

Making Public Service Reform a Reality in Nigeria

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Preamble

I want to start by paying tribute to the Africa Research Institute for giving me the great honour of delivering its 10th Anniversary lecture. My invitation to deliver this lecture and the courtesies I have been shown since my arrival from Abuja yesterday is totally in keeping with ARI's approach of giving Africans the platform to tell the story of Africa in their own voices, with first-hand knowledge, insight, dignity and respect. In the last 10 years, ARI has encouraged debate that has often gone against the grain, and ventilated research that has challenged accepted wisdom about Africa in the fields of Agriculture, Urban Development, Land Use, Governance, Institutions, Democracy, Human Development and Rule of Law. Ensuring that Africans have a platform to tell the story of Africa is an invaluable addition to academic and policy research, particularly as a review of twenty years of the application of management theories to developing countries found that 95% of these studies focused on developed countries, with only 5% trying to test the theories on developing countries (Hafsi and Farashahi, 2005).

We are all aware of the accepted wisdom about Path Dependence: the notion that the paths you have chosen in the past condition your future, espoused in popular books like 'Why Nations Fail. By the way, I look forward to books on how nations can succeed, which appear to be rarer. We are also familiar with large quantitative studies, complete with advanced econometrics, that seek to explain away Africa's issues with culture, history, geography and even weather. However, Africa very often sets its own rules. As an example, the Ebola pandemic was supposed to wipe out Nigeria. After all, it had made land fall in Lagos, a city with a population the size of London, New York and Paris put together, in a land mass that is only half of London.

The institutional weaknesses in healthcare and governance in Nigeria were said to be such that the Ebola devastation was supposed to be of Biblical proportions. But, seemingly inexplicably, it wasn't. Nigeria went from being denied the experimental ZMAP vaccine for Ebola by the United States to having the US Congress recommend that the American Government should learn from Nigeria how it successfully managed Ebola. Despite challenges in many areas, Nigeria's response to Ebola was held out as an example of good practice worldwide. It had institutional theorists scratching their heads and searching in vain for new theories to cover previous ones. Pliny the Elder was right: "There is always something new out of Africa." Richard Dowden was also right when he wrote about Lagos and Nigeria. He said:

"Impenetrable, incomprehensible to outsiders, Lagos survives. It pulsates. It grows. It works. So does Nigeria. By any law of political or social science it should have collapsed or disintegrated years ago. Indeed, it has been described as a failed state that works."

However, Nigeria exists on the same planet earth as other nations. Therefore, it is not immune to the laws of physics or basic common sense. So, if you fail to invest in electricity

infrastructure for 4 decades, you are unlikely to have stable electricity. If you fail to tackle corruption, it will become a binding constraint that will make sustainable development virtually impossible. As President Muhammadu Buhari warned, “If we don’t kill corruption, corruption will kill us.” So, while Africa often makes its own rules, it is also subject to certain universal rules.

My approach to this lecture will, therefore, be to examine certain key principles and concepts in the international public service reform and institutional change literature, and explore the extent to which they may or may not be supportable in our recent efforts to reform the public services in Nigeria. I am taking this approach in the hope that it would frame the debate better than simply having me claim a list of achievements, hoping that you would be surprised and delighted, while my heart palpitates, fearful that the whole thing could unravel at any time and I would be found out. We know that even in the most dysfunctional environments, pockets of effectiveness that deliver good public services exist. There’s nothing new there, and good news from Nigeria in this regard should not be that interesting. The more interesting thing is how it is possible to get anything done in such a difficult environment. That really is what I want to share today.

Institutions matter, but people matter more.

To set the context, let me start with Institutional Theory. President Obama once said; “Africa doesn’t need strongmen, it needs strong institutions.” Well, it takes strong men (and women) to build strong institutions. Strong men like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Nelson Mandela and Olusegun Obasanjo, and strong women like Angela Merkel, Rosa Parks, Margaret Thatcher, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Dora Akunyili.

As Nuhu Ribadu, the pioneer Chairman of Nigeria’s Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, once told me:

“You need to do ten times what is ordinary in this environment to get anything done. You need to be a little crazy.”¹

In determining what should guide my approach in seeking to reform Nigeria’s public services, I was faced with a choice between a prescription written for Africa by an American President that said that what Africa needs is strong institutions, on the one hand, and the empirical insights of a strong African reformer that said that you need to do ten times what you would ordinarily do in normal institutional contexts to get anything done, on the other. The choice, of course, was an easy one.

Tempting as it may be, we mustn’t be disingenuous just to make a point. What Obama meant was that Africa doesn’t need strongmen, not strong men. African strongmen are often dictators that appropriate their countries’ commonwealth into their own pockets, brutally suppress all dissent and seek to stay in power for life. Obama feels that Africa needs things to work the way they should, impersonally, for the betterment of society. Of course, he was right. Think what America would be been today without the institutions that are

¹ Abah, J., (2012), *Strong Organisations in Weak States: Atypical Public Sector Performance in Dysfunctional Environments*, Boekenplan, Maastricht.

currently constraining its president.

Still, like an African man looking for justification for taking a beautiful new wife, Africa looks longingly to Asia and its rapid development over the last 50 years and wonders about Western-style democracy and “good-governance.” As the World Bank’s President, Dr Jim Yong Kim, once admitted:

“China has lifted 600 million people out of poverty in the last 30 years. Demand is growing among other developing countries to learn from this remarkable progress.”²

Remarkably, China achieved this unprecedented feat without “good governance” in the western sense, without democracy as we know it, by constraining personal freedoms and brutally suppressing dissent, and reportedly without taking the advice of one single Western economist or development practitioner. There is currently a flurry of new books that claim that China secretly sought the help of Western economists in its development. To be honest, it doesn’t really matter one way or the other. As Tony Blair once said, “What matters is what works.”

What is interesting for Africa is that, given that the population of the whole of Africa is currently about 1.1 billion, if 600 million people could be lifted out of poverty in China over a 30-year period, however they did it, it would suggest that the whole of Africa could be completely free of poverty in 50 years using the China model. China understands the African concept of trade by barter. Africa understands the Chinese concept of critical infrastructure in exchange for oil, which is very different from mortgaging the future of unborn generations to the Paris Club for loans that are often never used for the purposes intended. The mood in much of Africa today is “Go east young man! Thanks for warning us about the inherent dangers on the Eastern highway but we’ve been on the Western road for nearly 60 years and it is still a dirt track.”

However, I am not of the view that simply copying and pasting China’s model will necessarily work in Africa, because, well, institutions matter. What Africa needs is strong leaders (politically, intellectually and morally) that can copy from anywhere in the world and paste-special in Africa, and that are strong enough to develop unique solutions that can urgently catalyse a new set of institutions on the continent. China has done what works for China. Africa must find solutions that work for Africa while learning from the experiences of others.

Reforming the reforms

Let me now get to the meat of the topic that I was flown 3,000 miles to come and address: “Making public service reform a reality in Nigeria.” The word “reform” means different things to different people, depending on the lens through which you view it and where you

² World Bank, (2012), China and World Bank Group Launch Knowledge Hub to Provide Solutions for Reducing Poverty. Accessed from the Internet on 5 October 2017 at <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2012/11/27/china-world-bank-group-launch-new-knowledge-hub-to-provide-solutions-reducing-poverty>

are in your development trajectory. Therefore, we need to start with definitions. I would define reform simply as changing something from its current state to a better state. Different approaches have been tried, from Thatcher's Corporatisation, to Decentralisation, to Best Value, to Efficiency Reviews, to New Public Management, to Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation. As my friend, Willy McCourt, pointed out in 2013, there is no silver bullet for reforms. If there was a recipe book, we would all be using it. That is why in the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) that I ran until the end of August 2017, we chose an outcome-focused approach. The issue of choice is important because you can choose virtually any approach and still make progress, including a focus on economy or efficiency.

It is for this reason that Nigeria has also focused on Efficiency. A new Efficiency Unit that was set up in the Federal Ministry of Finance was able to secure significant savings by banning certain expenditure and seeking economies of scale. As examples, foreign training and foreign travel have been severely restricted; business-class travel is only now available for Permanent Secretaries, Ministers and above; save for certain statutory conferences, attendance at conferences must be now fully sponsored by the conference organiser and be at no cost to government; and souvenirs like pens, calendars and t-shirts have been banned. Also, a Presidential Initiative on Continuous Audit is helping to track down ghost workers that were created despite an electronic payroll system, by matching biometric fingerprints on the payroll with those on bank accounts. The Civil Service Transformation Strategy of the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation also focuses on efficiency. However, a focus on Efficiency has the effect of reducing waste, but do not necessarily translate to better service delivery. A function can be performed in the most efficient way relative to the inputs provided but still deliver a poor service to the public.

Other recent key shifts in Nigeria's reform emphasis include a renewed focus on grand corruption by politically exposed persons. However, these have been bogged down by a slow judiciary and allegations of media trial. Nigeria is also in the process of totally overhauling its budgeting process. It introduced a Zero-Based Budget system for the 2016 Budget and has dramatically increased the provision for Capital expenditure.

In driving and coordinating the reforms, BPSR's guiding principle is straightforward: "The primary purpose of all public service reforms must be tangible improvements in the public services experienced by citizens. Everything else is an input." It is important to again emphasise this deliberate choice made, because the effect of it was to seek to move the focus of public service reforms away from the public service and on to the public. So, of course, pay reform is important, as are procurement reviews, efficiency drives and new performance management systems. However, using what citizens experience when they come into contact with government as a starting point, naturally brings all the internal reform issues into play, including economy and efficiency. The difference is that this is a slight detour from the unending incremental journey of internal strengthening of the public service, which seeks to force through better delivery of public goods by focusing on the external manifestations of internal weaknesses. This has had the effect of immediately improving services even when the internal systems had not completed the full loop of institutional change.

Using this approach, it has been possible to improve the process of obtaining certain licence-type services from government. It is now easier to renew your drivers' license. Indeed, it can be done online from the comfort of your bedroom, without knowing anybody, going through touts or paying a bribe. It is now easier to obtain a Nigerian passport than it was before, although challenges remain. Most Nigerian passport offices in the United States can now process passport within 24 hours. Even the notoriously difficult United Kingdom and South Africa operations have improved. There are still issues with touting and staff corruption in Nigeria, particularly Lagos, but steps are now being taken to address it, after years of pretending that it did not exist.

It is now possible to obtain your tax clearance from the Federal Inland Revenue Service completely online, without knowing anybody, going through so-called agents or paying a bribe. We have started to de-emphasize the need for expensive plastic identity cards and have instead emphasised the National Identity Number itself, which is obtained instantly upon registration. It is now possible to conduct banking transactions in Nigeria using the National Identity Number, without the physical plastic card, since the Nigerian Identity Management Commission has given access to their database to all banks. It is pertinent to note that the United States Social Security Number does not require a physical plastic card and that the United Kingdom stopped issuing National Insurance Number cards in 2012.

This approach to reform has extended to the government's efforts on improving the ease of doing business. Various agencies that simply served as toll gates in our sea ports and airports have been asked to leave. Travelling through a Nigerian airport is now a far less stressful experience than it has ever been. Business visitors are given visa on arrival. It is now possible to register a new company in Nigeria within 24 hours online. Indeed, when a license issuer commits to issuing a license within a certain timeframe, if they fail to issue it, the citizen is to take the application for the license as approved.

Focusing the reforms on what the citizen experiences when they come into contact with government has neatly sidestepped a number of interminable age-old debates. For instance, are public servants in many developing countries paid so little because they are useless, or are they useless because they are paid so little? Should we focus more on capital expenditure and drastically cut recurrent expenditure, or do we budget in the knowledge that every single item of capital expenditure automatically has recurrent implications? Focusing on the citizen experience takes a fairly straightforward approach: "Your mandate is to issue licenses/ passports. Can we have it please? You can go and sort out the internal issues of economy, efficiency, performance management, incentives and sanctions that would make it possible for me to receive my license/ passport. I just want it now!"

This approach has also had the effect of forcing inter-agency cooperation and breaking traditional organisational silos. In some cases, it has been necessary to use Presidential Executive Orders to force through the changes, and an Enabling Business Environment Council summons the heads of agencies monthly and extracts from them how the citizen experience of government can be improved and how doing business in Nigeria could be made easier.

While aspects of this approach may look like the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation approach, governments have a more direct ability to get things done than donors that can only advocate and advise.

“Activists” in government

A lot has been written on Activist Governments. As Judith Tendler points out, an ‘activist central government’ has perhaps an unrivalled ability to bring about change (Tendler, J., 1997, p.15). However, not a lot has been written on activists IN government and the notion of changing governance by applying pressure from within government is perhaps understudied in the literature. A lot of the literature on “demand-side accountability” automatically assumes that the demand must be from outside government. In seeking to reform public services in Nigeria, the Bureau of Public Service Reforms that I headed was perhaps in the unique position of being an internal, but independent, and apolitical, think tank of government. The Enabling Business Environment Secretariat and the Presidential Delivery Unit, both in the Office of the Vice President are two other similar organisations that apply pressure from within government.

When these organisations demand better services for citizens, the first realisation that dawns on the system is that these are not members of “the opposition, seeking to embarrass government.” Our experience has been that when you stare at the back of someone’s head long enough, they tend to turn around. We have publicly promised improvements on behalf of others, based on their mandates and without their prior agreement, and used that pressure from within to bring about a turnaround in service delivery outcomes for citizens. In doing this, our approach was never to embarrass, except where absolutely necessary to counter recalcitrance, but to offer support by holding up a mirror to the organisation to look at itself, bringing the voice of citizens to their attention, providing an independent process map (as is and as it should be), and helping with quick-and-dirty business process reengineering and de-bottlenecking. This often entailed a range of mixed method studies that included surveys, key informant interviews, pictures with geotagging, focus group discussions and mystery shopping where Bureau staff disguise as members of the public and document their experience in seeking to anonymously obtain a service.

The areas of focus were driven by customer perception surveys about the key pinch points when people come into contact with government, as well as stakeholder engagement on what the Bureau’s work plan should focus on. The issues identified were then ranked in order of priority and this informed the Bureau’s work plan for the year. This ensured that the work of the Bureau had resonance with the public. Beyond issues of licensing, it was able to focus on making it easier to see a doctor in a government hospital, improving the coordination of efforts at tackling the ticking time bomb of youth unemployment, and improving access to agricultural inputs for farmers. It is currently working on making the process of obtaining bail in police stations easier and more transparent. These are real issues affecting the lives of citizens. At all times, we were available to help. At all times, we ensured that the credit and glory for any improvement went to the organisation that did the improvements, not to the facilitator or activist in government.

This approach deliberately escalated the importance of agencies and parastatals in delivering public goods, an area that had been largely ignored while previous reforms focused on the reform of the civil service itself. More citizens come into contact with government through agencies and parastatals than through line Ministries. Unlike Ministries, agencies also have clearly defined mandates enshrined in law, with the autonomy and resources to deliver services direct to citizens. This shift in emphasis was a deliberate choice. Although it doesn't downplay the importance of civil service reforms, it placed the emphasis of reform efforts directly on citizens and tax payers.

Leading by example

As Chinua Achebe said:

“The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.” (Achebe, C., 1983)

In order to challenge colleagues from the inside, it is imperative to lead by example. This is one of those areas where our approach is entirely consistent with accepted wisdom. The Leadership literature is consistent on the need for the leader to lead by example and not to demand of followers what the leader will not themselves do. It is for this reason that I became one of the first appointees of the Nigerian government to publicly declare his assets. The Bureau of Public Service Reforms was the first agency of government to put in place an electronic Freedom of Information portal that is able to respond to requests for information in as little as 2 minutes, instead of the maximum 7 days prescribed by law. The Nigerian government has written the BPSR approach into its Open Government Partnership National Action Plan for implementation across the board and three organisations have already replicated it.

The Bureau has also beaten more than 200 organisations to emerge as the most transparent organisation in the country, in terms of procurement practices, for 2 years in a row, as assessed by civil society. Until 2017, it was the only agency of government in Nigeria that practiced proactive disclosure of procurement information. It was also the first agency of government to publicly defend its budget proposals on live radio and on social media.

This credibility is important for any person or organisation driving the reforms. It shows, above all else, that these things are possible and gives serious chief executives something to aim for. Of course, it enables the citizen to ask underperforming agency chief executives the same question that African parents often ask their children whenever they don't come first in class: “The person that came first, does he have two heads?” In this way, the challenge of personal example that Achebe talked about provides fuel for demand-side accountability from the public, which, in turn, promotes peer pressure and makes organisations more receptive to offers of help and support from the reform agent.

The writings of Niccolo Machiavelli, John Stuart Mills and Prabhan Bardhan chimes with our own experience that an individual or group can overcome a dysfunctional environment, institutional constraints and the prevailing political economy in which they are placed and achieve results by the sheer strength of will and the example of character.

The role of technology

Where they work well, public services just work, impersonally and predictably. It should really be as easy as putting a stamp on an envelope and having it delivered without begging, bribing or relying on a highly-placed contact. To achieve this, it is helpful to make greater use of the impersonality and predictability that technology provides. Apart from improving processes and making them cheaper, technology helps to constrain corruption and to assure sustainability. Promoting the use of biometrics and consolidation of government-held information makes government records cleaner. Ensuring that payments are made online makes extortion more difficult. This is another area where our approach to reform is on all fours with the literature on the subject.

Of course, we are not too naïve to know that, in developing countries, corrupt public servants can disable online payment platforms to enable them to collect cash payments. We were also aware that citizens are sometimes punished for “stupidly paying online, denying me the opportunity to help you!” However, the beauty of technology is that it leaves a clear audit trail. You know who did what and when they did it. Public education also helps citizens to stand their ground and refuse to yield to extortion. The first step to accountability is the availability of information. It is public information and education that we will consider next.

Engaging citizens

It is important to engage the public and carry them along in any reform effort (Tendler, 1997, p.137). However, there is perhaps not enough written on how to win over a cynical public whose distrust is based on years of broken promises and poor service delivery. Indeed, when BPSR rolled out its work plan for 2017, a popular blogger bet £1,000 that none of it could be achieved. By July, 2017 he had paid up the bet in the face of overwhelming independent evidence of improvement.

The public does not actually need to support the activity itself, like tax collection in an environment where a social contract is virtually non-existent. The support needed from the public is that the activity is being carried out credibly, consistently and accountably, and that someone is actually making an effort to make things better.

Making a deliberate effort to overcome in the cynicism in the mind of the public is of equal importance as undertaking the reforms themselves. We found that even when things are beginning to work, there is a significant time lag between when a few citizens start to proclaim that things now appear to work and when majority of citizens start to believe the narrative. Indeed, instead of asking those that have experienced an improved service how they went about it, many citizens will dismiss any claimed improvements until someone they know and trust can attest to it.

In developing countries, organisations driving reforms and institutional change are notoriously poorly-funded, as the focus is often on physical infrastructure like roads and bridges. At the same time, using traditional media like radio, television and newspapers can be quite expensive. Increasingly though, traditional media tend to rely more and more on online platforms to obtain their news. Social media channels like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube provide the reformer immediate and direct access to its audience. The survey facility on Twitter, particularly, helps the reformer to feel the pulse of the public on various issues. While it is not technically reliable or representative, like a nationwide survey by the National Bureau of Statistics, it nevertheless provides an insight into the minds of at least a portion of the public. Free blogging sites, like Medium, provide the opportunity to capture and explain those technical nuances that may be unsuitable for a social media audience, such as how the budget works and the efforts being made to reform it.

Of course, using social media in this way comes with certain responsibilities. The immediacy, directness and cost-free nature with which information can be conveyed about reform efforts is the same immediacy and directness with which reform actions and motives can be questioned. It, therefore, takes experience, tenacity and supreme patience to win over the public, many of whom are engaging anonymously and would treat any senior government official they can engage directly with cynicism. BPSR has deployed online media to great effect in driving change and has successfully encouraged a number of government organisations to become more responsive to citizens.

Engaging citizens also helps to protect reform efforts from what Prabhan Bardan described as “the infant mortality of reforms.” The more the public develop an appetite for better service delivery, the more difficult it will be to revert to the status quo ante and the more sustainable the improved state is likely to be, particularly when paired with a focus on technology.

Political Will and Technical Will

That Political Will and policy support are necessary to drive reforms is given. Where you have political backing at the highest level, it is a lot easier to drive reforms. As an example, the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council that is driving improvements in the ease of doing business in Nigeria is chaired by the Vice President himself. However, we know that even political will at the highest level is sometimes not enough. In the case of agency reform, the President himself has publicly stated his wish to reduce the number of agencies and parastatals in the country. Without activating the structures necessary to drive this work on agency reform, not much can be achieved. Even with Presidential Executive Orders, some public servants would initially claim not to have seen them, despite wide publicity and sustained sensitisation.

The interesting question is: If it is difficult even where there is political will, what does the reformer do when political will is lacking? My answer has a number of components. First, hold the organisation to the mandate given to it by law. Of course, we know that a reliance on law and formal rules alone is a sure way to fail in developing countries with weak institutions, but raising the question alone, particularly from within government, relying on

the reformer's own mandate, often has the effect of highlighting the issue. Secondly, tap into or engineer a demand from the public for better performance, as I had already described. Thirdly, seek out organisations where "Technical Will" may exist and offer to partner with them. Fourthly, producing an evaluation document about what is working and what is not has a way of focusing the mind. BPSR published "*Public Service Reforms in Nigeria, 1999-2014: A Comprehensive Review*" in 2015 and is currently completing the 2015-2017 version. Interest to be featured in it and to take advantage of the opportunity to showcase achievement has been high. Of course, it also has the effect of applying pressure on those that are not featured because they haven't undertaken any reforms of note.

Getting the best out of donors

Dambisa Moyo (2010) posits that aid can actually be destructive to Africa's development. While her main argument that Africa cannot be aided out of poverty and should, instead, trade itself out of poverty is persuasive, technical assistance from donors can be beneficial if properly and intelligently managed.

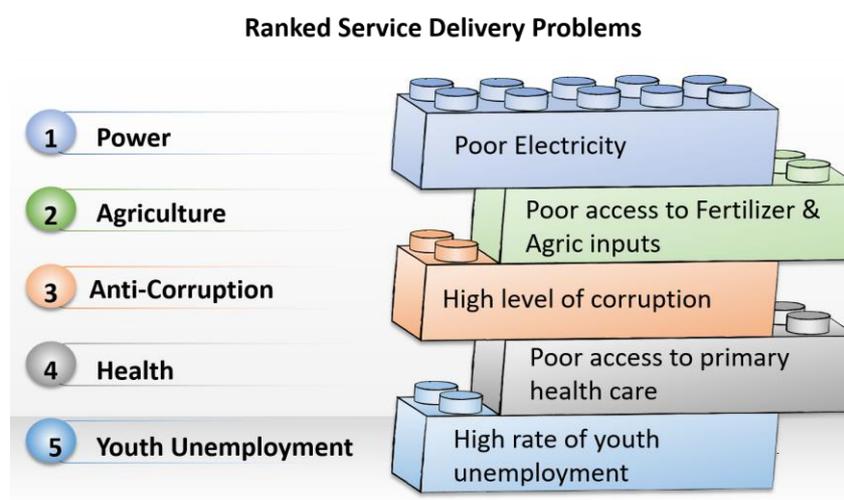
It is fair to say that when reforms are donor driven, it is often because the recipient of donor support has not set out a clear agenda behind which donor efforts can align. This can often happen for a number of reasons. The more donor dependent a country is, the less likely it is to articulate its own agenda behind which donor efforts can align. As the saying goes, "a beggar has no choice." Poverty has a way of robbing people of their self-confidence, allowing people their benefactors to issue prescriptions, some of which have never been shown to work in their own home environments. At other times, the recipient of aid is too distracted by the dysfunction of its own environment to be able to articulate a clear development agenda. I am not persuaded that it is as a result of a lack of capacity. Instead, it is more likely the presence of an institutional arrangement that means that a country consistently presents its 4th eleven, rather than its 1st eleven, as Chinua Achebe said using a football team analogy.

In seeking to intelligently manage technical assistance to the reform effort, BPSR sought to break from the mould of letting donors dictate the agenda and set the pace of reforms. It developed its work plans by carrying out surveys on what reform efforts it should focus on in each coming year. This ensured that reform initiatives had resonance with the public.

The inauguration of a new DFID programme called the Partnership to Engage, Reform and Learn (PERL) in 2016 provided BPSR with an opportunity to chart a new course for development assistance in Nigeria. Rather than the usual practice of government departments and agencies jostling for donor support and the donor picking and choosing from a menu, BPSR shared the PERL programme documents across government and convened a meeting of all potential government beneficiaries to develop an initial long list of priority reform areas. Following this, BPSR signed a Memorandum of Understanding with DFID itself, not the PERL programme, setting out responsibilities and expectations on both sides. While MOUs are not new in the donor assistance process, getting the whole of government to speak with a donor with one voice was a departure from the norm.

Rather than set out in detail the initiatives to be supported, the MOU focused on issues such as BPSR having the responsibility for ensuring that government continues to speak with one voice, given its coordination mandate and convening power, and DFID ensuring that its programmes do not disappear into the silos created by the individual contracts with its service providers. Of course, both parties were sufficiently open to recognise that DFID may need respond to some strategic and political imperatives that were outside the agreed framework, such as a direct request by the President or Vice President. However, these were expected to be the exception rather than the rule.

In partnership with PERL, BPSR then brought together key stakeholders, including academics, civil society, implementing partners of donor programmes and the donors themselves to debate and prioritise the interventions on the long list. This led to a common agenda agreed and supported by all.



Michael Bratton of Michigan State University and E. Gyimah-Baodi of Afro Barometer recently mapped and ranked the service delivery priorities across the continent in their 2017 paper titled: “Infrastructure, jobs, good governance: Bringing Africans’ priorities to the G20 table” (Bratton, M. and Gyimah-Baodi, 2017). Interestingly, the same issues identified by Nigerian stakeholder mapped neatly on to the service delivery priorities identified across the continent. Although some of Nigeria’s rankings were consistent with those of Bratton and Gyimah-Baodi they vary in order of urgency. This is not surprising, given that each country in the cross-continent study will prioritise certain issues higher than others depending on where they currently are in their development trajectory. So, while Power was ranked 11th by the study, it was ranked first by Nigeria and Corruption that was ranked 13th by the researchers was ranked 3rd by Nigeria.

Nigeria's Priorities	Service Delivery Issues		Cross-Africa's Priorities (% = Respondents)
1	Power Poor Electricity		11 (13%)
2	Agriculture Poor access to inputs		7 (16%)
3	Anti-Corruption High level of corruption		13 (12%)
4	Health Poor access to primary healthcare		2 (32%)
5	Unemployment High rate of youth unemployment		1 (38%)

An additional priority identified by Nigerian stakeholders was the need to identify and remove the bottlenecks to customer-facing service delivery in the country. This led efforts to improve drivers licensing, passports, national identity management, tax clearance, access to agricultural inputs for farmers, coordination of youth employment efforts and access to doctors in public hospitals, which were supported by the European Union and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID).

The approach taken had the effect of ensuring that donor support is not balkanised and resources dissipated. It is ensuring that resources and efforts are being applied to the areas of greatest need by the recipient of aid. It also has the effect of insulating the donor from ad-hoc requests that may not contribute to a strategic development agenda from disparate government organisations within the same country.

Conclusion

As I thank you for your attention, I will conclude by highlighting some 20 lessons we have been able to draw from our recent efforts to reform public service in Nigeria which I hope soon to compile into a book that should contribute to the debate on the topic.

1. There is no silver bullet for reforms
2. Reforms are intensely political in nature
3. Leadership by example matters, both at the political and technical levels
4. Reforms tailored to the local context have a better chance of success
5. Even in the most difficult institutional environment, it is possible to achieve better delivery of public goods
6. Institutions matter but people matter more
7. "Activist" organisations within government can trigger change when their activism converges with demand-side accountability from the public
8. Periodically, there is a need to reform the reforms
9. Credibility, integrity and transparency are key requirements for reform drivers
10. Public support helps to nurture reforms to maturity and protect them from "infant mortality."
11. We need both a whole-of-government approach and a problem-driven approach

12. Political will is a necessary but insufficient condition for driving reforms
13. "Technical will" is a viable option in the absence of political will
14. Formal rules and laws alone are not enough to change behaviour, but Establishment Acts setting out organisational mandates can be used to hold government bodies to account.
15. Efficiency is important but effectiveness resonates more with the public
16. Copying and pasting models blindly from elsewhere does not work. Better to copy and "paste special" to local conditions.
17. Drawing the public's gaze on to an underperforming government organisation can help to trigger change
18. Technology can improve processes, curb corruption and enhance the prospects for sustainability
19. Donor support, properly and intelligently managed, can help
20. Africa is different but the same as the rest of the world.

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