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ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES THAT IMPINGE ON PROJECT COMPLETION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

In an effort to assist in the political, economic, social growth and development of the nation, the Federal, State and Local Government administrators embark upon projects that are tailored to improve the social welfare needs of the populace. Ever since the end of oil boom in 1982, this nation has been witnessing an ever increasing emergency of projects. Enterprises earlier well conceived, over night become ailing, moribund and later abandoned. The existence of poor planning and execution culture is an antithesis to development. This has widely presented a high ugly picture all throughout the landscape. Very little has been written on the environmental problems that influence project completion in this part of the world, its prevalence in developing countries notwithstanding. For instance, environmental influences that impinge on project completion could result to colossal waste of scarce resources, poor economic growth rates, low income per capita, technological backwardness and the failure syndrome among the entire citizenry. These problems could result to political instability, culminating in the failure to attract the much touted foreign capital the country desperately needs to lift itself from economic cataclysm. In conclusion, this paper recommends, amongst others, that sticking to the project timetable/schedule and enacting legislation to check project management recklessness on the part of contractors and stakeholders will ameliorate such unwanted project termination.

INTRODUCTION

Government at all levels exists mainly to provide the necessary conditions that would aid the positive growth of the social welfare functions of the governed or populace. This positive growth is achieved through the use of projects. The existence of poor implementation and execution culture is an antithesis to development. This is because the growth of any nation is predicated on successful execution of development projects. For the projects to be fully executed they must be adequately budgeted for and

funded. Funding is normally carried out through the allocation of scarce resources between competing alternative uses (Ndiomu, 1994).

Failed projects throw a nation backward through different ways and these are: (1) the financial loss of the failed projects; (2) the loss of the alternative projects; and (3) the mortgaging of future development of the nation through the servicing of the debts used in funding the projects from sources other than internally generated funds (Okoroafor, 1997). A nation does not exist in vacuum. She lives within her environment which provides resources and lays down limits on its activities. A nation just like an organism can survive and grow only if she continually adapts and responds in time and space to its environment. By environment we refer to the external conditions and factors that influence development or growth of people, animals, plants and their working or living conditions. Project realization within time, cost and performance specifications can be influenced by environmental factors that are psychological, cultural, economic, social and political, or succinctly stated, socio-environmental discharge. This environment, in essence includes people, desires, intelligence, their attitudes beliefs, physical resources, climate, economic conditions, state of the art technology and government laws and policy (Koontz et al, 1990).

A critical look at our landscape would reveal the ugly sights of uncompleted, abandoned or aborted projects. If their costs are calculated, it would reveal a colossal waste of scarce resources (Ikedianya 1998). The question on the lips of every cost sensitive professional has been: Was there no proper feasibility studies before executing these projects. It seems very strange and unfortunate that political expediency overrides every other consideration in the selection of projects for execution in Nigeria. In other words, such projects are never planned to be executed with the targeted needs and aspirations of the would-be beneficiaries.

As Wilson (1986) noted, government is the agency or instrument of the state and so, of the people. It is the machinery of the state, a lever of social control and its offices act as agents of the state. It is on the basis of this concept of government that the various authorities or administrators of government of each country conceive and perform their economic, political and social functions and roles such as provision of certain amenities like pipe-borne water, electricity, construction of tarred roads and bridges, public schools and higher education institutions, health facilities etc, thus the genesis of development projects initiated and executed by the government. That is why Imaga (2003) very aptly stated that the problem of project management and feasibility analysis in Nigeria is that of poor conceptualization and management of development projects most of which have inbuilt deceitful mechanisms meant to serve and sub-serve selfish and self-centered objectives other than national goal and improvement on the lot of the Nigeria masses. The cumulative effect of this administrative

deceit at the high places has promoted Nigeria from the position of one of the most difficult nations to govern to that of the most corrupt country in the world. It is against this background that this paper seeks to discuss the environmental influences that impinge on projects completion in Nigeria and in the end proffer solutions on how to mitigate such factors.

PROJECT AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

At this juncture, it becomes very pertinent to ask what a project is so as to guide our discussion of the above subject matter. A project has been variously defined by competent authorities in the field. Imaga *et al* (2003) defined a project as a scientifically evolved work plan devised to achieve a specific objective within a specified period of time. Also Newman, *et al*, (1987) define a project simply as a cluster of activities that is relatively separate and clear cut. A project typically has a distinct mission and a clear-cut termination point. Examples are building a new plant, construction of roads, designing a new package, rural electrification, soliciting gifts of N5m for elderly men's dormitory. The above definitions have been supported by Anuolam (1997), and UNIDO (1986). For this paper, we have chosen to define a project as a task or series of tasks that have a definable beginning and end and requires the expenditure of one or more resources that must be completed in order to achieve the objectives for which they are instituted.

Project management is concerned with the art and science of energizing, co-ordination, planning and controlling human and non-human resources in order to achieve set objectives with constraints on time cost and quality performance. This view was supported by Moder (1988) and Stickney and Grouse (1988). These definitions give us a leeway for the discussion of project abandonment or project termination/completion. If there is no time frame for projects completion, one cannot be talking of abandonment of projects and the accelerating impact of environmental influences.

Project abandonment is the giving up or discontinuation of a project which has taken off (mid-stream). Thus a project can only be said to be abandoned if it is discontinued after the implementation has commenced (Cleland and Kerzener, 1983). In project management, projects are terminated for two basic reasons: *project success or project failure*. Project success means that the project has met its cost, schedules and technical performance objectives and has been integrated into the customer's organization to contribute to the customer's mission. Also a successful project means that the organization has been successful in positioning itself for the future; a strategy has been designed and implemented. On the other hand, project failure means that the project has failed to meet its cost, schedules and technical performance objectives or it does not fit in the organization's future. Failure is therefore relative.

ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES AND PROJECTS COMPLETION

It is important to identify at this juncture the various factors that influence projects' completion in Nigeria. This is necessary to put the project manager at alert and help him minimize those factors. It will equally help project funders or supervisors identify these factors with a view to mitigating their incidence.

Political Reason

This is a pervasive reason. In Nigeria, it applies to both public and private sector projects though at varying degrees. The political factor begins to exert influence on projects right from their conception stage. Most projects are political projects that were not originally meant to be completed. In Nigeria, there are so many of these projects. The second bridge across River Niger and its dredging has been on the drawing board since the beginning of 1983. They were initiated merely to score political points. Because of such reasons, proper feasibility studies are never carried out and the consequence is that they never leave the drawing board. Imaga *et al* (2003) emphasized that projects are conceived with in-built deceitful mechanism which stifle their completion mid-way. Another inherent political fact is that politicians in Nigeria find it extremely difficult to complete projects started by their opponents. It is done aptly to avoid giving credit to any person in the opposing camp.

Economic Influence

The economic factor deals with the reward system employed in Nigeria. There is no correlation between effort expended by an employee and the reward that he receives in the project environment. When a project staff believes that equity does not prevail, he is bound to withhold a measure of his productivity in order to restore equity. Closely linked to the above is the inability of project managers or owners to give adequate compensation to project staff who inspite of the unconducive project situation put in their best in the attainment of project goals. There appears to be no commitment and no goal congruency. To encourage productivity in the project environment, it is essential that a system of reward must be designed that attempts to equate hard work and reward (Unyimadu, 2006).

The Social Environment

Managers of various development projects have been criticized for not being responsive to the social attitudes, beliefs and values of some individuals, groups or societies. But attitudes and values are different from project managers and project staff such as accountant, engineers, technicians etc (Koontz *et al*, 1990). This variety of values makes it very difficult for project managers to design an environmentally friendly

