargaining Power, Contract and Conflict, Routeledge: New York

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Yusuf, S. T. et al. (2017). Erratic Policy Making, Implementation and Adoption of Incremental Model: Nigeria Example, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5 (1), 78 -94

⁸ Wole, A. H. (2018). Political Crises and Mismanagement of Contract Funds in Parts of Nigeria, *Journal of Arts and Culture*, 34, 78 -92

⁹ Ajibola, S. K. (2019). New Technology and Project Execution in Northern Nigeria, *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, 56 (3), 279 - 284

¹⁰ Ibid pg.282

¹¹ Akinola, A. S. (2021). Collapse of Buildings in Lagos and Quality Assurance (2011 - 2016), *Africa Development*, 33 (2), 44- 76

instances whereby road construction starts with a quoted specification but becomes bad mid-way and end well; books productions are combination of good and bad qualities. School buildings are also admixture of good and bad work. In summary, many government projects are not delivered with quality materials, and thereby crippling state development (Abilor, 2018)¹². Therefore, the public is the victim, that are cheated when public projects are poor delivered.

Contending Forces in Project Failure

Several forces are working against prompt, accurate and appropriate delivery of public projects. Any time the forces are at play, they hinder public projects from appropriate benefits by members of the public. Some of these forces emanate from state actors or initiators of the projects. Other forces are from outside, that is, members of the public or beneficiaries of the projects. The contending forces are either deliberately made to distort the project output or created by circumstances not factored into the project processes. In order to have good projects that would ensure there is value for the money earmarked, it is apposite that we interrogate these forces, discuss their impacts, and the destruction they wreck on public projects delivery. Stakeholders in public projects, either as awardees, contractors and beneficiaries should not handle the forces with levity. According to Sull (2019)¹³, the forces are part of public project execution over the years, and not given the required attention they deserve.

Irrespective of the type of project, project initiators need to consider availability of required funds. On several occasions, funds required for a specific project are not properly budgeted. Thus, unavailability of funds compromised the quality of projects in Nigeria. Many times, projects awardees know that this is important, but sometimes accepted the project offer with a lower sum, that is not able to do the project well at the detriment of quality. Whether the president, governor, minister, commissioner is the executor he might not have ulterior motive to divert the funds meant for the project but might under-budget. He might not be corrupt to request for any return from the contractor but intentionally negotiates for a lower sum that is unlikely to complete a desirable quality project. The executor, therefore, pleads for lesser project sum for want of funds. In the end, what he/she gets in return because of the low pay would certainly be a low-quality project. The idea of conserving more funds at the expense of awarded projects results in sub-standard and inferior public projects.

There is also “just do something” force. Many project awardees do not care to have their names written in gold. They are simply not interested in any legacy. Instead, they just wish they do something and make money from the process. These ten “per centers”, to use the words of Gunther¹⁴, are desperate project-

¹² Abilor, G. K. (2018). Clashes, Awards of Contract and Court Interpretations in Selected Public Projects, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 35 (2), 89 – 104

¹³ Sull, M. K. (2019). *Public Projects and Challenges of Funding in Malaysia*, Berkeley: The University of California Press

¹⁴ Gunther, R. (2022). *Project Award, Construction and Maintenance*, Batmore: The John Hopkins Press

hungers that look for all means to embark on projects, but are not after the success of the project. The project to them, are just means to making money (Haide, 2021)¹⁵. As they award the projects, they demand for a percentage of return from the contractor, which is sometimes not negotiable. The percentage return is to be paid up-front. In their words, they cheerfully reiterate, “they are the one giving you contract, we are also the one to certify it, so this is the sum I want” (Milky, 2019)¹⁶ When the contractor has paid such percentage, he/she has no option than to just do “something”. Therefore, doing ‘something’ can never be in the interest of Nigerians. It would mean to compromise the standard.

Similarly, there is the desperation for getting a project executed at all cost by ones firm without appreciable profit margin. In contractual business, the motive is to gain (making profit). The same motive also goes to contractors. There are instances when contractors are aware that they will not deliver a good project because their profit margin is low and still accept such project award. He/she will not hesitate to accept such projects, but instead of not making a good profit would just do “something”. Thus, mid-way into the execution of such project, the contractor would begin to complain. At times, some even accepts an offer knowing fully well that he/she would not do it well but just to make little gains only to make ends meet. It is also a common parlance in wrong project execution to hear “this I have stamped, you may not consider me for another one, and I do not care”¹⁷. When contractors are unlikely to win future contract, the bad one is already a loss and waste of public fund. The masses still suffer the loss in the end.

It is also not strange to see project initiator deliberately awarding projects to incompetent or in-experienced contractors. This could be due to ‘party consideration’. It is true projects are advertised and billed for. The project-awardees might not ask for any percentage return, but deliberately not pick the best contractor because of unfair political consideration. The state actors then deploy all means to ensure his preferred (anointed contractor) wins the contract. Thus, party politics compromised quality jobs and nothing will happen. The party in power uses every tactics to protect the dis-satisfied project. In the end, there will not be value for the money spent on the project. The public, therefore, grab with whatever is handed over to government.

There is also the sub-letting or outright sale of project to another contractor for execution. According to Johnson¹⁸, many old and ill-fated contractors that events have overtaken are fond of this practice. Most contractors in this category are well known, but are either no longer in vogue or old on the job. Because of their past integrity on the job, they easily get new contracts but do not have the wherewithal to implement them. Some of them do not have the

¹⁵ Haide, J. F. (2021). Due Process, Quality Control and Government Projects in Kwara State, Nigeria, *Malaysian Environmental Study*, 16 (2), 105 – 112

¹⁶ Milky, B. J. (2019). Public Project, Party Politics and Conflict of Interest in Nigeria, *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 18 (3), 37 – 58

¹⁷ Suberu, F. T. (2022). Public Attitude to Public Projects Maintenance, *the Nigerian Journal of Political Behaviour*, 7 (2), 67 – 8

¹⁸ Johnson, S. (2016). Funding Major Projects by Nigerian Government, *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 16 (2), 113 -123

required strength to monitor the project, money to implement it or current equipment to get it properly done. They either sell it to another contractor or collaborate with a partner. When they sell the contract out rightly, it is often on the high side. The sharing formula that some of them requested could be so high to the extent that the project will delay until there is a buyer. Some aged contractors in this category even save the mobilization funds, only to come up later and complain that the funds is not enough for the project, when in reality, they have not started anything or have started shabbily. In the end, they mess up the project, and discourage the project initiator.

In another vein, there are cases of the use of fake materials for projects. Some contractors deliberately use only fake materials, and others mix fake material with original ones. There is also the rush to cover up the fake and sub-standard items with the connivance of those in power (Goulet, 2021)¹⁹. When projects are products of fake materials, they do not give appropriate yield to public expectation. In some cases, the use of fake materials might not be deliberate. At times, contractors find it difficult to get original raw materials. However, instead of being patient, such contractors use what they could quickly get, because of unstable market price. Truly, rapid inflation might make the approved sum for the contract to be insufficient. Thus, a contractor quickly opts for fake material, at the expenses of members of the public, who are beneficiaries.

Some of the projects that government did do not follow appropriate procedures. This affects structural engineering works, as there is neglect of procedures or times required for a particular stage of the construction before the next stage. For example, bridges or culverts that require three months can be use much earlier than the time requirement. It is also rampant to see contractors tarring roads at mid-night or during a heavy rainfall in order to meet up a deadline. Particular stage of the construction before the next stage. For example, bridges or culverts that require three months can be use much earlier than the time requirement. It is also rampant to see contractors tarring roads at mid-night or during a heavy rainfall in order to meet up a deadline. Road works should not much be done during raining season but severally worked upon during raining season, which is not appropriate²⁰. Residents of a place might not be able to bear the pains of no alternate routes when roads are under construction. Sometimes, the rush might be to meet up with handing over date of a newly elected official or outgoing one, a response to residents' pains. School building, block laying or plastering of walls should be minimal when heavy rain is on. There have been instances of plastering and painting of public structures (buildings) almost simultaneously. Anti-corruption crusade could also be the one that compelled a contractor to rush back to site before a project is hurriedly completed. Such inordinate rush would not result in having quality job but just "anything". On the long run, such hasty projects do not last long or benefit the masses.

Above all, there is deliberate sabotage by some people because of political rivalry. Rival political opponents are sometimes fond of this. Opposition party

¹⁹ Goulet, R. U. (2021). *Bargaining Power, Contract and Conflict*, Routedledge: New York

²⁰ Sull, M. K. (2019). *Public Projects and Challenges of Funding in Malaysia*, Berkeley: The University of California Press

members deliberately sabotage public projects to discredit a serving political official. This sometimes comes up when civil transition is around the corner²¹. The motive is to make sure that there is no feasible project or achievement for canvassing elections. They deliberately remove or destroy projects of a ruling government to dislodge it from office. In another vein, many opposition party members in the same constituent may not want a political group, who are likely to be re-elected if they have some legacies (projects) that could attract votes. In other words, to reduce the popularity of a rival serving politician, an opposition party might arrange to destroy ongoing project, to enable them use the person's non-performance as basis of campaign. In some situation, the lapses in the executed project, if it is invariably completed might be basis of campaign.

Intrigues of Public Officers that Subvert Public Projects

The challenge of not having a public project actualized in line with the set standard is always disheartening. The attitude of public officials cannot be divorced from project failure. Disposition of policy initiator has been linked to failure of some public projects from meeting up the standard. Project initiators knowingly or unknowingly have been part of the challenges that kill project initiatives. For instance, some policy initiator labels public project as a personal one. For policy initiative to achieve the desired motive, all public projects must be tagged "public." It is a common thing, especially among politicians in Nigeria to see them naming public projects in their names. Some stakeholders, who do not like such personal aggrandizement, could destroy such project. Destroying the project is a loss to the public.

In addition, projects on direct labour do not have the required work force needs. They do also not have proper monitoring. Usually, project contractors must bid for projects through a fair and open tender. The essence of doing so is to allow for a competitive bidding, and follow due process. This is to allow government picks the best among the numerous tenders. However, paucity of funds halts the use of tender. Instead of a fair tender, government implements the project itself on direct labor. Members of the public do not embrace direct labour projects due to observed anomalies that often trail them²². To some policy analyst, direct labor projects are conduit-pipe to drain public funds. It is not to say that carrier officers who could successfully implement the projects are not skillful enough, but at times do not display the needed charisma for accelerated delivery. Therefore, they keep their expertise. Up-to-date equipment are also not available to some of them, while others are not current in their area of specialization. In some cases when the required equipment is available, it can develop a sudden fault; because they are not frequently used. In view of this, they could not deliver the project targets that are required.

Many times, there is no mandatory policy ideology that policy actor should follow. Under a democratic regime, party manifestoes should translate to public projects. Similar level of government within a geographical zone should be able to follow a common path, by pursuing identical projects that would enhance the

²¹ Ibid

²² Tigor, B. J. (2019). Expertise, Award of Public Contract and Role of Career Officers in Liberia Cairo, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32 (2), 88 - 94

living standard of the people. The similar level of government ought to influence one another positively²³. Even with the variation in financial capacity of tiers of government, they could still have common focus that political party would have outlined as its manifestoes. Sadly, manifestoes only serve as campaign tools; they do not 'fully' translate to projects of government. The variation makes elected public officers to pursue different projects that please them without minding the impact of such projects on people's life. In Nigeria, due to 'absence of party ideology', policy initiatives are more based on personal intuition of public actors. With such mindset, projects that ought to change people's life only turn out to be waste of public funds.

Policy priority is also sometimes for primordial purpose. Projects delivery is premised not on the good will it would bring on the people but simply because a project initiator wants something in his constituency. At times, political actors embark on construction of roads, establishment of higher institution, citing of solar lights and so on when they are needless in such areas or that point in time. The people project initiators represent lobby them for public projects. Projects are hence located in some places, not because those constituencies actually need them, at that point in time, but because they have somebody in power. It is unfortunate that they do not bother whether those things will have influence on the people living in those areas or not. This has made projects that worth millions of naira in areas that cannot sustain them. There are several boreholes in rural areas, where there is no electricity.

Several other public projects such as gari factory, oil-processing firm, fruit processing company in areas just because that is where a governor, minister or commissioner comes from, whereas there are no raw materials required for those facilities to be productive. For instance, when a government cites gari firm in areas that lack cassava, or oil processing firm in areas that lack palm trees, or Beverages Company where there is no coffee or cocoa plants amount to waste of funds. Such venture cannot do the public much good.

Poor maintenance culture equally makes public projects to degenerate. A number of good projects suffer decline due to poor maintenance. It is rampant to see abandoned project just because it requires small amount of money for maintenance. State actors attentions are inadequate to public projects until millions of naira are required to put them back to use. There are huge losses when roads that need little asphalt patching develop into deep gully. Classrooms that required little iron sheets, for instance, were preferred to be jettisoned and new bloc of classroom awarded. This calls for worry, when little amount of money is just needed to repair the abandoned one. Similar fate sometimes befalls vehicles, when government prefers to sell them because one of the tyres is not good. Bore holes that requires just a routine maintenance could be abandoned until it could not be repaired again. There is the general or deliberate negligent of public projects, because a past regime put them in place, until they become almost impossible to repair them.

²³ Suberu, F. T. (2022). Public Attitude to Public Projects Maintenance, *the Nigerian Journal of Political Behaviour*, 7 (2), 67 – 88

Bureaucracy or a rigid rule also affects the use public projects. Public projects that fall within the control of lower cadre officers (civil servants/elected politicians), who are incompetent to take a final decision on their maintenance until they are approved by higher officials make public projects un-useful. Sometimes, officials of government at higher levels delay approval for maintenance of public projects until such maintenance gets out of hands. The delays are in order to collect gratification or deliberate dilly-dally until a project rescue-mission is defeated. When junior government officials can discharge certain financial powers on maintenance, they still complain of paying returns, otherwise called bribe to higher levels. Thus, approval for what should ordinary be done within few days or weeks may not see the light of the day for months.

Disdain or hatred for award of contract with little sums of money also makes public projects to suffer. It appears public actors no longer have interest in contract that attracts little sums of money. It is common to see project that is not up to a million of naira suffering neglect. Public officials neglect public works that are not likely to fetch them enough rebates. The politicians call such projects non-profitable (Biezen, 2021)²⁴. The implication is that they would not make much gain from a project with little sums of money. In view of this belief, members of the public would suffer and wait until the project becomes fallow²⁵. Thinking like this therefore becomes worrisome. There is worry whether the welfare of the public that actually needs quick attention or the personal gain of public officials that should matter.

Another bad attitude is the rush for new inventions without satisfactory interrogation into means of sustaining them. The upsurge in technological innovations including projects construction is worrisome. There is need to be extra-careful in the choice of the use of technological equipment so as not to be victim of fake products or spare parts that daily flood Nigerian market. These new inventions are in all areas of human needs²⁶. Members of the public including government officials rush to use the new items. Unfortunately, most of them are not durable. People buy old equipment as new ones while others are entirely new but fake items, which are calamities to public projects. With huge sum of money, that some of those fake items consumed, they become mere decoration in the end. Several flashy government cars, office furniture, solar lights, electrical gadgets, office equipment, stationeries, and so on fall into this category.

Expected Roles of State Actors in Projects Pursuits

Government must strive to ensure it considers the wellbeing of the people in the provision of public facilities. To use the words of Adama²⁷, government owes a duty to make sure people enjoy public projects or facilities put in place

²⁴ Biezen, V. O. (2021). Financing Public Projects and Looting of Public Treasury in Nigeria, *African Journal of Economics*, 5 (4), 67 – 86

²⁵ Suberu, F. T. (2022). Public Attitude to Public Projects Maintenance, *the Nigerian Journal of Political Behaviour*, 7 (2), 67 – 88

²⁶ Suberu, F. T. (2022). Public Attitude to Public Projects Maintenance, *the Nigerian Journal of Political Behaviour*, 7 (2), 67 – 88

²⁷ Adama, O. (2021). Abuja is not for the Poor: Street Wending and the Politics of Public Space, *Geoforum*, 109, 14 - 23

through public funds. It is the responsibilities of government to provide quality things for the people. In view of the above, public funds must be used to provide succor for the citizenry. Life is better for everyone, when basic facilities, both in quality and quantity are available for all²⁸. The joy of everyone lies in the fact that there is value for public funds. In view of the desire for improved living, all public projects must be in good standard and justify public funds allocated to them. Given the above, people expect state actors to provide and maintain public projects to discharge their roles in a way that members of the public enjoy the gain²⁹. The followings are few things the state actors (executive, legislature and judiciary) must do to bring the best out of public projects.

State actors must have the genuine interest of the public in mind. The genuine interest of members of the public is the only thing that will compel state actors to give the best in terms of project provision and maintenance. The only thing that can define 'genuine interest' is the desire that people must live well³⁰. The state actors must not only strive for a better life for elite alone, but also ensure that others, who are not in any elective position, equally live happily. If genuine commitment to put qualitative and quantitative projects in place becomes a worthy cause, everyone will enjoy life. Thus, the wellbeing of the citizens should be a motivating preference to public officials in provision of facilities.

Public officials that award contracts must ensure there is no waste. Government officials must eradicate any waste in public realm no matter how little. Facilities, resources and assets of government need proper care and preservation because waste is retrogressive. It also brings people back, wastes time, energy, and resources (money or personnel). When government dissipates time, energy, resources, and personnel, it does not bring development. In addition, dissipation of time, resources kills ambition³¹. We must follow up on all funds allocation in order to ensure that all ways that could result in waste of public funds are blocked.

All elected representatives must be close to their constituents. People's needs must sought by sampling public opinion in constituent's areas. Many government facilities that government had spent billions of naira upon are not satisfactorily used. Good projects that government had spent billions of naira to put in place are badly used admiration against satisfactorily by members of the public, because they do not meet their immediate needs. It is necessary that there must be utilization from members of the public for projects executed by the state. As remarked, the only thing that can lead to appreciation of a project by members of the public is when such projects meet their immediate needs³². This is why government through the elected representatives must be close to their constituents and sensitive to their immediate needs.

²⁸ Schlesinger, B. L. (2020). Public Projects in Europe, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

²⁹ Sambo, A. (2015). what is Public Policy? In R. Anifowose (Eds.) Elements of Politics, Lagos: Sam Iroanusi Publication

³⁰ Ibid pg. 49

³¹ Sulk, P. W. (2018). New Trends of Corruption: Public Project, a Case Study, *Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16 (3), 126 – 138

³² Ibid pg. 128

The interest of the public should be the motive behind all planned and completed projects. There is joy among members of the public when public officials put public –spirit in everything they do while in public office. In view of this, state actors must try as much as possible to build in the spirit of confidence in public projects. Sometimes, government can try to seek financial commitment from members of the public, no matter how small to build public commitment in its projects. If government finances the whole project, the public must be able to see the project as belonging to them. Building in public spirit in projects would make them to be safe in public hands. People loot, abandon, or destroy public projects because they do not serve public needs (Sull, 2019)³³ Few ways to gain public spirit in public projects are for people to be working or having access to the services the project provides. Essentially, the services in such place must be affordable to people around the area. For instance, a public health center or school that recruits cleaners or guards would have first-hand information that is likely to protect and elongate life span of the facilities. If a police station truly secures a community, the public will see to its improvement from time to time.

It is important, as well, that government strives for the best. Members of the public are now more aware and have taste for good things. Public project, while going through implementation should always be the best³⁴. State actors must put up the state-of-the-art facilities, both in outlook and longevity. From the outset, public projects must attract the people. Public projects are in serviceable ends when members of the public see it as fantastic. When a project is not at its best, patched from the outset, it will not attract people. This is why schools, roads, bridges and so on need appropriate handling. For instance, many newly constructed overhead bridges in Osun, Ogun, Kogi and Oyo states have been condemned in time past by members of the public as death traps. It took several media briefings before the states could douse the tension, and eradicate the misgivings over the bridges.

State actors should never discriminate. Any project, be it ongoing or completed should be seen as public asset, that belong to everyone. Public projects demand support of elected, traditional, community leaders and other stakeholders, not minding which political party puts them in place. The idea of destroying public projects because we do not like the face of the initiator is a dis-service to public goodness. It is important that state actors avoid writing personal names on public properties. The fact that public projects are government properties means they belong to everyone. It requires that state actors put self-serving attitude and mentality behind them. This has led to poor maintenance of public projects by succeeding regimes.

³³ Sull, M. K. (2019). *Public Projects and Challenges of Funding in Malaysia*, Berkeley: The University of California Press

³⁴ Abilor, G. K. (2018). Clashes, Awards of Contract and Court Interpretations in Selected Public Projects, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 35 (2), 89 – 104

Opportunities for Public Projects in Nigeria

Considering the state of things as regards Nigeria's public projects provision, there exist greater prospects that supposed to be advantages to Nigerians, in order for their wellbeing to be properly catered for in public projects matters. We discuss some of such opportunities in this section. One, Nigeria is a democratic state that preaches free and fair election, human rights, rule of law, separation of power, due process, constitutionalism, and equality. Unlike a military regime, where soldiers do things by force, hastily and without decorum for human rights, democracy that Nigeria subscribes to is an opportunity for people to express their likes and dislikes³⁵. Thus, the Nigerian public should have opportunity to request for projects that would bring those benefits through public opinion. Current democratic practice, since 29th May, 1999 ought to enable the Nigerians request for projects that would change their lives.

Nigeria's democratic system presupposes that the citizens should have a say on issues that affect their welfare. Doing this is an avenue to having a people-oriented policy³⁶. Democracy should bring about a smooth change of government, and enable the people to change a regime that is not keen on people's welfare³⁷. In a way, Nigeria should be able to use its population that is close to 180 million to bring about desirable changes in the direction of governance. Nigeria ought to have gone beyond sit down and look. To use the words of Gunther³⁸ votes of the people are to ensure that we vote or elect responsive representatives into our public offices. Nigeria's four-year periodic election and opportunity for a second term both at the national and sub-national levels is a good prospect for retaining an elected representative, who delivers on his promises. As posited by Yusuffet al.³⁹, election period is also an opportunity to remove a representative who does not care about the welfare of the people. Nigerians should as well use the election time to change any public official who does not do well in the first term. The electorates have the opportunity of using power of the ballot to remove any political office holder, who feels unconcerned about the welfare of the people. Government officials have a reasonable time to plan and implement their policies for the wellbeing of the masses⁴⁰. The electorates can as well vote out corrupt officials who are not willing to provide laudable projects for the people.

In addition, the country operates a presidential system of government, where checks and balances are operational. In the system, one organ of government

³⁵ Sulk, P. W. (2018). New Trends of Corruption: Public Project, a Case Study, *Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16 (3), 126 – 138

³⁶ Sulk, P. W. (2018). New Trends of Corruption: Public Project, a Case Study, *Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16 (3), 126 – 138

³⁷ Dayoor, D. N. (2018). Public Project, Safety and Welfare in Selected West African Countries: A Comparative Analysis, *Entrepreneurial Journal of Engineering*, 6 (12), 65 – 78

³⁸ Gunther, R. (2022). Project Award, Construction and Maintenance, Batmore: The John Hopkins Press

³⁹ Yusuf, S. T. et al. (2017). Erratic Policy Making, Implementation and Adoption of Incremental Model: Nigeria Example, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5 (1), 78 -94

⁴⁰ Akinola, A. S. (2021). Collapse of Buildings in Lagos and Quality Assurance (2011 – 2016), *Africa Development*, 33 (2), 44- 76

should be able to check the other. There is a fair use of separation of power among the three organs of government and not concentrated in one organ of government. Such separation is to ensure that there is no abuse of power by any organ of government in policy formulation, or implementation and that no organ of government abuses its office⁴¹. The lawmakers at national and sub-national entities should use their oversight functions discretely. We expect the legislature to discharge oversight functions but not overstretching it for monetary or any primordial gain. The state actors must ensure the use of the provisions of the constitution. It is important lawmakers deploy the state constitution to monitor project-compliant with regard to tender specification. Lawmakers should work in public interest rather than for 'share-to-share' syndrome⁴². Nigerians will gain a lot and have a robust project if lawmakers appropriately use oversight functions on its projects thrusts. For instance, projects carried out by the president, ministers, commissioners, and officials of government, both at the national and subnational levels require legislative oversight⁴³. Best results will emerge if the legislature faithfully delivers on its mandates.

Education is a vital agent of development, if allowed to fulfill its role. With several colleges of education, polytechnics and universities including research institutes in the country, our project pursuits should be robust. The National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure charged with the coordination of research and development of technologies relevant to small and medium enterprises should be able to chart a good course for the country's engineering work. There is also the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research at Ibadan that conducts social and economic policy primarily for the national government. According to Terry⁴⁴, there are sixty-nine research institutes in Nigeria. Scholars, academics and students daily carry out researches that are able to solve our challenges. It is expedient that most public projects in place in the early 1980s and late 1990s, such as Operation Feed the Nation and Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure, DIFRI were results of consultations with Nigeria's research institutes. In addition, the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Study in Kuru, Jos, is to train leading political, administrative and bureaucratic personnel for the required working etiquettes.

Nigeria has appreciable skilled bureaucrats and officials that have been trained over the years and trainable. Policy outputs from these experts should be helpful to having public-driven projects. The country can sufficiently tap from the knowledge base of its skilled work force for maximal gain. The trainings and workshops for the high-ranking elected and appointed political, and public servants are to bring out the best in them given the prerequisite for the recognition of transparency, accountability, commitment, efficiency,

⁴¹ Tigor, B. J. (2019). Expertise, Award of Public Contract and Role of Career Officers in Liberia Cairo, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32 (2), 88 – 94

⁴² Tigor, B. J. (2019). Expertise, Award of Public Contract and Role of Career Officers in Liberia Cairo, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 32 (2), 88 – 94

⁴³ Sambo, A. (2015). what is Public Policy? In R. Anifowose (Eds.) Elements of Politics, Lagos: Sam IroanusiPpublication

⁴⁴ Terry, W. H. (2022). Award of Contract, Quality Control and Maintenance in Isreal, *AJournal of Opinion on World Affairs*, 9 (4), 31- 45

effectiveness and service delivery. Besides, the country has several professors, scholars and public commentators and bureaucrats for the country's project drives. Nigerians can also express their interest, satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The social media is a public space for Nigerians to explore to express their desires⁴⁵. Government can easily reach its people through interviews and expression of opinions on twitter, face-book, and websites. There is a popular saying now that 'if you see something, say something.' There are ample chances for Nigerians to put up information that is capable of sustaining public projects for the wellbeing of a common person. There are possibilities of exposing any deceptive way of implementing public projects. Nigerians can petition anti-graft agencies on corrupt practices of government or contractors through the social media for prosecution. Thus, government officials could easily get feedbacks on their activities, including projects done.

Presently, there are about eighteen political parties from which the ruling All Progressive Congress {APC} emerged at the national level. The People's Democratic Party has sizeable number of supporters as a main opposition party at the national level in Nigeria. This should be very good opportunity to play its role of being a versatile watchdog on the ruling party and the projects its implements. The multi-party system that Nigeria operates supposed to be good opportunity for fair competition. The country's party system should spur manifestoes that will bring about veritable projects for the wellbeing of Nigerians. It is germane that opposition political parties play their roles of ensuring fantastic projects that are capable of meeting the yearnings of Nigerians are the outputs of huge yearly budgets that government allocates for capital projects. Aside of numerous political parties, there are interest groups, labor unions and civil society groups that should constantly put the ruling government on its toe, so that it could do well.

Nigeria's constitution is written, supreme and rigid. There should not be abuse of power or office. The constitution defines the rights, and limits of government powers and functions. All public projects must have implementation monitoring units. It should be easy to contact government officials, if we have a genuine report on any shady deal of a contractor. All public projects should have identity of project client and contractor⁴⁶. This is a good avenue to know whom to contact for any dissatisfaction on ongoing project. If we remain silent, the consequence will be borne by everyone in the country. Above all, Nigeria is blessed economic resources that can earn the country enormous wealth. Aside from petroleum, Nigeria is lucky to have natural gas, tin, ore, coal, limestone, zinc and fertile land. Nigerian authority at different levels should make efforts to explore several redundant resources appropriately for the good of everyone. The resources ought to serve as catalyst to pave way for the provision of water, and construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of feeder road.

⁴⁵ Bizzy, J. (2021). Ethical Consideration and Public Project Management, Cambridge University Press

⁴⁶ Cole, D. T. (2018). Fake Raw Materials and Connivance of State Actors in Public Projects, *Journal of Social Work*, 5 (3), 22 – 38

Conclusion

The provision of public projects in Nigeria is not presently satisfactory. In terms of quality and quantity of public projects, Nigeria is at low ebb. Thus, public projects have not satisfied the wellbeing of Nigerians. Public projects production is in a state of decline and depression. Many public projects have not affected positively the lives of Nigerians. Many public projects are yet to satisfy the yearnings of Nigerians. The observable anomalies in the current provision and utilization of few public projects in place suggest that members of the public (the masses) have not substantially benefited from enormous financial expenses committed to Nigerian public projects. The implication of this is that project initiators have not achieved the motive for which public projects inaugurated, which should be "public satisfaction.

Recommendations

It is important to consider a number of policy options that public projects in Nigeria require in order to meet peoples' needs. With the appalling state of public projects in Nigeria, public policy drive needs be rejig towards exploring opportunities that are open in the country, which include the followings. All public projects need to be adequately prioritized. Given the fact that rural and urban areas, educated and non-educated, civil servants and artisans may not need the same thing at the same time, it is important that state actors weigh the options before them to determine things that members of the public need at every point in time. It is certain that Nigerians are not expecting the same thing from government at the same time; hence, desires of the people must accommodate all shades of opinion. By doing this, nobody would be left out or have open vengeance for public projects provision

This is the time for all Nigerians to develop a civic culture of protecting public projects as 'common assets.' If Nigerians have a new orientation that all public projects are from public treasury, and for the good of all, then our priority would be higher to protecting them. The new orientation would also make everyone to understand that all wastes, destruction and abandonment of public projects are retrogressive. Hence, all hands must be on deck to prevent wastes in terms of funds or time.

State actors or project initiators should desist from tagging public projects as personal. The National Assembly needs to initiate a legislation that will prevent tagging public projects in personal names. Henceforth, it should become a criminal act for any politician to tag a public project in his name or that of his political father. If there will be need to do otherwise, it must requires legislative approval. If public projects must have personal insignia at all, the parliament must approve such decision. All states must domesticate such laws after its enactment at the national level.

State actors must be prudent to pursue feasible projects. State actors must drop all white elephant projects that only drain public. The parliament must stand firm to ensure that public projects are no longer tunnels for draining public funds. The lawmakers must faithfully discharge its oversight functions.

Execution of public projects should no longer be avenue for sharing the national cake. All projects that do not do people much good should be discouraged.

It is important we put efforts in place to ensure that all public projects embarked upon are completed. Therefore, government officials must properly plan all public projects such that once commenced they are not abandoned. Government must set aside enough funds to be sure that there is enough funds for a project up to completion stage before it commenced at all. This step is likely to prevent abandonment of projects on the account of poor funding. It is high time the National Assembly made a law that will prohibit abandonment of public projects. It will also require projects to commence when the required funds to complete them are fully available. If, for any reason, incomplete projects are in place towards the end of a regime, the initiator of such projects should transmit the reason(s), in writing, to the parliament for consideration. A project should not commence on the probability of securing a second term in office. Having, transmitted the reasons for inability to complete a project to the lawmaker, and accepted through a resolution; it must be binding on the succeeding regime, as a matter of compulsion to complete the project. Adequate monitoring of all public funds on projects is needful to avoid waste.

The idea of direct labor must be re-visited. It is more or less an attempt to divert public funds. Direct labor projects must conform to quality assurance. A good number of years should be for 'guarantee-period.' Any project, be it awarded or direct labor, must meet the guarantee-period, failure which a refund to put the project back into use must be made. Community leaders, traditional rulers, and civil society groups must be assertive to report any observed shady deal in the execution of public projects to the lawmaker. It should become a serious offence to find an abandoned or un-used project in any community. Except, where the stakeholders in such areas have reported an abandoned project to government, they should be liable for prosecution.

The overhead cost on governance is too much. This has no doubt made provisions of public project a mirage. It is necessary to reduce the overhead cost of political office holders. It is high time; everyone rose against the heavy payments of political officers. Nigeria needs to reduce the heavily monetized politics, especially those for nomination forms, campaign and buying of votes. When politicians spend heavily before they win elections into political office, award of projects remains one of the sure ways they explore to make monetary gain of their expenses. This is why politicians need to spend less. We need to implement existing electoral law on the limit to which a contender should spend. Taking this step would be a right decision to help the commoners.