Article

THE ROLE OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM

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Abstract
This paper is on the role of information management in Nigerian democratic system. Nigeria is experimenting democratic system of government. Information is at the centre of every successful government. This is purely a review paper. Information in itself is not sufficient but necessary. It is a means to an end and it requires efficient management system. There is need for Nigeria National Information Policy. With this in place, the goals of information management in a democratic system will be attainable.

Introduction

The value of information in every sphere of life cannot be over-emphasized. Information is being increasingly recognized as a critical resource for development at all levels of government. The economical identification, processing, dissemination and management of socio-economic information, in particular, and its effective utilization by appropriate target audience in a democratic system, is a vital sector of planning and projecting any nation's, be it federal, state or local government's programmes and activities.

The primary concern of this paper is the role of information management in Nigerian democratic system. Information Management is the art of planning, netting, organizing, coordinating, controlling, directing and evaluating information to meet the exact needs of people. According to BBC English Dictionary 1992, democracy is a system of government or organization in which the citizens or members choose leaders or make

other important decisions by voting. Appadoral (1975) defines democracy as a form of government in which the people exercise their governing powers either directly or indirectly, through representatives, periodically elected by themselves. In the ancient Greek States, Direct Democracy was practiced, such that all the qualified citizens participated in public affairs. In the layman's idea, democracy is the government of the people by the people for the people. In modern states, according to Afugbuom (2000), indirect democracy is practiced because of the enormous population, usually representatives are elected by the people and they run the government in the atmosphere of peace. This indirect system of democracy is referred to as Representative Democracy. Democracy has to be built up through carefully thought out legislation. Good governance is what democratic system demands, in which both the elected and the electorate are happy and are at peace with each other, so long as the needs of the people are met. Nigerians are making an untiring struggle for a stable democratic rule. The ten features of democracy are:

- (i) Periodic elections
- (ii) free and fair elections
- (iii) existence of political parties,
- (iv) existence of opposition parties
- (v) supremacy of the people
- (vi) respect for the rule of law
- (vii) respect for fundamental human rights
- (viii) equality of citizens before the law
- (ix) independence of the judiciary
- (x) readily availability of development information.

Information Flow and Good Democratic Government

Qualitative information flow between the responsible electorates and dedicated elected leaders who place the interest of the people first is what makes for good democratic governance. There should be both hierarchical and horizontal information flow. We have the elected federal, states and local government leaders. The local government is for the grassroot. To determine the exact needs of the people - the governed, the local government(s) operators should sieve information from them, in a horizontal manner. The local government should analyze, synthesize, package and deliver the requests of the people to the state government and solving the ones within their ambit of operation. The state government after doing the much they could for the people would package

the rest to the federal government. This is the hierarchical information flow which provides for good democratic governance where the needs of the people are addressed.

Democracy is characterized by widespread consultations (information gathering) for qualitative and accurate decision-making. Under peaceful and favourable socio-economic conditions, democracy encourages the intelligence, self-reliance, initiative and social sense of free people by placing the ultimate responsibility of government on the citizens themselves. It makes the governed to trust the authority and ensures equal consideration for all.

Centrality and Quality of Information in a Democratic System

Information is central in any democratic system. Information made available to operators of democracy should be meaningful and useful, and some qualities give it value for the end users. O'Brien (1996) thinks of information as having the three dimensions of Time, Content and Form.

Information is frequently Time sensitive: Timeliness, frequency, and currency. The goal of an information management system is to provide the right and complete information to the right person at the right time. In the correct format and at the lease possible cost (Nwosu 1995). Thus, information system, should be designed to provide information whenever they are wanted (Demand Reporting), whenever specified conditions occur (Exception Reporting), or at regular time intervals (Periodic Reporting). Another time dimension attribute that is very important is the time period that the information describes. Information is frequently needed about past, present and future time periods. This helps the democratic leaders in strategic planning in order to avoid the mistakes of the past.

The **content dimension** of information is usually considered its most important attribute. For instance, what good is information that is attractive and timely if it is also wrong? Thus, accuracy is a vital attribute of information. However, if information is correct but not really related to one's or society's information needs, then it is not **relevant,** and not very valuable. Even if information is accurate and relevant, if it is incomplete, it is inadequate. Therefore, completeness of information is very important, as its conciseness. At this computer super age, flood of information is overwhelming. Therefore, the end- users should not be flooded with unnecessary information.

Information must frequently reveal the performance attained by elected representatives of the people. Therefore, information can be provided about the activities accomplished during a specific period of time frame or tenure schedule. Information should also be provided about the progress made toward specified campaign promises. This is related to the concept of status information, since information can reveal the status of efforts made by the elected representatives to operate within the election promises. It is also related to the concept of exception reporting, which reports information only if performance falls above or below specified levels. Finally, information about performance frequently reveals the resources accumulated or amenities attracted to the communities by the elected leaders.

The Form Dimension of Information

Information packaging must be attractive and easy to understand (clarity) and use (O'Brien 1996). The level of detail needed depends on the information needs of a particular end user. Information can be provided in detail or summary form, depending on the level of management (strategic, tactical or operational) involved. The way information is presented is also vital to its comprehension and use. Orderly presentation in a predetermined sequence of information arrangement is advocated. High - quality information can now be presented in a medium (paper, slide, firm, computer, internet, etc) that is easy for people to access, understand, and use in their work activities. Computer has become so popular in wide information netting and dissemination.

The Role of Information Management in Nigerian Democratic System

Olayiwola (2000), observes that:

> *"Over the past few years, citizens in many local, state and national governments have become increasingly dissatisfied with the level of services from their administrators. This has forced many governments to now, take the private sector approach of "customer (electorate) as king".*

With this customer/people orientation approach, a whole new ranges of additional services and greater transparency in the running of governments are required. This was the approach the former Governor of Anambra State Nigeria; Governor Chris Ngige applied. No wonder the people at the grassroot reacted at the pages of newspapers and magazines against his loss of the governorship seat at the election tribunal judgment. Although people reacted against his removal but documented information played **litigation support role.** When a legal action is initiated against or on behalf of elected

leader(s), records provide the necessary information (documentation) to win the case in court. With clear documentation of the electoral processes, democratically elected leaders' intents and subsequent action is a safeguard for protection from litigation consequences and an imperative for the government's information system.

The critical role of information management in a democratic system is the use of quality information from the people in the system, as decision - making tool. In order to make appropriate **decisions, democratic** leaders must have appropriate quality information. Decisions are only as good as the information on which they are based. To make error-free decisions, democratic office holders need sufficient background information and means for validating the decisions, including feedback from the electorates and control mechanisms inherent in documented information.

Efficient information management programme frequently provides information required for routine decisions. These types of decisions are made based on established government policies, procedures and rules, all of which are parts and parcels of the government's information management system.

A well-equipped leader/administrator is a well-informed one, who knows and understands the heartbeat of the people that elected him into power, and satisfied their needs. Every government department or political office holder to carryout the functions demanded by office, uses documented information. This is the **administrative role** of information management system. It also makes for the continuity of an office when leaders are replaced after tenure by new ones.

Democratic rule demands transparency and accountability. In good democratic governance, leaders show or even publish in mass media how they have acquired, allotted and spent public fund. This requires efficient and effective documentary evidence which very adequate information management provides. Thus, in a democratic system, information management has fiscal accountability role to play. The EFCC and ICPC rely heavily on this type of information for their operations.

Information management also has **historical   reference role to play.** Documented activities of past democratic government provide information for present and future leaders for their endeavours. They aid in the reconstruction of past activities of government as they provide information for the present and future planning, so as to meet the needs of the people. They also furnish data on which to base new action for the

present and the future. The policy papers, executive minutes, decisions or directives are in this class, and they are for permanent preservation and retention. They are equally preserved history for future generations yet unborn (future leaders). When recorded information is lost or destroyed, much of it can never be replaced, if at all replaceable. Those portions of the information replaced are often a result of recollection and may contain considerable distortion from the original information.

Documented information provides a **reference base not only in a historical sense but also in a current sense.** Technical reference documents or files consist of specialized information for use as a technical reference database (e.g. government white papers, special reports and studies etc). Therefore, elected representatives must maintain this historical base both as evidence of their past achievements and as their prologue to the future.

In any democratic system, there are always legislative and regulatory requirements within the local, state and federal government programmes which must be operated within established policies and procedures. Thus, information management in a democratic system plays **legislative/regulatory role.** The National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) operates under this statutory regulatory role. The documented information of such an Agency, operating under our present nascent democratic rule, is subject to string/strict regulatory constraints. They must be able to substantiate their positions through complete and accessible information by documenting activities and producing that documentation upon request.

Information management makes for government's **efficiency in the discharge of her duties.** Frustration and reduced efficiency occur when the individual responsible for making decisions is unable to locate the information necessary to efficiently develop and evaluate alternatives. Not only is this searching costly in terms of the staffs time, but it is also a loss of productive time for the officer requiring the information. Therefore, the officer's or his administration's efficiency can be seriously impaired if needed information is not readily available. A systematic approach to information management provides the vehicle for information availability to enhance the efficiency of the elected representatives and ultimately the government.

Citizens want where and how to obtain useful information on their rights, duties and the services they are entitled to and where to make complaints which will be heard.

Their demands relate to their wish to play a role in democracy within their country. In transparent democratic system, information availability and accessibility are made possible with operational National Information Policy of which information management is a subset.

Labour and other pressure groups in Nigeria, for example, to a greater extent are very keen on taking part in debates and decision-making process and on being informed about the state of democracy. Their interest is the welfare of the people (electorates). Their action is not without influence on democratic quality. This is achieved only in a democratic system with open kind of information management system where citizens exert some significant influence on government's decision-making. All interest groups are encouraged to participate in the process of determining and evaluating the common problems and determining proper solutions for the mutual benefit by participating in for a created to discuss the specific issues with proper information. For instance, Azike (2005), reported that the then President of the Nigerian Labour Congress, Oshimole, was always given preferential treatment to speak, out of turn, at the National Political Reform Conference. No citizens contributing in a civil manner should be barred from stating the positions of themselves and the interest that they represent (e.g. issue of Resource Control). No side should be favoured by the representative in the forum process (information management process) when it comes to moderating the quality of the participating based on factual information. In this way the people can contribute a great deal of knowledge without the interference of "editor" who intends to convince the populace of their cause.

With quality information in mind, the democratic system has been created in such a way as to provide as many relevant links and referrals to other quality information as possible. Constituencies are encouraged to provide pertinent links to pending issues to give voters the best available knowledge with which to conclude the best decision. This cross-fertilization of ideas in an ideal democratic system with efficient and effective information management system is what makes for good governance. Those chosen to represent the interests of others in the political system have historically used a variety of methods to obtain information about their constituents' preferences, including physically touring their local governments periodically, reading letters from constituents, and polling their constituents about key issues. In this age of electronic digital communications, and the concomitant decline in the costs of communication on a global scale have profound implications for political interaction among

representatives and their constituents and for economic and political development throughout the world. As electronic communication enables citizens to directly and instantaneously convey their wishes to their representatives with ever decreasing costs, the nature of political interaction is likely to change.

Electronic Access to Information and Democratic System

In what Grossman (1996), calls the "Electronic Republic", the power of individual citizens is increased in several ways; through greater access and greater influence. There is greater access to those who represent them in the political system, and to information, on the internet, about issues, decisions and pending legislation that might affect the people. There is greater influence both as an individual who can more easily communicate his or her views on a topic directly to elected representatives, and indirectly through easier access to issue advocacy organizations. There are other, more subtle implications of this shift in public power for elected representatives and for citizens themselves. For representatives, this could mean the transformation in the definition of their role; from the more traditional conception of the representative as someone who is selected to represent his or her constituents by considering the facts surrounding various issues and making carefully reasoned decisions on that basis with the interests of his or her constituents in mind; and someone who is merely a proxy for his or her constituents, adding up the constituency responses on a given issue and voting accordingly. The electronic media has given a larger percentage of constituents than ever before the ability to easily and quickly transmit their opinions on public policy issues to their representatives. The danger is that whereas a representative is supposed to consider what is best for his constituency as a whole, a proxy is constrained to represent the majority view point. This dominance of a majority faction could have serious repercussions in the Nigerian context.

At the same time, and in the same vein, the opportunity costs of participation are reduced. Electronic access could potentially erase disparities of distance and geography, minimizing the rural-urban distinction that has had significant political implications in Nigeria in the past. Aside from these direct consequences, Grossman (1996), sees as an additional consequence a power shift in the electronic republic.

> *The big losers in the present-day reshuffling and resurgence of public influences are traditional institutions that have served as the main intermediaries between the government and its citizens-the political parties, labour unions, civic associations, even the commentators and correspondents in the mainstream press.*

By empowering ordinary citizens to participate more directly in their political system, electronic communications should increase the role of citizens in the policy-making process at the expense of the political "middlemen" who have historically provided the forum by which ordinary citizens could make their interests on specific issues known through interest aggregation and representation. Not only this, but electronic communication and participation in politics may eventually lead to a more direct democracy in which general participation is increased with both potentially positive and negative consequences. In larger democracies such as the United States, Grossman (1996), opines that, there is a potentially troubling outcome.

As the political system grows ever more responsive to majority impulses, and the legislative and executive branches feel increased pressure to bend to the public will, the judiciary remains the branch of government in the best position to serve as a brake upon the people. In the electronic republic, the judiciary will have the increasingly difficult and sensitive role of protecting the rights of unpopular minorities and thwarting the popular will when it gets out of hand. Protecting the essentially anti-majoritarian doctrine of judicial review will become the key to preserving democracy in any electronic republic and preventing it from succumbing eventually to a popular tyranny or a demagogic leader.

In other words, James Madison's (1987), concern in the early days of the United States democracy over controlling the effects of majority faction" may once again become a problem in an electronic republic. That this issue could become a concern even in the United States, where strong legal barriers exist to this "tyranny of the majority", has significant implications for the political impact of electronic communications in Nigeria where factionalism is already a problem and there are weak safeguards to majority domination.

For UNESCO, freedom of expression is a pre-condition for democracy and the cornerstone of all human rights, the defense of which is at the heart of its action   in favour of a culture of peace and non-violence. According to Keery (2002), our system of democracy fosters paternalism in a host of ways – of which the management of information was but a small if important part. It has always been true that information is vital political currency in a democracy, even a practically one-party democracy like our own; this is true in politics as the salience of corporate information is in the financial market environment.

The advance world has gone e-Democracy. E-Democracy explores ICT, organizational renewal, and skills and their application in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government to reinforce democratic participation and decision-making. In order to serve the citizens, public administration needs to be open and transparent. The complexity of legislative producers and processes, the volume of associated information and the multiplicity of actors means that tools need to be developed to assist the general public navigate through the democratic system. The main benefits will be the citizens. ICT can bring significant improvement in productivity to the legislative process. These benefits, related to efficiency, accessibility and transparency are monitored and reported on by the use of process re-engineering and automated workflow. This supports transparency and accountability, the main benefits will be within the government administration. The classical model of democratic involvement is being challenged. New models of engagement, for example enable by collaborative technologies, are developing which allow expression of individual political will. These new models tend to be issue specific and suited to "communities of engagement" which are virtual and fluid. The e-Democracy concerns the secure opening-up of processes and procedures that underpin democratic participation and decision-making in civil society. The end objective is to transform democratic system into more responsive and accountable government.

A democratic government should deploy information and communication technology (ICT) for it's information management. This should align mainly with the preparation, successful implementation and delivery of policies and programme that will benefit and add value to the quality of life of the citizens. It involves the deployment of human, natural, financial and material resources of the government in pursuit of developmental objectives arising from the demand of the citizens for better and more efficient services that better meet their needs.

Summary and Conclusion

Whatever its quality, information in itself is not sufficient. The citizen also has to use it and react to it. Citizens are leading participants in the democratic system. Their demands cannot be ignored.

It should have become clear by now that we do not have a National Information System yet in Nigeria. We equally do not have National Information Policy, but we shall get

there, if and only if the nationally elected leaders appreciate the need for it in the democratic system. There are already, the National Archives Decree of 1992 and the National Communicating Policy (for press freedom).

The degree to which information and knowledge are captured and used to support good governance in a democratic system depends on whether a strong underlying **information Management** infrastructure is in place. This provides governance-related institutions and individuals with the mandate, direction, responsibility, tools and capability to create, and preserve information effectively in all forms (Information Management Programme). This infrastructure must be developed and sustained by a knowledge-centred information gathering and management culture. This culture and infrastructure need to be based on a strong vision of information enabled governance and a set of fundamental information principles. Information Management allows increased information and communication in the promotion of democratic political regimes. Therefore, Information and communication technology that most efficiently support the strategies of the government within the purviews of corporate governance, ministerial administration, state and local government actives should be provided.

Information is the defining resource of democratic governance and ethical governance issues as choices hinge on fundamental Information Management questions: What information need to be created and acquired? For what purpose? Who will have access to it? Will information be share, combined and integrated to solve increasingly interconnected problems? Who will have access to it? Will it be used to promote political and public debate and genuine stakeholder participation? Who will own and control the information? How will its security, secrecy, integrity and value be protected? Information Scientists with subject backgrounds in Laws, Political Science, Public Administration, and other Management Sciences are best suited to man any national, state, local governments and wards Information System.

Having the knowledge of the roles of Information Management in a democratic system is necessary but it is not sufficient. Both the elected leaders and the electorates must be willing and determined after putting every framework place, to have the goals of Information Management in a democratic system achieved or achievable.

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