ACCELERATING PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH THE MANAGEMENT OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATONS IN NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The practice of inter-governmental relations (IGR) and its management has become an important element for facilitating service delivery in the public service. This paper departs from the premise that IGR presents an opportunity for improved service delivery that is yet to be fully harnessed. In order to fully actualise the facilitative potential that is inherent in IGR, it has become essential to identify critical elements that can assist public administration practitioners to harness the possible gains that can be made through effective IGR management. These critical elements are identified in this article and are linked to the generic activities of public administration which are described as involving decision-making, planning, advising, co-ordination, conciliation, arbitration, command and data gathering through which government carries out its responsibilities.

The article commences with an overview of the case study contexts – the Nigerian public service and the South African public service. This contextualisation provides an opportunity to highlight and present cross-country findings (Ile, 2006: 146-196) that may assist in improving IGR effectiveness in both federalist and unitary states.

CONTEXTUALISING CURRENT PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

Nigerian and South African perspectives

The article commences with an overview of the case study contexts – the Nigerian public service and the South African public service. This contextualisation provides an opportunity to highlight and present cross-country findings (Ile, 2006: 146-196) that may assist in improving IGR effectiveness in both federalist and unitary states.

These two countries have been carefully selected as they exhibit some of the difficulties that several African countries have had to deal with. This relates to managing diversities (in a federalist structure as in the case of Nigeria and in a unitary style government as in the case of South Africa) including embracing ethnic, cultural, racial and religious tensions. It is important to note that over the years, there have been bold attempts to reform the public service in these countries and much has been written about these (Kuye 2006; Levy & Tapscott, 2001; Nnoli 2000). The current public service reform philosophies that shape service delivery in both countries are the Service Compact with all Nigerians (Servicom) and the Batho Pele principles of South Africa. However, much still needs to be done in understanding the factors or elements that facilitate effectiveness of IGR within the current reform initiatives.

The Servicom principles were introduced after a comprehensive public service review. According to the Office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Servicom is based on the principle that Nigeria can realise its full potential if citizens receive prompt and efficient services from the state. It requires a show of commitment and renewal, consideration for all the rights of Nigerians to enjoy economic and social advancement, and the need to deliver quality services in a dedicated manner that is fair, honest, effective and transparent. (http://wwwservenigeria.com/index.php?option =comcontent&task=view&id=5&itemid=6. Retrieved: 23 May 2006).

In South Africa, given the legacy of the apartheid government, there was a pressing need to reshape the manner in which services were delivered to millions of South Africans who were previously excluded or provided substandard services. The Batho Pele principles are about putting people first and aims to enhance the quality of services delivered in a manner that improves accessibility, efficiency and accountability to all recipients of public goods and services. Its key principles are: consultation with customers, adherence to set service standards; increased access to services; higher levels of courtesy; access to information about services; openness and transparency; the remedying of mistakes and failures; and the provision of value for money (Department of Public Service and Administration. http://www.info.gov.za/ aboutgov/publicadmin/ bathopele.htm. Retrieved: 23 May 2006).

This article argues that in order to achieve the desired goals or outcomes of the specific country reforms (i.e. Servicom and Batho Pele); one of the critical elements that must be strengthened is IGR. This is even more so given that there has been increased interaction among the different spheres of government within particular countries, making IGR more complex and intensive. Hence, Wright (1988: 467) describes IGR as a
"huge complex building under continual construction and reconstruction. The edifice has no single deliberate overall design or consistent architectural motif. There is a non-stop remodelling and renovation, plus minor and major internal repairs; there is even selective razing and often whole floors and wings are added".

The article is therefore not in search of an illusive, universal model for IGR, but rather an attempt to understand the intricacies of the management of IGR with a view to making interpretations that smooth out complexities and ensure improved co-ordination of the relationships among governments at different spheres.

In each of the selected countries, four ministries/departments of government were investigated. Their workings were analysed with a view to determining, among other things, the value that IGR brings in addressing service backlogs. In Nigeria, selected activities of the following ministries were investigated: the Ministry of Steel and Power (PHCN), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Petroleum Resources.

In South Africa, the departments selected were the Department of Housing, the Department of Health, the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the Department of Agriculture.

CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSES

In all systems of government (federal, confederal and unitary), there will be some form of relationship between the national government (centre) and the regional governments (periphery). This relationship could be in the form of de-concentration, decentralisation or the devolution of roles as mandated by the constitution of the country. In the selected countries, the relationship between the federal, state or local governments (as in the case of Nigeria, on the one hand) and the relationship between the national, provincial and local government (as in the case of South Africa, on the other hand) has significantly demonstrated that the nature and management of these governmental relationships can affect service delivery.

The effectiveness of decentralisation lies in the strength of the IGR system in a particular country. If there is a weak or ineffective IGR mechanism at one level of government, it may result in government's total or partial inability to achieve the ambitious objectives set. Ademolekun (1999: 50-52) argues that the necessity for decentralisation in modern governments accrues from:

- the need for governments to be visible at all levels and be accountable for delivery or non-delivery of services;
- the failure of the centralised state to achieve balanced socio-economic development; and
- the importance of ensuring that administrators understand the contexts in which they operate and the needs of the people they serve.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS FOR IGR EFFECTIVENESS IN BOTH COUNTRIES

The analyses of selected activities of the selected ministries or departments suggest that the effective management of IGR requires a mix of critical elements. These elements have been identified by Ile (2006: 200-211) as commitment, communication, co-ordination, capacity, planning, policy management, project management and leadership. IGR management, as underpinned by the crucial elements identified are presented in the configured figure and formula below:

Figure 6 - Emerging critical elements impacting on the management of IGR
Successful management of IGR = C+ 3C+ 3P+ L
Where:
    C = commitment (and a critical element hence it stands alone);
    3C = communication, co-ordination, capacity;
    3P = project management, planning, policy management; and
    L = leadership.

Commitment

Commitment is a critical element for the effective management of IGR. This relates to the will of the political and administrative class to achieve a common goal. This element provides the springboard from which all other elements must depart. Suberu (1999: 91) succinctly captures Nigeria as "a federation of enormous sociological and cultural diversity ... the federation's peculiar volatile character derives from its vortex of combustible regional, ethnic and religious cleavages" which has been categorised along various divides. The nature of the centralist structure of government in Nigeria has emerged over time, making the centre very attractive and further leading to the fragmentation of territories through the creation of several weak states, whose input has generally been minimal.

In the South African scenario, it is argued that co-operative government would count for nothing if provinces and municipalities are being told what to do, do not take ownership and are not committed to programmes seen to be from the national sphere. This further reinforces the divides between centre and periphery, making it extremely difficult for players (all levels or spheres of government) to commit to a common course. What has evolved is a weak relationship between spheres, where the level of commitment across all provinces and municipalities cannot be said to be uniform. What has emerged from the above is that the nature of intergovernmental relations is IGr (with a weak emphasis on relationship) rather than IGR, due to inadequate commitment, and ultimately, this level of commitment is translated to weak deliverables.

Communication

Communication has to be effective to have the desired impact on service delivery. An effective communication is one that ensures that the intended message reaches the receiver. In the public service, Levy and Tapscott (2001: 88), note that the executive and administration must communicate better as this builds trust within the sector. Poor communication may lead to service delivery being affected, diminish trust among public officials, and plummeting legitimacy in the relations between citizens and the executive (Wright, 1988: 43). Within that framework, building social partnerships must be understood as a process of trust production (Boguslaw, 2002: 47-48). The reliance on the effectiveness of communication within and across government levels/spheres could lead to high levels of co-operation in the public service, as national, state, provincial or local government and citizens, collectively form a problem-solving group, bringing about increased trust and refined relationships through communication.

Furthermore, the value of communication is critical, as in all relationships, because it helps in the resolution of conflicts and in dealing with contentious issues. In this regard, Rapoo (1995:25) notes, however, that

"conflicts between the tiers of government are not necessarily a threat to the democratic order; on the contrary, some would see them as a sign of healthy pluralism and as evidence that the system is succeeding in creating the competing centres of power that are essential to democracy".

However, conflicts need to be proactively managed through open and transparent communication processes, if the IGR effectiveness is to be actualised.

Co-ordination

Co-ordination has emerged as one of the critical elements that could improve the chances of service delivery success. Service delivery in the realm of public service is anchored on the devolution of responsibilities away from centralised delivery institutions (Kaul, 2003:23). Macrae and Pitt (1985:197-198) further note that in order to attain strategic effectiveness in government activities, it is important to seek harmonisation in the management of bureaucratic or governmental complexities. This harmonisation can be brought about by sound co-ordination across the various spheres/tiers through integrated strategies that will result in improved efficiency and effectiveness, benefits of economies of scale, resources optimisation, striving towards attainment of minimum standards, managing overlaps, ensuring alignment of processes and promoting skills transfer from capacitated levels or spheres of government to other weaker ones.

Nnoli (2000: 48) indicates that the lateral organisation of government institutions makes co-ordination of the activities of the various ministries and departments an important part of IGR. Within the activity of co-ordination, there are other sub-activities, for example, budgeting and development planning, that have to be dealt with as mechanisms for inter-ministerial co-ordination and these can be achieved through various activities and decisions. This implies that the state has to harness the totality of the various networks to ensure that the benefits of economies of scale are actualised through formal and informal mechanisms of IGR.

In South Africa, Chapter 3 of the 1996 Constitution promotes co-operative governance among the spheres of government. However, "it can be argued that while the architecture of the new democratic state is in place, yet in many areas of service delivery, the performance of the public service requires much improvement" (Towards a Ten Year Review, 2003:75). Similarly, the Premier of the Eastern Cape Province (http://www.info. gov.za/speeches/2006/060, retrieved 29 March 2006) noted that:

"A lot still has to be done to actualise government vision. In growing the efficiency of government, the thrust has been to strengthen the centre through sustained co-ordination and intention. Particular attention has been focused on harmonising the three spheres of government towards seamless service delivery. The programmes bundled in the Provincial Growth and Development Plan (PGDP) have provided fertile ground for effecting this form of integrated planning and implementation. Many lessons have been learnt and it is getting easier. However, more work lies ahead to fine tune the provincial model and to make sure that IGR structures are functional and bear tangible fruits. In particular constructing integrated development plans that embrace the delivery plans of all three spheres of government, including public entities must become the new way..."

Capacity

The management of manpower, budgeting and training needs have remained an enormous challenge as a result of the capacity limitations that are faced at various levels or spheres of government in both countries. The Nigerian Minister for Internal Affairs (1986: 11) openly admitted that his department was understaffed, resulting in capacity shortages that affected delivery. In the South African situation, the transfer of mandate without a corresponding transfer of funds together with an assessment of the human resource capacity of various spheres to deliver may have, at times, led to the government's inability to deliver. This situation is such that the blame cannot be laid squarely on one of the spheres. All spheres must take responsibility for it and work together, taking advantage of any IGR opportunities that may be present or even creating them in order to meet the expectations of the people. Furthermore, in South Africa, with regard to human resource capacity, both the IGR Audit and the Presidential Review Commission of 1998 recognised the importance of intergovernmental human relations as a political approach towards managing tensions in government (Levy & Tapscott, 2001: 11), as poor IGR co-ordination is frequently a problem of capacity and management rather than purely one of procedure. What this suggests, is that appropriate capacity has to be developed with regard to recognising the value of the human or individual element in the management of IGR. The skill of managing human relations in IGR is thus critical (particularly for senior administrators and executives), alongside capacity to efficiently and effectively spend funds allocated, and with due regard for issues pertaining to ethics and accountability.

Project management

While some gains have been achieved in certain governmental activities, efforts still need to be intensified to ensure that the huge delivery needs are met in both countries. The delivery challenges hinge on the performance of all levels of government with a need for operational efficiency and effectiveness. Systems that ensure that resources provided are efficiently and effectively utilised with the aid of project implementation may be critical, as is the development of appropriate monitoring tools. In South Africa, several project management challenges remain, especially in the housing sector. In the Nigerian context, Akobundu (1995: 8) notes that,

"we do not appear to have fashioned out a systematic and a clearly defined approach towards project implementation, let alone imbibing the culture. All efforts at ensuring effective project-monitoring have generally not yielded any meaningful results."

Planning

In order to deliver on promised and expected services, Oshisami and Dean (1999: 88) note that, for the system to work, there must be adequate contact between those who plan and those who are responsible for both budgeting and implementation. This makes the element of joint planning and consultation with relevant stakeholders a delivery imperative. With three spheres/tiers of government in both countries, the structure makes planning a very complex task, requiring effective communication and co-ordination. Ayida (1987:30-32) argues that for planning to be successful, the following elements have to be successfully managed:

- the will to plan;
- statistics;
- budget;
- co-ordination; and
- research and development.

The above may not be adequate but should also take into consideration the technical planning apparatus. In Nigeria, planning has been problematic as "past censuses were not only exaggerated, but claims were made that counts included fictitious elements"(Ajayi, 1985:9). Likewise in South Africa, a challenge remains of getting accurate and timely data and information, a position which may have also contributed to a number of failed or poorly executed projects. Planning therefore plays a pivotal role in ensuring the success of intergovernmental relations. In South Africa, the government has since introduced a National Planning Framework to enhance areas of strategic policy prioritisation and to improve the policy decisions of government (Towards a Ten Year Review, 2003:13). To ensure the alignment of service delivery at all spheres of government, the Provincial Growth and Development Plans (PGDP), for provinces and the Integrated Development Plans (IDP) for municipalities were introduced. Despite the introduction of these strategies, the integration of service delivery still faces some challenges.

Policy management

The development of a policy framework and its management are important. In South Africa, the IGR Framework Act, 2005, only came into being eleven years after the attainment of democratic government. This meant that most of the interactions (although broadly promoted by the Constitution) did not have the specific guidelines and muscle to ensure implementation. Macrae and Pitt (1985:197-198) note that in order to attain strategic effectiveness in government activities, alignment in the management of bureaucratic or governmental complexities, which can be brought about by a sound policy framework and implementation strategies, is vital.

In the Nigerian case, (given that Nigeria had been under military rule for over 22 years of its post-independence existence) the governance style that has emerged is one that stifles democratic values - such as participation on the part of officials and citizenry, and a culture of inclusivity. With the struggle for state power by the different polarised units, Udoji (1975: 157-166) argues that "there is a growing desire for participation at all levels and that local government has an important role in fostering rapid economic growth. Participation will thus decongest the centre and thereby free national leaders from the onerous details as well as bring management close to the site of operation".

He adds that the problems include the reconciliation of central government's responsibility for policy direction and its management of the inherent tensions in a manner that ensures effective performance and stakeholder participation in governance. This demonstrates the importance of the systems approach. Hence

it is argued by Almond, Powell & Mundt (1996: 44) that the system propensities approach, which determines a government's legitimacy rating by citizens, is likely to be more effective in making and implementing policies and in overcoming hardships in most modern societies. This approach requires an assessment of the extent to which the political and administrative systems are open, and participation is high, in public debates in an effort to shape the future of the country.

Furthermore, while it may appear that it makes senses for implementation and monitoring to be located within the same agency, (as they complement each other), this may not be the route to go, as separation of the roles could allow for greater levels of probity and accountability of resources deployed. The need for improved project monitoring and evaluation certainly remains one of the challenges that the present governments in Nigeria and South Africa have to grapple with and find solutions to or develop management strategies for.

In this regard, it is crucial that project management be strengthened through effective monitoring of implementation, especially with regard to developing a data base of tried and tested project partners who may be from the private sector. These need to be monitored in a bid to manage unscrupulous contractors and service providers who may defraud government; and systems have to be put in place to ensure that such elements are blacklisted as a deterrent to others.

Leadership

A weak relationship among the various tiers or spheres of government needs strategic leadership across the political and administrative spectrum. The question of striking a seamless interface between the political and administrative domains still remains an area of challenge for both Nigeria and South Africa. In the Federal Republic of Nigeria, leadership across the tiers of government are expected to play complementary roles. Ayida, (1987: 40-42) notes that the "role played by the federal government civil service in nation-building is essentially the role played by the state in the state civil service in the overall development of their respective states and the local government civil service in their respective areas".

In the South African case, what seems to emerge is that the current leadership is clear on its vision but there seems to be a dislocation between that top level of leadership and the middle/administrative leadership. Consequently, there are several challenges with policy implementation and frustrations over the pace of delivery which President Mbeki has pointed out in his State of the Nation address for two years in a row (i.e., 2004 and 2005).

Other elements related to leadership such as corruption by senior officials suggest the need to uphold ethical standards. If left unchecked, corruption will spread and become entrenched, a situation which is usually difficult to reverse. This is a complex problem that nevertheless has to be tackled as attitudes and values of both political leaders and appointed officials at the different levels of government has influenced the substance and style of IGR (Adamolekun, 1999: 104). Within the framework of the governance principles and philosophies, public officials must be publicly accountable and responsible for their activities. Both countries require accountable and responsible leadership that is committed to rooting out bribery and corruption in positions of power as indicated by David-West (1985:9), a former Nigerian Petroleum Minister who noted that "one heard about illicit oil, people making millions in oil, but a lot of the unethical behaviour were from people who were privileged to be in the corridors of power or who were linked to the seat of power".

The attitudes and values of some public servants are disturbing, as allegations of corruption and lack of accountability abound. In South Africa a range of non-delivery issues such as dissatisfaction with the poor or slow rate of housing delivery led to several country-wide riots in 2005.

In Business Report (2006), the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) is reported to have criticised the manner in which the housing grant was administered. This parliamentary financial watchdog noted that about R2,5 billion had been handed out as subsidies since 1994 from which the Auditor-General's investigation identified that R323 million had been spent on irregular applications. This included monies that were granted to employees who were earning salaries well above the subsidy assisted group, to people who had died, to people with invalid ID documents, duplicate payments, and payments to applicants under the age of 21. These inefficiencies were largely due to a weak system, as administrators could easily override any objections that the system had put forward. "These overrides talk to the heart of the matter, it is not a problem of capacity, it is a problem of system, it is an attitude, it is designed for corruption" (Dreyer, 2006: 1).

The current nature of the leadership is critical. For instance, it is clear that Nigeria has endured more military than democratic rulership since independence. This history has suffocated democratic and good governance principles such as accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the population. Ethical principles have been replaced with values that are autocratic in nature such as curtailment of constitutional rights and massive corruption. In essence, the country's leadership has exploited the resources of the country (effectively playing the exact role of the colonisers) for their own advantage and at the expense of the ruled. Given the deep-rooted unspoken leadership philosophy (of governments serving the ruled), it is little wonder that the general perception is that the public service in Nigeria is not there to serve but to be served.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

There may be different benefits and challenges in the management of IGR in various countries. However, some critical elements that underpin the success of such management have been identified and discussed in this paper. These will strengthen governmental systems, enable the achievement of the desired goals, minimise overlaps, create synergy, lead to higher levels of harmony among sub-systems, bring about the effective and efficient utilisation of resources, and improve co-ordination and integration.

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