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Performance Measurement in Government

As the tenure of the current administration and most political leaders draws to a close, one is inclined to consider how heads of government have performed and whether such performance will have an impact on the forthcoming elections. In assessing achievements, many Nigerians have formed their opinion on the basis of newspaper adverts, social media campaigns and some propaganda. Others have had the privilege of visiting various communities over the years and can therefore attest to structural changes, good or bad, that have occurred over time. It is noteworthy that there is no country-wide unified measurement framework, to enable people determine the performance of their leaders vis-a-vis budgetary allocations, resources and opportunities. This absence of such a defined performance measurement framework leaves room for diverse interpretations of what is considered an achievement and gives leaders the latitude to tell their stories how they deem fit, or claim accomplishments where very little has been delivered.

Performance measurement is extremely important in assessing accomplishments and depicting successes and failures of an institution over a specified period of time. In business organisations, a performance measurement framework is derived from the organisation's vision to adequately reflect strategic objectives and then cascaded to employees to gauge their contribution to the organisation achieving its overall objective. Evaluation periods are set up periodically – annually, semi-annually, quarterly and in some cases monthly. Performance measurement requires deliberate efforts and the commitment of leaders to hold and be held accountable. However, the overall burden of accountability rests with the leaders, such that when organisational performance is poor, it is the leader who is said to have performed poorly.

Political leaders all have mandates. Many set out a vision for themselves, which they sell to the people during campaigns. They make promises which the people expect them to deliver on. However, seldom do these leaders during their administration demonstrate, in clear terms, how they have achieved or fallen short of the expectations of the people. Political leaders shy away from performance measurement due to the fact that it forces them to be accountable and sometimes, subjects them to criticism. It is for this reason that political leaders substitute performance reporting with advertisement and campaigns to prevent the people from comparing output with targets and to blur the perception of the people into believing that such government is working.

In its quest to increase accountability, the Federal Government, through the National Planning Commission prepares a performance report of the Nigerian economy. A review of the most recent edition of this report shows a good attempt at providing vital information on key sectors of the economy as well as a historical trend of many parameters. The report also



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compares some of the indicators in sectors with international benchmarks. However, the report can be improved significantly. It should start with the overall objective and agenda of the government and then segment the economy into composites of this agenda. This way, Nigerians will better understand how various activities within specific sectors enable the achievement of the Government's mandate. Furthermore, the information within the report should be standardised i.e. define Key Performance Indicators to adequately reflect and compare allocation to a sector against output and impact. The report must also compare the current status of each indicator with the past and expectations and target for the future based on our national vision and current agenda. This will enable people to clearly identify areas where the speed of progress is sufficient and those that need further attention.

The Federal Government instituted performance contracts with ministers a

few years ago and claims to appraise their performance periodically. Despite the fact that the implementation of these performance contracts was widely publicised, no information has been provided to the citizenry on the parameters of assessment or feedback on how the ministers are performing. The National Assembly has oversight function to ensure that the executive arm of government performs its duties and delivers on its mandate. It is therefore important to ask if the performance reports for ministers and other reports of ministries are shared with the legislature. Oversight functions go beyond visits to roads to see if construction was completed or the like, to actual analysis and evaluation of performance reports and sector reviews. The review process by the legislature should culminate in the dissemination of information to the public and lead to the enforcement of specific measures and sanctions where necessary.

A primary constraint to measuring performance is the lack of data. A lot of the information that is required to measure performance is either not tracked or poorly documented. There is conflicting information on many key indices. For example there are conflicting figures for unemployment, population and crude oil production in the country amongst others. The National Bureau of Statistics is the repository for data and while it is making significant attempts to provide information on the economy, it has not sufficiently delivered on its mandate. Finding information is difficult and often impossible on its website. As a nation, we have not laid enough emphasis on data collection and analysis, and as a result, are left with a lot of assumption and guess work. The states have not made the situation for data gathering better. Whilst many states have passed laws to establish state bureaux of statistics, most of these remain poorly funded, lacking in structure and manpower and without sufficient expertise.

Some state governments such as Gombe, Delta and Lagos, have instituted performance measurement frameworks and these have made attempts to measure the level of economic development periodically. It is important to note that embarking on performance measurement simply provides a standardised basis for which to adjudge outputs and compare current status with expectations and targets. When sectors are measured, it becomes easy to assess government performance in detail. It also provides a basis for decision-making and guides budgetary allocation and the future focus of the government. Performance measurement is particularly important at the state level as this is a stratum of government closer to the people in order for inclusive development.

Until we institute performance measurement frameworks across the country, it will be difficult for all parts to sustain the current pace of economic development or improve it. Until the people can compare successive administrations, there will be no incentive for new leadership to seek to deliver better results than prior ones. Until performance is compared from one region to the other, people will not have a fair basis for adjudging the quality of

education, infrastructure etc. Until performance is measured adequately, we will continue to make assumptions of performance and remain blind-sighted to reality.

What must be done

Firstly, we must make performance measurement mandatory and standardize it nation-wide. The Federal Government should lead efforts to develop a clear framework for such assessments and through the national and state bureaux of statistics and ministries of economic planning, effectively measure performance periodically. In doing this, the Federal Government should review and leverage methodology and reports from states that have successfully implemented performance measurement frameworks. A team of experts should be constituted to ensure that the framework developed is robust and flexible enough to accommodate the peculiarities of various regions and the diversity in focus of various administrations while providing a fair and uniform basis for performance measurement and reporting.

Secondly, we must prioritize data collection and analysis, and adequately fund the national and state bureaux of statistics. Developed countries are able to show changes in key indices monthly as a way to assess the effectiveness of policy and the performance of leaders. Nigeria and other developing countries should learn from such accountability and strive accordingly. We must be able to trust the authenticity of data that is reported and return to making decisions based on such data. However, let us start by collecting data.

Thirdly, we must hold our leaders accountable to their mandates. Performance should be measured periodically and the performance of leaders should be appraised regularly and publicized for the people to know. This will force them to correct areas that are not achieving results, realign focus and meet the expectations of the people. It will ensure that leaders make promises that they intend to keep as people will be informed and can assess them on the fulfilment of such promises. In addition, public servants must be willing to be held accountable to deliver on their work. It is only by doing so, that leaders can fulfil their mandate and deliver on the expectations of the people.

Every leader has a mandate and the achievement or lack thereof must be shown to the people. Too often, people celebrate mediocrity due to ignorance and/or the ability of some leaders to spin their underachievement as overachievement. There must be a basis for evaluating leaders who are doing their job, those who are performing below what is required and those who are superior performers. Measuring performance is a very important issue that should not be left to advertorials or publicity stunts. It should form the basis for re-election or aspiration to higher positions of authority.

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