

CLIENTELISM AND LEGISLATORS' CONSTITUENCY SERVICE PROVISION IN NIGERIA – AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

In developing societies, democratisation and governance are often marred by the influence of clientelistic dynamics, which usually define the nature of the interaction between legislators and constituents. MPs face pressure to downplay their primary law-making, representation, and oversight roles in favour of the provision of particularistic and clientelist goods or risk losing goodwill and elections. Against this background, this study presents a literature review of clientelism and constituency development services in Nigeria. As a mechanism for directing and distributing clubs and private goods, this paper isolates Constituency Development Funds in Nigeria, investigating its practices and governance implications. This study acknowledged that constituency services could be instrumental in the delivery of public goods and development initiatives at the community level. However, these services mostly take the shape of soft projects that are challenging to measure and have accountability deficits. Therefore, although constituency service activities, through the operation of Constituency Development Funds, have the prospect of engendering decentralisation of development, this is less likely in low-accountable systems. The paper reiterates the arguments that clientelism complicates and perpetuates the cycle of deprivation by jettisoning public goods for private or particularistic goods. It also undermines the quality of the delivery of legislators' primary functions.

Keywords: Development, Clientelism, Constituency Development Fund, Legislators.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The last decade of the 20th century brought a change to the system of rule across many African countries. There was a noticeable change in the governance system, with hitherto authoritarian and one-party systems embracing democratic government and multi-party systems (van de Walle, 2007; Barkan, 2009; Osumah, 2010). However, the democratisation process has been tortuous and attended by varying challenges. Africa has, among other things, suffered from strong presidents and weak parliaments, the dominance of the executive arm of government, and intermittent absence of a democratic government due to military forays into politics (Fashagba, 2009; Duruji & Duruji-Moses, 2017).

At the same time, comparative politics scholars have long regarded African politics as an arena where clientelism - the exchange of favours for political support and votes - is widespread (Wantchekon, 2003; Kusche, 2012). In practice, political clientelism is demonstrated through two primary mediums: the provision of particularistic goods targeted at individuals as well as constituency services targeted at groups, communities or individuals (Zackaria & Appiah-Marfo, 2020; Demarest, 2021). It is often argued that colonial legacies and the fundamental features of the African political system encouraged the

development of patron–client politics, which eventually gave rise to patrimonial regimes (Barkan, 2009). Clientelism has also been seen as a rational response by African political elites to maintain political power after their inability to meet the high public expectations in post-colonial African states (Dunn & Englebert, 2019). Researchers expected that the phenomenon would decline longitudinally. However, it has proven to be an enduring feature of politics (Roniger, 2004).

Clientelism has grave implications for policymaking and governance, especially in low-income and developing societies. Politicians may be adjudged by citizens not based on their core duties but on the quantity of private goods provided. In the same manner, fearing that voters may support other contenders if their requests go unfulfilled, politicians may be incentivised to focus on and spend more time on providing private goods and let their primary functions suffer. As a result, the prevalence and institutionalisation of clientelism may systematically define public expectations from representatives and engineer a reconstruction of representative roles.

In addition, by eroding the system of accountability during elections and heightening the capacity of high-spending politicians during elections, this practice may bring inefficient and unqualified leaders into government, leading to the erosion of good governance systems and sustained underdevelopment. As noted by Mares and Young (2016), the use of private incentives violates people's rights and has a significant detrimental impact on elections' capacity to hold elected officials accountable to voters. Moreover, as Acheampong (2020) argues, clientelism may further perpetuate the cycle of poverty, illiteracy, and incompetence. Clientelism corrupts the procedures and outcome of elections (Lindberg, 2003). It represents a perverse accountability where the power that should belong to the electorate, by virtue of election, is reversed, and the electorate ends up being controlled by the politician. Hence, voters are punished or rewarded for their voting behaviour, rather than the other way round, as normally expected in a democratic system (Stokes, 2005).

This paper examines the issue of clientelism and the provision of constituency services in Nigeria. The paper is divided into four sections. First, it reviews the roles of the legislature and legislators. Next, the paper explored how clientelism is deployed as a mobilisation tool across various contexts. It then proceeds to isolate Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) as a variant of clientelistic practice. The paper then examined the deployment of CDF (through Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIPs)) in Nigeria.

2.0 THE ROLES OF THE LEGISLATURE / LEGISLATORS

The legislature is a complex institution whose status, power, and functions vary from country to country (Ball, 1977; Ornstein, 1992). This notwithstanding, four major roles that legislators play can be identified: law-making, representation, oversight, and constituency service. Recently, public engagement has also been considered a core responsibility of legislatures (Odeyemi et al., 2023). Legislators may view, prioritise, or evaluate the salience of these roles differently from constituents, just as there may also be differences concerning which representation model should be applied. The four core responsibilities of the legislators are expanded as follows:

2.1 Representation: Representation is brought about because of the impracticalness of bringing the entirety of citizens together to represent their interests individually in the political system. Due to the evolution and expansion of society, there was a transformation of the direct democracy system in the 18th and 19th centuries, leading to the ascendance of representative democracy. Representative democracy makes provisions for elected individuals (delegates, trustees, attorneys, proxy) to articulate the interests of the citizens and make decisions on their behalf (Dahl, 1989). In this wise, Barkan (2009) saw the legislature as an arena where representatives representing different interests articulate and advance their benefits through policy-making. Loewenberg and Patterson (1979) noted that the legislator–constituent relationship presents various intricacies, including a complex argument regarding the scope of the legislator's constituency makeup. Constituents can be political parties, geographical territories, ethnic groups, gender, social class, or interest groups. Constituency makeup considerably influences how the legislator interprets and prioritises his/her role. This is because legislators represent diverse interests in society, including various religions, political thoughts, and geographical locations. The focus of representation could also be on the local or national environment/constituency.

In the same manner, there is a distinction regarding the model of representation that the legislator employs, e.g., the delegate model, which implies that the legislator's actions and representation are based exclusively on constituent preferences; the trustee model, which gives the legislator wide leverage and allows him to act based on his judgement of what is best for his constituents; and the politico model which lies in the middle of the spectrum and justifies the legislator alternating between the previous two models, depending on the prevailing circumstance (Russell, 2012). Whichever model is chosen conditions the legislator's interpretation of his/her roles and interaction with his constituents.

2.2 Law-making: The need for effective governance leads to the differentiation of governmental powers and responsibilities among various branches of government. The legislature has law-making as its core function, making it the central institution because governance is initiated through law-making, after which the said laws would be enforced by the executive, and any dispute arising from the above would be settled by the judiciary (Oni et al., 2019). Odeyemi and Abioro (2019:218) noted that "legislatures are assemblies of elected representatives from geographically defined constituencies, with law-making functions in the governmental process". Similarly, Norton (2013:1) conceptualises the legislature as "a body created to approve measures that will form the law of the land".

2.3 Oversight: Another vital function of the legislature is the performance of oversight duties. Besides specific responsibilities to defined constituents, legislators are also mandated to promote national and broad interests through various activities (Tom & Attai, 2014). Barkan (2009) underscored the importance of vertical and horizontal accountability. In particular, the horizontal accountability function of the parliament is an essential feature of representative democracies by scrutinising the activities of the executive arm and its agencies. Fashagba (2009) noted that the oversight function of the legislature helps to promote executive transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. In Nigeria, the legislature exercises this role in various ways, including the confirmation of executive nominees such as ministers (Fashagba, 2009). The legislature also has the power to

investigate executive actions and government spending with the aim of preventing inefficiency, corruption, impudence, etc. (Ahmadu & Ajiboye, 2004). This power is usually exercised through legislative committees, public hearings, and project site visits.

2.4 Constituency Service: Legislators are usually required to initiate, organise, and monitor developmental projects in their constituencies. This expectation is quite noticeable in single/small-member constituencies/districts (Barkan, 2009). Constituency service occurs by providing specific resources to targeted groups, constituencies or individuals. It normally involves the provision of private goods, which could include cash, foodstuffs, building materials, school fees, provision of assistance with or through the bureaucracy and many more.

Power (2012) categorised constituency services into four major headings: a) genuine assistance in identifying employment or other opportunities and, more overtly, clientelistic behaviours clearly intended to buy their continued support. b) "grievance chasing", where constituents use MPs to address particular government services or bureaucracy challenges. c) "policy responsiveness" ,i.e. the use of legislators to influence specific policy proposals. d) the provision of pork – where MPs use their influence in government to secure government spending and projects.

Constituency services have been attended by seemingly endless controversies. While some scholars have referred to it as a mechanism of decentralisation and democratic development, others have criticised and dismissed it as a diversion from the traditional roles of legislatures. For example, Atairet and Ibanga (2021) referred to constituency functions as extra-legislative functions. In another paper, Orimogunje (2015:181) posited, "Legislative constituency projects is a departure from the traditional constitutional role of the legislature under the doctrine of separation of powers, and usurpation of the role of the executive". Additionally, Lindberg (2011) argues that the provision of constituency services compromises the principle of impartiality (unequal treatment of citizens) and the governance process.

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW - CLIENTELISM AND POLITICAL MOBILISATION

The electoral studies literature is replete with various means through which politicians seek and attain power. The World Bank Policy Research Report (2016) distinguishes healthy political engagement from unhealthy political engagement, with the latter referring to situations whereby citizens participate in elections and reward/punish politicians for personalised benefits and patronage rather than the public good. As Lindberg (2003) noted, politicians use programmatic or clientelist allurements as a political strategy. Incumbents and challengers rely on this strategy to win elections (Gallego & Wantchekon, 2012). However, incumbents are more poised to utilise this strategy because of access to public funds, unlike challengers, who often need to rely on sponsors or their private income (Acheampong, 2020; Gallego & Wantchekon, 2012).

Clientelism has been found to have a significant presence both in developed and developing democracies (Kopecky & Scherlis, 2008; Lindberg, 2003). Kuo (2018) noted that political clientelism, which then took the form of pork-barreling and patronage, was formerly popular in advanced democracies such as the United States and Britain. However, as the study further noted, political strategies have now metamorphosed into programmatic politics, interest

group politics, and lobbying. Similarly, Zackaria and Appaih-Marfo (2020) argued that political clientelism is still evident among MPs in advanced democracies but is evolving from the private satisfaction of individuals and sectional politics to programmatic policies. Keefer (2007) noted that clientelism is more widespread in emerging democracies as political actors are less able to make issue-based and credible electoral promises to voters and are, therefore, driven to advance clientelist policies. As a result, politicians in developing countries tend to overprovide targeted goods such as jobs and public work projects and underprovide non-targeted goods such as universal education, property rights, and other general policy decisions. In the case of the legislature, political clientelism occurs primarily through providing individually-targeted and constituency-wide goods, projects, or services in exchange for support or votes. This provision requires contact between the political office seeker and voters and often induces ballot exposure during elections (Mueller, 2018).

Some studies have emphasised the role of patrons in the distribution of clientelistic goods and see it as a predominantly top-down process (Stokes, 2005). Nichter and Peress (2016:1) criticised this conception of clientelistic benefit as an entirely "top-down process" from machines to clients. Through data from Brazil and Argentina, the paper highlighted the agency of citizens, noting that the provision of clientelistic benefits can be citizen-initiated and its use a consequence of "request fulfilling" by politicians. In other words, politicians may be incentivised to use this approach by constituents just as they may willingly deploy it in order to covert votes. Fikri (2021) noted that clientelistic transactions could be facilitated through success teams, social networks, community leaders, and political parties. Stokes et al. (2013) also demonstrated the pivotal role of brokers in the direction of benefits to voters. Clientelistic brokers often include political partisans, state employees, civil society organisations, employers, ethnic leaders and gangs (Mares & Young, 2016). Clientelistic exchange can be immediate or based on expectations: the expectation is that the client would support the patron's ambition in the polls and that the client is guaranteed some benefits due to the political support (Kusche, 2014). Although the outcomes of the use of clientelist strategies are challenging to measure, it is nevertheless considered an important electoral tactic (Mares & Young, 2014). It has proven to be an important political strategy, and politicians often find ways to overcome electoral restrictions that challenge it, such as secret balloting. For example, politicians may use observing party agents or neighbours to predict whether voters are likely to renege on agreements or prevent such breaches (Stokes, 2005).

As a strategic tool, clientelistic goods could have different targets. Demarest (2021) found that clientelist goods are narrowly directed at elites and party officials (who decide party candidates) rather than the public. Lindberg (2011) revealed that the targets of clientelistic goods are groups from which MPs face the most electoral pressure. Thus, where local party executives select party flag bearers, MPs are likelier to target local party officials than ordinary people. The study also found that private goods are less likely to be considered where candidates are from dominant parties and where, judging by usual support, parties/candidates only need to mobilise support by encouraging people to go to the polls on election day. On the other hand, in highly contested electoral constituencies, where swing voters are poised to influence the election result, candidates are likely to identify the swing voters and induce them with private goods (Lindberg, 2011). Similarly, Bussels (2019) noted that parties would likely target electoral strongholds.

In some climes, young people, who are predominantly first-time voters, are the most targeted (Fikri, 2017). Nichter and Peress (2016) also reported that machines are more likely to fulfil requests of their supporters, likely voters and people with low incomes. They are also likelier to fulfil the requests where it is easier to track citizens' vote preferences.

While clientelism may serve regime stability needs through resource distribution, it remains a dangerous practice. Clientelism underlines the practice of vote buying in many developing countries (Guerra & Justesen, 2022). In the literature, clientelism has been associated with poverty, inequality, and economic vulnerability (Acheampong, 2020; Bobonis & Gonzalez-Navarro, 2017). Clientelism also has implications for accountability. It implies that parties may be evaluated or punished not on the quality or achievements of their programmes or the provision of collective goods but based on private and particularistic goods supply (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). As a result, politicians may be incentivised to focus on and spend more time providing cheap private goods to individuals at the expense of public or general goods. Furthermore, programmatic accountability and government performance may be undermined by allocating targeted goods at the expense of national programmes (Shin, 2015). At the level of parliament, clientelism adversely affects legislators' effectiveness. It results in less time for legislators to focus on their core duties, resulting in absenteeism, conflicts of interest, and confusion regarding constituents' real needs (Zackaria & Appiah-Marfo, 2020).

4.1 CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND

Studies on the operation of constituency services projects disagree on its utility. While some conceive it as a medium for the decentralisation of benefits and promotion of developmental goals (Tsubura, 2014), others see it as an extra-legislative function and usurpation of the executive role (Orimogunje, 2015; Nnamani et al., 2021), with adverse implications for legislators' core tasks (Power, 2021). Other studies also interpret it as a political strategy and political marketing tool. Butler & Collins (2001) argued that political attraction has changed from abstractions and ideas to tangible outputs, and this has resulted in the waning salience of ideology in gaining political support, increased voting volatility, a decline in party membership and the increasing significance of constituency services. The deployment of Constituency Development Funds is also controversial based on the questions of its effectiveness and accountability, as well as its implications for strengthening of existing patronage networks.

While the use of clientelism and positive and negative inducements (as demonstrated by vote buying, provision of commodities or favours in exchange for votes and use of administrative, financial, or physical punishment) to influence voter behaviour has been comprehensively investigated by empirical studies (Mares & Young, 2016), the exercise of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs,) has been relatively underexplored, despite its salience in developing countries. Constituency Development Funds reveal clientelistic characteristics. As Young (2009) illuminated, apart from direct favours and patronage, clientelism may take the subtle form of using development funds to provide local goods. Development funds enable legislators to influence budgetary provisions to facilitate material projects or secure "pork" for their communities (Keefer & Khemani, 2009; Benson, 2018). It has emerged as a veritable institutional response to the increasing salience of constituency services in the work of

legislators (Power, 2012). CDF is a unique mechanism which gives legislators some authority in the selection of community developmental projects as an extension of their constituency service function. By design, it seeks to bring development to constituents. However, as Tsubura (2014) noted, CDFs go beyond a means of transferring public funds from the central government to local governments but serve as an instrument for the redistribution of resources for politicians' electoral advantage. As of 2014, CDFs are implemented in about 15 developing nations globally (Tsubura, 2014).

There is evidence that citizens appreciate development funds. Power (2012) reported that voters around the world are turning to their MPs for assistance on a broad range of issues, regardless of whether they directly affect the work of the parliament. The basic premise is that MPs can practically fix any issue because of their access to resources, power, and influence. The study also found evidence that voters sometimes hold politicians accountable for the tangible benefits they supply than for their oversight or executive monitoring role in governance. Wolak (2016) also showed that citizens prefer legislators who are close to and active in the local community. This preference is likely to incentivise legislators to concentrate more on drawing targeted goods to the community so as to retain the support and goodwill of voters. This could be significant in developing democracies such as Africa. Warren (2019) indicated that African legislators experience high legislative turnover rates. Thus, CDFs may be a rational and decisive political strategy.

4.2 CONSTITUENCY SERVICE PROVISION / ZONAL DEVELOPMENT FUNDS IN NIGERIA

The system of democracy in Nigeria can be traced to 1960, when the country gained its independence. In 1966, the Westminster system was adopted and later replaced by the American presidential model in 1979. This was followed by a long period of military rule, spanning almost 30 years, but interspersed with short periods of democratic rule. Nigeria returned fully to a democratic system in 1999. The country has since witnessed a system of representative democracy spanning 23 years. Nigeria's long period of military rule had grave consequences on the institutionalisation of the legislature. The legislature was severely attacked and assaulted during military rule due to autocratic tendencies and the practice of suspending the legislature by military rulers. Consequently, throughout Nigeria's long period of autocratic control, resources were allocated according to the whims and caprices of the military authorities, favouring some areas while unfairly neglecting others since they lacked a voice in the government. As a result, after Nigeria returned to democratic governance, constituency projects were conceived as a tool to be used by legislators to ensure equity and the spread of government presence across the country (Duruji & Duruji-Moses, 2017). As a result, constituency projects became a crucial component of the legislators' role in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, starting in 1999.

According to the Nigeria National Orientation Agency (2021), constituency projects are vital to national development because they are one of the ways the government bring development to the nooks and crannies of the country through the active participation of the members of the National Assembly. Through Constituency Development Projects, legislators facilitate and recommend projects (e.g. provision of boreholes, renovation of roads and schools, grants, and training) to be cited in their constituencies during the budget process (Awofeso & Irabor,

2022). At the start of the programme in 1999, a sum of five million Naira (US\$6,360.59) and three million Naira (US\$2,544.24) were released for each Senator and House of Representative member to kick-start the initiative (Udefuna et al., 2013). Similar arrangements were equally replicated at sub-national levels by the respective governments. In 2017, the programme was reformed and renamed Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIPs) (Benson, 2018). Just like CDFs, ZIPs were also designed to be implemented by federal ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) following submissions from federal legislators at both houses of the National Assembly.

Over the years, the amount expended on CDFs / ZIPs had grown steadily. In 2021 alone, One hundred billion Naira (US\$1,272,118.97) was allocated as funding for the ZIPs. The upper and lower chambers of the National Assembly allocated this amount using a ratio of 6:4, respectively. In other words, 60 per cent of the overall value of the ZIP projects goes to Senators, while House of Representative members fix the remaining 40 per cent for their projects in the constituencies (Dataphyte, 2021). These projects take the form of hard and soft initiatives. Examples of hard projects include construction, repair and refurbishment of classroom blocks, training centres, and drainages; and installation of transformers, electric poles and wires and street lights. Soft projects take the form of provision of financial grants, computers, motorcycles and tricycles; organising of trainings, sensitisation programmes and seminars; and provision of consumables (Dataphyte, 2021). An important point to note is that description of constituency services in Nigeria are rarely reported in honest language to constituents. Agi (2022) disclosed that legislators usually misrepresent constituency projects as they seek to ascribe full credit for the projects. In order to endear them to voters, some lawmakers engrave constituency projects with dishonest inscriptions suggesting them as the direct sponsors. It was, therefore, commonplace to see inscriptions such as "This project is sponsored by Senator A or Honourable B".

4.3 IMPLICATIONS OF ZONAL INTERVENTION PROJECTS IN NIGERIA

Challenges to ZIPs in Nigeria are exposed at the design and implementation levels. By intention, initiatives such as CDF and ZIPs are conceived as an instrument to bring development to local communities. However, the implementation often takes a clientelistic dimension and becomes directed to selective individuals such as party loyalists and loyal/potential voters. Implementation of projects is also often mired by lack of proper monitoring and corruption (BudgIT, 2019).

As Dataphyte (2021) discovered, most of the initiatives take the form of soft projects – transient-in-value projects that mainly target a few individuals and take the form of empowerment benefits rather than infrastructural projects that would have benefited the general community. In an examination of 1884 executed ZIPs in 2021, Dataphyte (2021) observed that 65 per cent of the initiatives were soft projects, mainly in the form of grants, training, sensitisation programmes, consumables, supplies and equipment. The forms of projects are challenging to trace, and it is difficult to measure their effects in the mid to long term.

At the level of implementation of the projects, several gaps have also been brought to light. BudgIT (2017) found that 40.4% of constituency projects covered in the 2016 fiscal year

budget were not delivered. The study noted that challenges to the implementation of constituency projects include lack of effective monitoring and evaluation, obscurity of budgetary provisions, dishonesty of contractors, under-implementation of projects and non-implementation of projects, use of substandard materials for building construction, and lack of constituency awareness. Other challenges to constituency project implementation include embezzlement, lack of consultation with constituents on the choice of projects, and contract inflation (Awofeso & Irabor, 2020).

ZIPs have also been criticised on the basis of their exclusionary nature and the fact that the substantial investments have yielded little or no sustainable impact on local communities. In 2019, a National Summit on reducing corruption in the public sector called for the cancellation of the programme because of the blatant mishandling of cash and the poor results it delivered. The summit was particularly concerned about the concentration on soft projects involving the provision of empowerment benefits to targeted individuals by politicians rather than the entire population (Dataphyte, 2021).

In the same manner, the constituency project contracts are often overinflated, despite the poor quality of jobs, leading to the direction of the biggest share of the benefits meant for the people to dishonest contractors. At the same time, the locations of projects are sometimes not disclosed transparently, making it difficult to track. At community levels, citizens are also usually kept in the dark concerning the nature and expectations of the projects, making it easier to evade responsibility by the implementing actors. Sometimes, projects are not implemented at all (BudgIT, 2019).

In its investigation, Punch (2019) revealed that legislators typically bargain with agency heads to divert the funds released by the Federal Government for constituency projects for personal uses. In the same report, it quoted the former Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, as saying that despite the appropriation of One trillion Naira (US\$1,272,118,968.57) for constituency projects between 2009 and 2019, the impact of such massive investment on the lives and welfare of ordinary Nigerians was difficult to see.

The preceding analysis suggests that the operation of constituency services and intervention projects in Nigeria takes the shape line of clientelism and brings into doubt the developmental outputs of the projects. The choice of project and implementation procedures often tilt the balance of benefits to politicians who use the funds and projects as a means of political marketing, taking advantage of accountability gaps. This situation highlights the need to re-evaluate the operation of constituency projects and the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This paper examined the practice of clientelism as a political strategy that influences the nature of interaction among legislators and constituents. Clientelism cuts across context and space but seems to be more prevalent in developing countries. This study also explored Constituency Development Funds and Zonal Intervention Projects as variants of the practice of clientelism in Nigeria. The literature review indicates two major motivations for the adoption of these initiatives: as a tool for political mobilisation and as institutional responses

to public expectations. In Nigeria, constituency service projects are taunted as a medium for decentralising legitimate democratic dividends. However, project design and implementation challenges make this goal elusive. Projects mainly involve short-term, difficult-to-measure, and particularistic goods, demonstrating the characteristics of clientelism. At the same time, implementing more general projects is often mired by a lack of proper monitoring and corruption. Consequently, the greatest beneficiaries of the projects remain politicians, contractors, and party loyalists. Arising from the foregoing, this study argues that if constituency service projects would serve developmental objectives, the scope must be clearly defined and restrictive to long-term, measurable, and impactful projects that target the community in the broadest sense. Furthermore, accountability gaps must be filled to ensure the funds are expended for the proper purpose.

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