

A Study of Government Project Failures in Nigeria

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Abstract: Project failure which occurs in all countries of the world, is an embarrassment to any country where it occurs, especially developing countries where the failure is more frequent. Generally, project implementation is characterized by success implementation, delay and failure. Thus, efficient practices ought to be relied upon to mitigate failure and delay. The aim of this study was to investigate and analyse the causes, effects and consequences of project failures across Nigeria. A systematic literature review of scholarly publications relevant to Nigeria to establish the findings and answers to the three research questions selected for this study was adopted. In this study, the following causes of project failure were identified: poor communication between the various stakeholders in public projects within Nigeria; poor contracting and contractor practices; poor planning and estimation; frequent design scope changes and errors; lack of adequate resources and bureaucracy; socio-cultural and political interferences; and poor leadership and corruption. Also, the effects of project failure identified were: loss of State revenue; project cost overruns; loss of revenue by citizens; substandard infrastructure; and low empowerment to community. Accordingly, the consequences of the failure were identified as follows: slow economic growth; sector-centric underdevelopment; loss of foreign aid/grants; tougher donor regulations; loss of elections to incumbent leaders; and lack of confidence in State from financial institutions. It was concluded that majority of the causes were anthropogenic, and while the effects touched on stakeholders and the communities within which these projects were to be implemented, the consequences touched the whole economy as a result of the failures. It is recommended that better management practice, political will and efficient implementation of projects to avoid the huge rate of failures and their attendant effects and consequences should be encouraged in Nigeria.

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1. Introduction

As is generally known, projects serve as a major driver towards the development and growth of any nation. Kendrick (2015) suggests that the projects executed in a nation gives notable contributions to the development of that nation. Therefore, it is necessary to execute successful projects that will serve its required purpose and aid in improving the standard of living of that nation. Government projects, especially in the field of construction are usually capital intensive (Panayides *et al.*, 2015) thereby making its success a priority. Despite the necessity to have successful projects, the bulk of projects in developing nations end up as failed and this failure might have a negative outcome on the shareholders in the project (Damoah, 2015) as well as on the citizens of the nation.

Globally, project failure has resulted in the loss of large amounts of funds. Information system projects in the UK, power generation projects in Africa and construction projects in Asia are few examples of projects that have experienced failure (Heeks, 2006; Fabian and Amir, 2011; Okereke, 2017; Shahhossein *et al.*, 2018). A specific example is the

Home Office where £750 million e-boarder scheme whose contract was awarded in 2007 and terminated as a failed project in 2010 (Alami, 2016).

The rate of project failure in developing countries has been found to be higher than the rate in developed countries (Ogwueleka, 2011; Damoah, 2015) thereby creating the need to embark on more development projects. These projects however, experience several challenges such as inefficient planning (Akande *et al.*, 2018a), cost variation (Aziz, 2013), difficult stakeholders (Rajablu, *et al.*, 2015). Currently in Nigeria, the rate of project failure is alarming and these failed projects have high financial implications (Akande *et al.* 2018b) which consequently reduce the rate of development.

It seems that the issue of project failure has become an integral part of government as well as organisational projects; however, these cases of failure are dependent on the criteria used for assessing such failure and also on the parties defining or evaluating the project failure (Mar, 2012; Carvalho, 2014). Furthermore, different causes of project failure have been identified. For example, Soliman (2010) identified 29 causes of failure as a result of delays in

Kuwait's construction projects. He went ahead to state that the major causes of these delays are design and finance-related problems. Delays in Zambia's road construction projects were attributed to poor supervision, contract modification, construction mistakes, inadequate or unavailable equipment, poor procurement practices, difficult financial processes, etc. (Damoah, 2015).

At present, the menace of project failure has prompted researchers to look into the underlying factors leading to these failures. Some researchers have taken a rather generic approach (Liu *et al.*, 2011; Aziz, 2013 Taherdoost and Keshavarzsalehc, 2016) or have researched on project failure with regard to specific projects in certain industries (Oloruntobi, 2013; Patanakul, 2014; Kog, 2017).

Although there are numerous causes and effects of project failure, studies on these causes and effects are few. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the causes, effects and consequences of project failures in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

In this research, methodology involved the study philosophy, study approaches, study strategy, study choices, study design and study methods.

2.1 Study philosophy

In this study, based on the aims of the projects undertaken and the aspect of knowledge sought, epistemological philosophy (Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015) was selected with the concomitant antecedents of epistemological philosophy being the interpretivist perspective. The choice of epistemological philosophy was because of its approach to research being the search for knowledge on reality (Myers, 2013). The philosophy aids in understanding the causes, effects and consequences of failures of the well-known reality of thousands of failing projects in Nigeria.

2.2 Study approaches

The approaches consisted of data collection approach, theoretical approach and researcher data collection involvement approach.

In the data collection approach, qualitative or quantitative approach (Saunders *et al.*, 2012) can be used. In this case, qualitative approach was used in which data were collected through interviews, observations, case study, focus groups, analysis of record and oral history (Lune and Berg, 2016).

In the theoretical approach, there was a move from known facts or specifics (data) to theory with the aim of developing generalisable facts (theory) (Wilson, 2014). This qualitative approach was adopted because of the need to develop an understanding of the projects followed by generalisable theory in the field.

In the research data collection involvement approach, the objective approach was adopted to do away with the impact of the data (bias) and withdrawing a huge involvement in the collection of the data (Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

2.3 The study strategy

In this research, a systematic literature review strategy for the collection of data was adopted. The rationale behind this choice was informed by the budget constraints for this study and the costs it would incur in the process of collecting primary data. Moreover, through the systematic approach, it was possible to collect empirical data easily by simply reviewing literature. This strategy made it possible to tackle the causes, effects and consequences of project failure in Nigeria.

2.4 Study choices

Unlike a mixed method of choices, a mono-method was adopted for this study based on the objectives of the study. The mono-method specifically concentrated on reviewing the literature regarding the causes, effects and consequences of project failure in Nigeria. However, the study choices described the nature of decisions adopted in the nature of data used in the research, and according to Cohen *et al.* (2013), research choices can either take the form of a mono-method or a mixed method. Thus, the choice of a mono-method in this study was effective in ensuring that the data collected was adequate to explore the research aims extensively.

2.5 Study design

A cross-sectional design was adopted for this study. Thus, the data collection process took place in a short span of time allowing a sizeable amount of data to be collected regarding a specific project. Of course, a study design implies the time horizons for undertaking the project (Saunders *et al.*, 2012) besides the plan of execution to undertake the evaluation of the research aims and objectives (Bell *et al.*, 2018).

2.6 Study methods

Owing to the qualitative and systematic literature review strategy selected for this study, secondary data sources were adopted for the study. The rationale for this choice was the ease in analysis, efficiency, time-saving and objective appeal offered from secondary data collection techniques (Myers, 2013). This is because the data considered were from researchers who explored aspects of causes, effects and consequences of project failures before. Thus, primary sources were excluded because of similarities with primary data peer-reviewed journals, reports from research and the Nigerian government, books, newspapers articles and websites. Sampling therefore involved a pool of secondary sources from a population. The inclusion and exclusion matrix (Table

1) offered a quasi-sampling technique to utilise in the inclusion and exclusion of secondary data.

2.7 Data collection and analysis

The collection of data took a week. Data between 2000 and 2019 were considered in the provision of the need for information with regard to the causes, effects and consequences of project failures in Nigeria. The bulk of the data analysis came

from books and journal articles. However, valuable insights from textbooks, government records, newspaper articles and statistics from reputable institutions were included. These sources provided vital aspects from both corroborative argument and supportive assertion in the discussion and subsequent conclusion of the research aims.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Matrix for Secondary Data

Parameter consideration for inclusion	Inclusion threshold	Exclusion threshold
Publication date of the reports, journal articles and websites	The publication date for the source lies between 2005 and 2019, a 15-year space. However, works done beyond this timeframe but possessed corroborated results and conclusions were included	The publication date for the source lies outside the 2005 and 2019 time-space. Save for the validly close/related studies.
The publication date of the books	The limit for inclusion was capped at 200-2019.	Excluded if it was published before 2000.

3. Results

3.1 Causes of project failure in Nigeria

3.1.1 Poor Communication

Poor communication between the various stakeholders in public projects within Nigeria has been identified. The poor communication is between the Federal government and State government, government and the private stakeholders enjoined in the projects, government and the local communities, and project implementation parties. Poor communication has also been linked to project delays.

3.1.2 Poor contracting and contractor practices

These practices are: poor contracting practices linked to poor contracts agreed upon with contractors, contractors deliberate non-performance on contracts awarded to them, and embezzlement of allocated budgets to contractors. The contracting challenges linked to failure were affirmed to be nepotism and tribalism in awarding of contracts in a rather biased manner which has led to high failure.

3.1.3 Poor planning and estimation

Lack of skilful planning, estimation and scheduling in the implementation of the projects has been established to cause significant failure in projects across Nigeria. Poor contractor estimation, time horizons for implementation and cost estimations have closely been established to cause project failures in Nigeria.

3.1.4 Frequent design scope changes and errors

Persistent changes made to the established design, errors and defective designs pushed forward for implementation have been established to be closely linked to project failures in Nigeria. It was also found that design changes and errors increase the costs of the projects, delay implementation and impediment on the successful implementation of

building projects including other several projects in Nigeria.

3.1.5 Lack of adequate resources and bureaucracy

Budgetary detriments were established to be linked to a high rate of project failures in Nigeria. Also slow or non-disbursement of funds from the government towards the implementation of projects due to corruption, toxic bureaucracy and zero allocations made to these projects have been linked to a high rate of project failures of roads, buildings, energy and other infrastructural spheres within Nigeria.

3.1.6 Socio-cultural and political interferences

Socio-cultural interference through conflicts and incessant opposition to public project have been established to confer impediments to project completion in Nigeria. Similarly, the lack of continuity in projects which were poorly funded by previous governments was found to be one of the causes of project failure in Nigeria.

3.1.7 Poor leadership and corruption

Poor leadership and corruption, contracting, estimation and implementation of projects have been associated with project balloon in costs, time overruns, and eventually abandonment and failures of various projects in Nigeria.

3.2 Effects of project failure in Nigeria

3.2.1 Loss of State revenue

Loss of State revenue was found to be a leading effect of project failure in Nigeria.

3.2.2 Project cost overruns

Project failure has been found to cause project cost overruns to stakeholders enjoined in the agreed-upon contracts. It was also found that contractors will have to pay for their credit facilitations in undertaking

the project. Therefore, with the failure of projects, stakeholders are tied to honour the agreements of their contractors with the greatest burden being economic/financial effects.

3.2.3 Loss of revenue by citizens

Project failure was found to have a close impact on local citizens' life because it leads to a loss of revenues. This is because project implementation opens up local citizens and communities to employment and commercial opportunities in labour supply, material supply and procurement gains as the contractors outsource locally.

3.2.4 Sub-standard infrastructure

It was found that project failure and incomplete projects have resulted in the 'handing over' of substandard infrastructure to the local community.

3.2.5 Low empowerment to community

One of the findings was that disempowerment of the local communities is a resultant effect to local communities in regions where these projects failed. Also, low empowerment was found to result in loss of employment opportunities which develop capacity where the projects are undertaken.

3.3 Consequences of project failure

3.3.1 Slow economic growth

From the literature review, project failure was linked to slow or derailed economic growth of the community where such projects were cited in Nigeria. A case in point is the \$20bn Ogidigben Gas Industrial Park in Delta State of Nigeria which was positioned to be a game-changer in the oil refinery.

3.3.2 Sector-centric underdevelopment

It was found that project failure leads to low development rates in the associated sectors within Nigeria. For instance, the failure of Ogidigben oil refinery to take off since 2015 has led to the region's slowdown of its progression to the refinery of crude oil extracted from the region.

3.3.3 Loss of foreign aid/grants

A grave consequence which has been noted with the rising number of failed projects in Nigeria is the loss of foreign or donor support for the local projects undertaken in the country. It was noted that the rising leadership failure evident in embezzlements and misappropriation of funds by Nigerian governments and its leaders has led to donor support withdrawal.

3.3.4 Tougher donor regulations

It was also found that tougher donor regulations were a detrimental consequence of project failure in Nigeria. The embezzlement and poor management of donated funds were found to be reasons for increased requirements for local Nigerian governments to meet to discuss terms for the award of contracts. These terms/regulations seek to seal the loopholes in accounting practices, project planning, design and

implementation order to ensure that the intended goal is met in Nigeria.

3.3.5 Loss of elections by incumbent

Loss of election by an incumbent government was observed to be due to project failure. With growing appetite for infrastructural development projects, the failure to successfully complete these projects has been seen to cost some incumbents their seats.

3.3.6 Lack of confidence in State from financial institutions

Project failure was found to result in the loss of confidence of financial institutions on the governments for resources credited to them. The embezzlement of funds, failure to confer intended goals of projects by the implementing governments, lack of accounting and poor efficiency in the process of implementing these projects have been observed to confer low confidence on governments. This was observed to be responsible for failure to secure credit for financial institutions.

4. Discussion

4.1 Causes of Project Failure

Communication was found to be a leading cause of project failure in Nigeria. Existing literature affirms the importance of communication on the successful implementation of projects globally (Zulch, 2014; Ikechukwu *et al.*, 2017; Sambasivan and Soon, 2007). Additionally, Hussein (2018) states that these communication challenges are exemplified in linguistic barriers, cultural barriers, poor feedback and unclear communication channels. Similarly, Ogundelea and Somefunb (2008) and Dim (2018) further corroborate these challenges affirming weaknesses between intergovernmental communications and stakeholders in Nigerian projects. Evidently, with this poor communication channels, the overt occurrence of failures will still be seen in projects in Nigeria.

Alternatively, poor contracting and sub-optimal contractor performance have been established to be closely linked to project failure in Nigeria. Uyo (2019) points to the underperformance of contractors on awarded contracts, the embezzlement of project funds for ulterior gains and favouritism in contract awarding processes. Such favouritism locks out good contractors who could have undertaken the projects effectively but in place have close friends, relatives and tribesmates who end up delivering poor work, and in the end lead to failures. Such practises are rife in the tendering processes for infrastructural projects in Nigeria across governmental levels. As such, these practices can be understood to be determinants of the occurrence of project failure.

Poor planning has also been established to result in high project failures in Nigeria. Adebayo *et al.* (2018) affirms the importance of agility and effective inclusion of intended goals in the planning and designing stages of a project in order to achieve success in project implementation. Inherently, poor practices at this stage will imply a subsequent failure to projects. Dosumu and Aigbavboa (2017) cite the rife failure of projects in Nigeria due to planning-related aspects like the estimation of time and costs, as seen in Anambra State of Nigeria with the huge failures owing to poor planning (Nzekwe *et al.* 2015). Undoubtedly, poor planning means poor conceptualisation of the project by the implementing stakeholders which implies errors and subsequent failures.

Frequent design changes touching the scope size and errors made in the implementation process have been established to cause failures in Nigerian projects. From literature, changes late in implementation spike the cost and time overruns of projects (Ayal, 2005). Understandably, project limitation in finances and time horizons paired with the incessant changes in the plans can be costly and in turn, derail the implementation process. Naturally, contractors or financing can be withdrawn ultimately leading to failures which are the cases for the Nigerian projects. Similarly, lack of adequate resources as seen can be explanatory to these high rates of failures. Financial constraints paired with poor planning and changes to a project, sum up the bulk of structural setbacks to the successful implementation of projects globally. In Nigeria, funds disbursements to the local governments, toxic bureaucracy and under-financing to these projects are the leading causes of the high failures (Ubani and Ononuju, 2013). Essentially, without enough financial support projects cannot take off, leave alone their completion. Thus, finances are critical to the success or failure of projects.

Lastly, socio-cultural and political interference and poor leadership and corruption have been recorded to cause failures in projects in Nigeria. Socio-cultural and political interference in the form of conflicts (socio-cultural) and lack of funds allocation by incumbents to projects initiated by their predecessors (political) have been seen as leading causes (Nweze, 2016). Evidently, politics plays a critical role in the development story of the majority of African states and Nigeria is no exception. Poor political will has seen thousands of projects in Nigeria fail before they are even implemented. Understandably, the aspect of poor leadership and corruption only but further worsen the case for public projects. Corruption, embezzlement of funds, nepotism and tribalism in contracting practices and other sectarian practices have seen the country fail to

attain its potential in the projects it undertakes. Politics and corruption in the commencement of projects have seen earmarked projects lie unattended to. The \$20bn Ogidigben Gas Industrial Park and the Gelegale Seaport projects in the Delta and Edo States of Nigeria are typical examples (Yusuf, 2018; Okoromadu, 2019). Evidently, these two spheres of detriments have led to failures in projects across Nigerian states.

4.2 Effects of project failure

The effects of project failures are adverse to stakeholders of these investments across Nigeria. First, the loss of state revenues pumped into the completion of these projects has been noted as the prime effect caused by the failure of these projects. Sahara Reporters (2019) puts the wasted revenues at 2 trillion Naira (\$5.517 billion) between the years 2000 and 2019. Moreover, only less than 16% of the projects in road construction end up successful in Nigeria (Dim, 2018). The bulk of projects undertaken in the country fail and this has sent the states' limited resources down the drain with little benefits drawn back from these investments. It is important to note that the lost revenues could be used in the provision of essential services to the community and in addressing the poverty levels for the majority of the Nigerians as opposed to undertaking these costly infrastructural projects which in the end fail. Thus, state revenue losses to such projects have been an evident impact of these failures which warrants immediate solutions. Alternatively, project cost overruns have been established to be an associated effect of these failures. These costs have been tied to the contractual responsibilities that stakeholders are tied to and have to fulfil, regardless of the trajectory of the project. Notably, credit facilitation costs have been noted to be a leading cost associated with the majority of Nigerian projects that fail. Contractors will be obliged to pay the loans they took to undertake the projects, while the government is paying its donors and financial institution for the projects too. Therefore, the need to meet the financial facilitations given to the project stakeholders is a consequence noted in failed projects in Nigeria.

Loss of revenue to the community due to failed projects is a notable consequence of project failure in Nigeria. It is important to note that project implementation is geared towards the provision of projects that facilitate vital services to the local Nigerian communities. Arguably, infrastructural projects open opportunities to the local communities in commerce and social integration which is important for the development of the society. In the case of Nigerian projects, failures have locked out communities from development, taken away the probable revenues that could have been gained with

the operation of some of these projects. A case in point is the Delta community which has lost revenues which could have been generated from the \$20bn Ogidigben Gas Industrial Park. Its failure has left the community economically disadvantaged and still playing catch up with advanced regions like Asaba within the same Delta state. Thus, low empowerment of the community disadvantaged by the project failure can also be understood to emanate from these aspects.

Lastly, project failures confer the all-dreaded poor infrastructure to a community which is detrimental to the reputation and economic development. It is important to note that failed projects essentially mean the intended goals of a project were not successfully met by the respective stakeholders. As such, the remnant project is a fraction of what was intended in the designing stage. The case of Nigerian projects has seen the end product in roads, buildings and other infrastructural projects which fail with the end product being poor to the community. Anambra State has been noted to be filled with these set of consequences due to failed projects owing to huge rates of failures. As such, sub-standard projects delivered to the Nigerian community has made the community to remain at a disadvantage.

4.3 Consequences of project failure

Slow economic growth has been noted to be a widespread consequence of persistent project failures in Nigeria. Slow economic growth can be understood from a holistic perspective. From that, and with corruption, misuse and loss of public funds and socio-economic deprivation, the local community can be noted to collectively augment the detriments of project failures on the economic development of Nigeria. It is important to note that the over 2 trillion Naira spent by the government on constituency road projects from 2000-2019 could have improved the infrastructural state of the Nigerian economy (Sahara Reporters, 2019). These revenues could have catapulted the economy and its people to a transitioning or developed country. However, owing to the aforementioned causes of these failures, the country still needs development and better implementation of the projects it embarks on. Thus, there is a huge economic development gap that has been increased by the slowing rate of economic growth resulting from these ever-failing projects.

Secondly, project failure leads to slowed developments in the associated sector in which these projects would be operating. The project failures deprive the sectors of the needed support that these projects were intended to offer. For instance, the Gas Revolution Industrial Park, Ogidigben in Delta State and the Gelegale Seaport in Edo State, were both intended to benefit the gas industry in both Edo and Delta States (Yusuf, 2018; Okoromadu, 2019). By

their implementation, the local gas industry would have benefitted from better refinery services locally in Nigeria, hence bridging the costs, improving the efficiency of the product value chain. This, in turn, would have benefitted local oil manufacturers with more revenues as they remain competitive. However, their failure implies that these projects would not be conferring the intended economic benefits to the local communities and on the other hand locking out economic opportunities for the industry players to capitalise on for overall economic and sector growth.

Thirdly, loss of foreign financial assistance and increased requirement from these financial institutions and creditors have been noted as detrimental consequences of these project failures in Nigeria. Project implementation requires finances from institutions, foreign donors and governments. These include the World Bank, United Nations, African Development Bank and the European governments which perpetually partner with local state governments in the fulfilment of projects. However, with an equal loss of revenue to embezzlement through corruption and other financial malpractices, the resultant consequences are grave to the Nigerian governments (Akande, 2018b). First, private institutions that locally bankroll these projects can withdraw permanently due to the practices that lead to eventual failure of projects. This means that in the future, the Nigerian government may be blacklisted or barred from accessing credit facilities to implement projects. Secondly, those donors that remain in Nigeria or still have the will to support the development agenda for the people, will introduce new requirements and measures that governments must put in place before they receive the facilities. These new measures can be in the form of accounting practices, taxation policies and new laws to (1) ensure the facilitated funds are not stolen and (2) these donors get their money back regardless of the project progression. These institutions go further to oversight the utilisation of these funds to ascertain coherence and efficient usage of these resources. Therefore, with every failure in Nigerian projects, the external donors take account and introduce new aspects or withdraw from these projects altogether.

Lastly, from socio-cultural and political aspects, project failures lump low confidence levels from the electorate on the political class in Nigeria. Secondly, these politicians carry the burden which is evident in election loss. Management of project is a critical aspect of project and its subsequent success (Sambasivan and Soon, 2007). In this view, the failure of projects in Nigeria which are commissioned by politicians on a rife understanding, means these politicians are responsible. This can be attributed to the rife failure of the majority of projects in the

country (Dim, 2018). The expansive corruption and cases of malpractice warrant communal interference and public discontent with their political class (Nweze, 2016). Therefore, the electorate has been seen to respond to the loss of confidence in the incumbent leadership by electing new leadership to punish incumbents who ruled in the face of failing projects. Therefore, lack of confidence in the current leadership and the resultant loss of their seats can be understood to be fuelled by the failure of the political class to implement these projects which have failed despite having a significant impact on the successful implementation of these projects.

5. Conclusion

The causes of project failure in Nigeria are anthropogenic and span from designing, implementation and management of the projects. This ranges from poor communication practices, poor contracting practices, poor planning and estimation in the designing stages, frequent design changes, socio-cultural, inadequate resources and toxic bureaucracy to poor leadership and corruption in Nigeria.

Project failures confer detrimental effects on stakeholders in Nigeria such as revenue loss, loss of economic opportunities, etc.

The consequences of project failures are several, leading to overall slowdown in the rate of economic development, slowing down and underutilization of opportunities, etc.

6. Recommendation

Appropriate intervention, better management practice, political will and efficient implementation of projects to avoid the huge rate of failures and their effects and consequences should be encouraged in Nigeria.

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