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**Abandoned Projects and the Place of Public Bureaucrats in Nigeria: A Theoretical Review**

by  
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**Abstract**

This study focused on abandoned projects and the place of public bureaucrats in Nigeria. The study was based on the need to examine the functions of career public servants in the continuity and completion of government projects in Nigeria. The researcher employed system theory to analyze the subject matter, because as a system, new government needs to continue with the project of past governments. The study used only secondary sources of data through textbooks, journals, online sources and other documents; hence only literature review approach was used. Based on that, it was discovered that public bureaucrats have significant role to play in enhancing the issue of project continuity and completion in the Nigerian system. They can do that effectively by providing the necessary data for political executive(s) to ensure effective policy making, assisting/ advising the political executive(s) on project matters, promoting effective project implementation; and ensuring project monitoring and evaluation. Based on the findings, it was recommended that public bureaucrats should be very effective in providing the necessary information for political executives and assisting in policy matters; the political executive(s) should adhere to the information provided by public bureaucrats so as to enhance project continuity, completion, commissioning and reduce project abandonment; the culture of government projects being abandoned by political executive should be discouraged by government at all levels; and citation of project(s) should base on needs of the public, and not political interest; hence the need for continuity and completion of government projects in the system.

**Key Words:** Government Projects, Abandoned Projects, Public Bureaucrats, Development.

**INTRODUCTION**

After the maintenance of law and order in the society (which is the primary function of government) another major role of government is the execution of infrastructural and human development projects. Government project here is a planned undertaking (which is a set of activities), processes or services which is oriented towards the attainment of specific objectives within a given budget and period of time (Agugua, 2011). Such government project could be in the area of road construction/maintenance, electrification,

building of housing facilities to be used by government (for school, hospital or administrative purposes) and or in the area of human capital development etc.

But it's a fact that most of these government projects are abandoned, especially when there is change in government. Hanachor (2012) observed that when actions and activities on development project are suspended without any stated time of resumption, the projects are said to be abandoned. So when the time lay between suspension and resumption is so much as it concerned government projects, the project is confirmed abandoned. If the rate of abandoned or incomplete projects must reduce in our society, the public bureaucrats (which are part of the executive arm of government) must perform some critical functions.

Here, the public bureaucrats are the staff of government (civil or public servants) who works on the principles of permanency, neutrality, anonymity and government funding. For that, we can state here that public bureaucrats have numerous roles to play in the continuity and completion of government projects. It is the function of the public bureaucrats to provide data for government for policy making. The bureaucrats in this case have to provide accurate statistical and financial data to enable the political executive understand the real nature of the policy to be made, the constraint to the policy/project(s) and the revenue matters. It is also the duty of the public bureaucrats to implement the policy/project very effectively and give developmental/positive advices to the government on projects/policy issues.

In Nigeria today, it has become a culture that whenever a new government or administration comes into power, virtually all ongoing projects, no matter how laudable and people – oriented, they are often stopped and abandoned. Every new government considers the projects and programmes of its predecessors more as the legacy to improve the former government, rather than way meant to improve the people's well-being. It has also been observed that majority of contracts - on abandoned projects - in most cases were awarded to party men, political associates, friends and family members of the past governments and they might not even possess any technical knowledge needed to run the projects. For that, the new government sees that as lack of transparency, corruption and as an opportunity to offer other projects to its own cronies, instead of continuing with the old project. Many Projects have been abandoned notwithstanding the huge sum already spent and the constraints they already have on people. For that, it becomes pertinent to ask "what are the roles of public bureaucrats in the continuity and completion of government projects in the Nigeria system?"

Therefore, the objective of this study is focused on examining what public bureaucrats can do, what they are already doing and what they ought to do in reducing the incidence of abandoned projects in the Nigerian society. This paper is theoretical in nature as the researcher utilized only secondary sources of data through textbooks, journals, online materials and other documents. This is to say that only literature review approach was used for the study; hence the data collected were discussed qualitatively.

### **The Concept and Nature of Government Project**

The term project has been derived from the Latin word *Projicer* meaning "a proposal or plan". The end-product of a project is the segment of broader developmental

goals (Nwizu, 2014). It refers to a set of activities whether complex or simple, that will aid or bring about change in an organization or to a society. Goel (1981) opined that a project means "the specifications and accomplishments, within a given period, of related set of activities that will result in a measurable change in any government or system's capacity to improve the well being of the community directly or indirectly

Agugua (2011) stated that government project is a planned undertaking which is a set of activities, processes or services which is oriented towards the attainment of specific objectives within a given budget and period of time. Projects are generally part of a sub-programme or programmes. For this study, a project is a government planned and Organized programme, activity and action aimed at enhancing the development of the society in the area of human capital and/or infrastructure in a specified budget period. The main purpose of a project is to convert assets or resources into desired results (objectives) through a set of activities or processes.

### **The Concept of Abandoned Project**

Many scholars have explained the concept of abandoned project. In the view of Hanachor (2012), when actions and activities on development project are suspended without any stated time of resumption, the projects are said to be abandoned. The abandonment of development projects is the act of discontinuing any activities or maintenance works on such development project within a time frame of the contract agreement and with no intention of returning back to the development.

For the purpose of this paper, a project is abandoned when the government that started the project could not complete it within its tenure and successive government refuses to go on with the project; hence when there is no sign of work on the project for a long time (up to 4 years or more), it is confirmed abandoned.

Development projects abandonment involve the complete absconding from accomplishing a project objectives, and such has negative impact on the economy, people/ host community of the development project, and other stakeholders/beneficiaries. In all, abandoned project is a situation where government development project is not completed within its specified period and when there is no hope of resumption on a specific project. Many reasons actually contribute to the problems of abandoned project in the Nigeria system and other places.

### **Causes of Development Project Abandonment**

Many scholars have analyzed causes of development project abandonment. Hanachor, (2010), Ihuah and Benebo (2014) and Ugwu (2015) identified the following.

1. **Issue of funding:** This is discussed under three major areas:
  - a. **Inadequate funding:** Considering the economic challenges in the Nigeria economy, it is very difficult for government at both state and federal levels to effectively finance development projects as it ought to be. This is based on the fact that in most cases, the required funds are not always available. In some cases, when the required funds are available, there may be inappropriate allocation of the required funds to development projects and such has the

imperative effect of causing the project to be abandoned. Finance is the sustaining factor for any project accomplishment and where such is insufficient or inappropriately allocated; the projects tend to suffer abandonment scenarios.

- b. Improper financial analysis:** Financial analysis is very important for the execution of government development projects. Most government development projects usually require counterpart funding. For that, when one or more parties to the funding fails, the resultant effect will be insufficient funds for the project, and the project definitely will be abandoned.
- c. Under bidding of projects:** In most cases, government development projects are usually contracted out to specialist. Most contractors in order to win the contract, deliberately lowers their quotation, only to apply for variation later. Some may go on with the project but will resort to the use of inferior materials or even deviate from the original project plan. Where any of these become the case; the project is at risk of abandonment.
- 2. Choice of project site or location:** When the project site is not appropriate for the kind of development involve, the project is likely to be abandoned. This is true because, when a project is sited in a location where needed raw materials, equipment's and human resources are not available, such project may be abandoned. Also, when the site of the project is in dispute (based on ownership tussle), the project maybe stopped halfway.
- 3. The continuous community eruption and interference in project developments:** The community leaders, youths, and women groups are usually on premises of government project demanding an incurable sum of money as compensation before any development project could be carried out successfully in their area. They undermine that the benefits of these development projects are to improve their lives and environment as a whole.
- 4. Timing:** The timing of a particular government project determines the probability of the project being completed. There have been cases where government that is leaving office in few months starts huge development projects which ought to have been started years back. Such timing may be negative especially when the next administration refuse to continue with the project.

#### **Effects of Development Project Abandonment to Stakeholders**

When a development project is abandoned, its benefits to the public is defeated; hence such situation bring negative consequences to individuals, groups, community members and the government.

- 1. Effect on Individuals:** Execution of projects results to empowerment of members of the communities in the form of poverty reduction, employment, contracts etc. If for any reason these projects are abandoned, those working there lose their job and supplies will be stopped. This will result to loss of economic benefits of the projects (Hanachor, 2010). In some cases, people experience social problems as they will find it difficult to readjust their lives.

2. **Effect on the Community:** Depending on the size and magnitude of the projects, a single project in the community is capable of transforming the face look and the socio-economic features of the community. If the project attracts large population of workers, it is possible to attract some social services which will develop the community. In addition to the above, if the project is one of the government zoned projects, record will reflect that the community has benefited from government, while physically the project does not exist, and the expected benefits forfeited.
3. **Effect on Government:** Most people see government properties as every body's property. When government projects are abandoned, some people go as far as vandalizing the material and whatever is left in the site at that time. On return to site, after years of abandonment, the vandalized materials have to be replaced at extra cost. Sometimes the governments end up re-awarding the contract to new contractor at even a more contract value than at first.

### **The Concept and Functions of Public Bureaucrats**

For the purpose of this study, public bureaucrats mean the same thing as civil servants. They are the government employees at federal, states and local government levels, employed on the principles of impartiality, merit system/professionalism, anonymous, non-political and non-partisan etc. (Ubah, 2015). The civil service is a body of officials responsible for policy initiation, assisting the government for policy formulation and implementation of decisions (approved policies). They are responsible for carrying out the day to day activities of the government.

To this end, the civil service is the entire organization of employees of various ranks, talents and training, who are in the service of government on regular permanent basis and who do not engage in any form of politics while in their service of the government. Thus, it's the collectivity of civil bureaucracy set up by modern governments to administer and execute their policies and programmes. Ideally, civil servants (that is career bureaucrats) are persons recruited to serve in government institutions and ministries on the principle of merit and competence. They are evaluated periodically with regard to their individual and work group job performance (Ogbuagu, 2005).

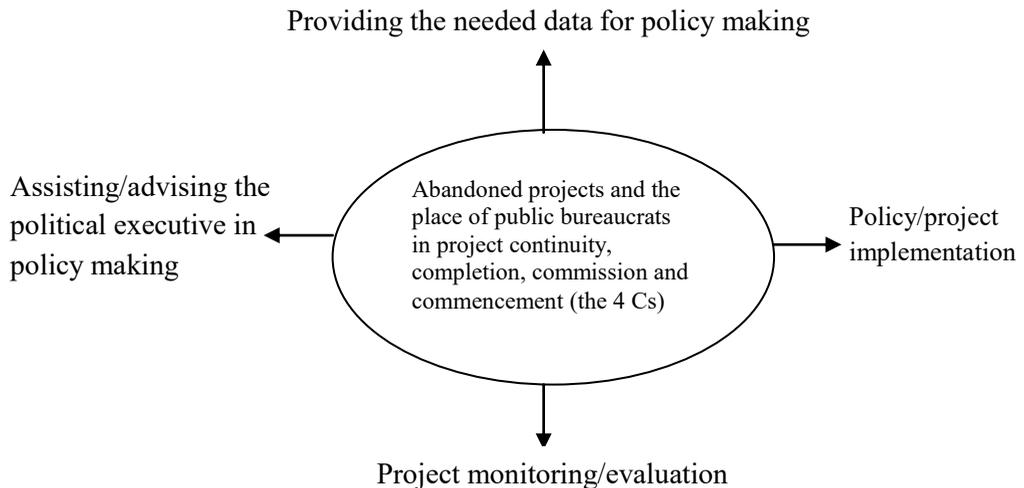
Based on the foregoing, it could be stated here that the public bureaucrats perform the following functions:

1. Advising the political executive on the evolution of public policies and programmes.
2. Providing the necessary information for policy making.
3. Implementation of policies and programmes decided by the political executive.
4. Project monitoring and evaluation.
5. Provides continuity in government and serves as a repository of knowledge of past government decisions and procedures.
6. Manages the machinery of government and thus perform the day to day duties that public administration demands.

### The Place of Public Bureaucrats in the Continuity and Completion of Government Projects: A Theoretical Analysis

Public bureaucrats have many functions to play in ensuring continuity and completion of government projects and reducing the problem of abandoned projects. Such functions were discussed here thus:

**Fig 1: Conceptual model on the role of bureaucrats in project continuity and completion**



Source: author

1. **Providing the necessary data for government to ensure project continuity:** Since public bureaucrats serve every government that comes to power and keep necessary government information, it is their role to provide necessary and needed information to the government especially on incomplete projects of past administration. According to Al-Gazali (2007), it's the role of the civil servants to assist the government in the formulation of policy by providing the necessary data. This is true because, as the permanent staff of the government, the public bureaucrats are always part of the past administration and are aware of the policy issues, their financial implications, impacts, benefits and challenges. It's therefore their roles to provide all the needed information to the political executive so as to guide the government in policy/decision making. When such needed data are provided accurately, the government will know all the on-going projects, the level of works already done, the level of government financial investment, the benefits to the people and hindrances to

such project(s) etc. The government will then understand the needs to continue and complete such on-going projects to avoid financial waste, energy and material waste, and to ensure accountability in the system.

When the government has all the needed data of previous government through the bureaucrats, it enhances continuity, objectivity and transparency in government. Here, the career staff should make sure the government has information/data of the past administration to enable it continue and complete on-going projects and programmes.

- 2. Assisting/advising the political executives on policy making:** For the political executives to make the right policies and execute projects that will benefit the public, they need to be assisted by public bureaucrats – who have served every government – in performing their functions. According to Ogbuagu (2005), it is the function of the civil servants to advise and assist the political executive on policy making. Though, the political executives have the function of policy making and the career civil servants have the function of policy implementation, but considering the nature of political programs and the engagements of political executives, it becomes necessary for the (senior) public senior civil servants who have acquired numerous experiences to assist the government in policy making and offer the government the necessary advice.

Here, Ezeani (2011) opined that though it's the duty of the political executive to make policy decision. However, the career staff should be consulted and used for policy making as they have gained much experience in the service. Ogbuagu (2005) recognize that though they perform distinct functions of policy formulation and policy implementation, it is actually difficult to totally remove the public bureaucrats from policy formulation; hence the senior civil servants have the function of advising the executive on the evolution of public policies and programmes and assisting the political executives on policy formulation.

The bureaucrats should always advise the government on the needs to continue and complete the project of past administration considering the money already invested; the benefit of such project if completed to the people and the negative impact of the project (on the environment/people), if not completed. In this direction, Ogbuagu (2005) opined that the civil servants should be a body of experience operators who anticipated potential problems and handle them before they become behemoth. To make this possible, the service should be tuned to nourish a positive creative administrative environment through effective advice to the political executive.

- 3. Policy implementation:** The primary function of public bureaucrats is implementation of government policy and programmes. It's a fact that the determination of policy is the function of the ministers/commissioners (political executive); and once a policy is determined, it is the unquestioned and unquestionable business of the civil servant to strive to carry out that policy with precisely the same good will, whether he agrees with it or not (Al-Gazali, 2007). Therefore, it's the functions of the public bureaucrats to implement the government decisions (that is, the approved policies) without fear or favour. The career officers should be effective

in the execution of such policy by avoiding corruption, favouritism and executing the policy the way it was approved.

In all, the civil servants should execute their responsibilities as it ought to be, supervising the projects as it ought to be, being active in project management and evaluation etc.

**4. Project Monitoring/Evaluation:** It is the role of public bureaucrats to constantly monitor the ongoing government projects, and evaluate the rate of work done and what remains to be accomplished. When the above functions are performed effectively, the issue of development project abandonment will reduce drastically; hence government will get needed information on its projects. Ayuba (2012) stated that it is the function of the civil servants to monitor government project, supervise and evaluate it so as to ensure project completion.

It is the duty of the civil servants to provide direction by giving the needed information based on project monitoring to the government. This is because the government come and go, and the civil servants remain permanent and have the experience to monitor government project and to give information on how, when and why to continue a particular on-going/abandoned project; where to cite new projects and needs to complete and commission them.

Therefore, the career civil servants have the role of monitoring, evaluating and supervising government project. It is the duty of the political executive to provide the necessary resources and training for career staff to perform the above functions.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **System Theory**

System theory originated in the works of the Austrian biologist - Ludwig Von Bertalanffy - who applied it to study the biologist phenomenon. It was adapted into the social sciences, first by Anthropology, then sociology and Psychology, before it arrived in Political/Administrative Sciences (Ekwonna, 2014). The credit for the popularity of the systems theory in the political sciences belongs to David Easton, Robert Dahl and Gabriel Almond who applied it in the study of national politics.

A system is a set of elements standing in interaction. A whole compounded of many parts and assembly of all parts. It is necessarily for all parts to be working. In simple social science parlance, a system is a whole or an integral with structure and interrelated parts which all function to maintain the continuity of their existence. The system theory sees society as that governed by mutually interrelated structures which possess their unique individualized characteristics and performs special roles independently, but still maintain a dynamic equilibrium between themselves for the successful maintenance of the entire system.

A system is a relationship of unity and interdependence among elements. System theory was employed in this work because of the following issues as identified by Ekwonna (2014).

- 1. Input:** This consists in information and demands made on the system and to which it must respond. These come from the environment.
- 2. Output:** This is the system's response to the demands made upon it by the environment.

3. **Conversion:** This is both capacity of the system and the process through which it puts demands/input in order to process or create its own response/output.
4. **Feedback:** This is the gap between input and output and the accompanying information through which the system assesses its response to an earlier input.
5. **Environment:** This consists in the milieu or matrix in which the system exists including neighbouring systems and activities surrounding them.
6. **Structures:** Every analytical system has structures. These are the different mechanics (or institutions) through which the system performs its functions.
7. **Equilibrium:** This is the continuous state sought by the system, the maintenance of which insures its survival without need for radical transformation. This is how it maintains balance between demand and its ability to generate outputs.

System theory stipulates that a country is a political system with different components. In this case, each component is independent of each other and maintains certain level of autonomy but still work collectively for the existence of the whole. That is to say that Nigeria is a political system with federal, states and local governments that work collectively and independently for maintenance of Nigeria polity/system.

In line with our subject of discussion, if Nigeria is really a system, the political leaders must always ensure the continuity of public project(s) no matter the administration that started the project(s). In this direction, the issue of abandoned/incomplete project in our society (system) will be minimal.

#### **CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS**

The major goal of every government is to enhance development through the execution of government projects, as that will bring about qualitative improvement in the standard of living of its citizens. To realize this noble objectives, a government must not only start a project, but must try as much as possible to continue, complete and commission the project; hence when a project is completed and sustained, the overall benefit of the project to the government, the state, the people etc will be all positive.

If the government must achieve its objectives on project continuity and completion, the public bureaucrats have many roles to play in the planning and estimation (cost) of the projects, providing the needed data to the government on past/on-going projects, assisting the government in formulating policies, total project implementation and giving useful advises to the political executive on the needs and benefits of continuing and completing any on-going projects. This is because if projects are implemented with the same zeal and spirit it was made, the issue /challenges of abandoned project will be minimal or will not arise at all in our society.

The study therefore concludes that the achievement of the development goals of the government is dependent (among other factors) on making the government a continuum through project continuity and completion, and that is dependent on the political executive using the data provided by public bureaucrats in making policies, consulting public bureaucrats in policy making, using public bureaucrats for total project implementation and adhering to the advices of the public bureaucrats to ensure project continuity, completion, commission and commencement of new projects.

Based on the above, the study recommends that:

1. The culture of discontinuity of government project in case of change in government or organizational leadership should be discouraged. The national and state assemblies should enact law that will guarantee continuity of government project, so as to ensure growth and development of our society.
2. There should be effective training and development of public bureaucrats to effectively provide the necessary and accurate data for government to enhance project continuity.
3. The political executive should always adhere to information provided by bureaucrats as that will enhance government sincerity on project execution, reduce corruption, enhance the performance of career staff and lead to completion of many government projects.
4. There is also the need for a conscious effort by government/political executive to reduce the extent to which politics infiltrates bureaucratic activities. This will ensure that public bureaucrats are allowed to perform their functions on policy/project implementation as it ought to be.
5. The citation of government project anywhere in the state/country should be based on needs, not political interest to enhance its completion even when there is a change in government.

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