

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION AND COST MONITORING: THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN PUBLIC SECTOR AUDITING IN NIGERIA

BY

JOSEPH U. B. AZUBIKE

Abstract

The paper examined budget implementation and cost auditing in the public sector. It observed that modern trends are emerging in the areas of audit of the public sector in particular and auditing in general. Literature review methodology was adopted and the paper identified some of the emerging trends to include due process, budget monitoring, cost and price intelligence, cost auditing, and the value-for-money auditing. The paper noted that these modern trends have made reasonable impact in budget implementation and monitoring. It concluded by noting that the emerging audit trends are essential for effective budget implementation and recommended that these new audit issues should be backed-up with enabling laws.

Keywords: Budget implementation, cost monitoring, Cost auditing, National Planning.

Introduction

The principal function of government is to lay down policy through the production of non-market services primarily for collective consumption and to manage transferred income financed mainly by compulsory levies on entities in other sectors. Government performs the function of supplying certain public goods and services and fulfilling certain public purposes not entirely for commercial and financial purposes. Government financial management entails the management of revenue, expenditure, cash lending, borrowing and debt operations associated with government activities.

Government financial management commences with the planning process, which involves setting of goals and targets in a national development plan. This is pursued through formulation of policies, articulation of appropriate projects and programmes and the mobilization of available financial, human and material resources for their effective realization. A national development plan cannot achieve its stated objectives unless the projects, programmes and policies therein are effectively implemented. The actual implementation of a development plan, therefore, begins with the budget.

The budget for a development plan includes budgeting for the resources to execute the plan finance, manpower and materials. Public sector resources in Nigeria are allocated through the central, state and local governments. Resources of the central government are allocated to different sectors such as education, public health, infrastructure and agriculture. (Afemikhe, 2005)

Budgeting making and budget implementation involve the process of identification of public needs and the determination of the quantity of goods and services to satisfy these needs through the political process, assisted by economic analysis within the overall development plan objectives. The allocation of resources is then made to major functions and economic categories within sectors.

The budget implementation process is carried out under the constraints of value-for-money, accountability and transparency. Value-for-money covers three elements of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. (Afemikhe, 2005) The pursuance of best value (value-for-money) is, therefore, a key ingredient in public expenditure management. Furthermore, it would be observed that strict adherence to the parameter of public expenditure management reduces corruption, waste and fraud, enhances productivity, promotes good governance and raises the morale of stakeholders. A budget affirms the prudent use of limited resources, cost efficiency in executing capital projects, avoidance of wasteful spending and improvement of revenue generation.

In the face of the perceived laxity in the budget implementation procedures in Nigeria, it would be pertinent to find out the impact of due process, value for money audit and cost audit in the achievement of an efficient budget implementation. These tenets are meant to be achieved in Nigeria through the activities of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU), otherwise known as the “Due Process Office”.

Statement of the Problem

The issue of budget implementation is one that pervades all organizations irrespective of the sector or size. Once an organization prepares a budget, the ideal thing is that the budget should be properly implemented for optimal benefits to the stakeholders. But, this appears not to be the case in most organizations.

It is against this background that governments and auditors introduce measures and strategies in order to check wasteful expenditures in line with global practices. Some of the emerging strategies include value-for-money audit, cost audit, due process, price intelligence and budget monitoring. The study will find out if these measures actually help to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in procurement costs.

In view of the above, the question, which readily comes to mind, is whether significant impact is being felt in an economy in the presence of the emerging budget implementation strategies and whether the strategies are necessary. An answer to this question is necessary while deciding on audit opinions. The paper will, therefore, attempted to establish the need to attain optimal utilization of scarce resources through the introduction and implementation of these emerging auditing concepts and philosophies.

Objective of the Study

Having set out the statement of problem, the paper will evaluate the recent developments in public sector practices and the challenges facing the auditor.

The specific objectives of the study include:

- i. to identify the emerging audit philosophies, concepts and strategies in the public sector,
- ii. to ascertain the role of the public sector auditor in the emerging audit circumstances,
- iii. to ascertain the impact of the emerging audit trends in procurement procedures and budget implementation,
- iv. to increase the knowledge in the field of public sector auditing and accounting.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS

Traditional Budgeting Concept

According to Lucey (2002) budget is a quantitative expression of a plan of action prepared in advance of the period to which it relates. A budget is a quantitative statement for a defined period of time, which may include planned revenues, expenses, assets, liabilities, and cash flows. A budget provides a focus for the organization, aids the coordination of activities and facilitates control. The above definitions were further reinforced by Nweze (2004:75) who states that “a budget involves every level of activity integrating requirements and financial needs”. He highlights the benefits of budgeting to include “planning and coordination, clarification of authority and responsibility, communication, control and motivation”.

Ihedioha (2003:235) identifies the objectives of budgets as follows:

- i. budgeting provides plan of action for reducing uncertainty and for proper direction of, individual and group efforts to achieve goals
- ii. to state the firm's objectives in clear terms to avoid confusion and to facilitate their attainability.
- iii. to coordinate the activities and efforts in such a way that the use of resources is maximized.

- iv. to communicate objectives to all concerned with the management of the firm so that they are understood, supported and implemented.

BUDGET PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION: AN OVERVIEW

According to Nigeria's Financial Regulations (2000), before ministries and spending agencies can incur an obligation to make expenditures, they must secure spending authorization from the Ministry of Finance. After the annual appropriation act has been accepted to the executive, the Minister/Commissioner of Finance issues a General Warrant to the Accountant-General authorizing him to release funds from the Consolidated Revenue Fund to meet the costs of services as set out in the approved annual estimates excluding any sub-heads or items of expenditure over which he desires to retain special control. This warrant will also authorize officers controlling officers to incur expenditure in accordance with the approved estimates subject to any reserved items.

If the Appropriation Act has not come into operation at the beginning of the year, a Provisional General Warrant may be issued to ensure continuity of the services of government at a level not exceeding those of the previous year. The Provisional General Warrant has a maximum of four months validity. When items excluded by the General Warrant by virtue of being reversed, a reverse expenditure warrant will be issued.

The Accountant-General of the Federation/State, on the basis of authority grants spending authorizations to incur expenditure (AIE) on a monthly or quarterly basis. The Accounting General will give immediate cash backing in support of all warrants and AIE by advising the CBN to credit such agencies with the respective amounts in the warrant or AIE. The length of period of spending authorization is determined in functional cash flow forecasts for the period when payments are anticipated.

During the phase of budget implementation, there are many possibilities for interventions and manipulations in view of the fact that officials have a great amount of discretionary powers to decide which spending ministry or agency will be granted, on schedule, a ministry will not be able to make commitments and, therefore, goods and services will not be ordered on schedule. Afemikhe (2005:14) opines that:

the officials in charge of issuing spending authorizations may favour a given Ministry perhaps because of reward for his corrupt action. The official, for instance, may favour the Ministry of Public Works in order to make sure that the Ministry is able to contract major suppliers from which monetary reward will be received.

In spite of the specific nature of appropriation laws, the commitment phase of the expenditure process is a fertile ground for corrupt activities. The most frequent is the partial or total disregard of procurement regulations and procedures, where they exist. Procurement procedures and regulations specify the price and quality of goods and services that are authorized in the budget. They also specify the delivery schedule, terms of delivery and payment as well as contingent supplementary services such as maintenance and warranties. In addition, they specify the procedure, which will have to be followed by competing bidder prescriptions for price, quality, quantity as well as for terms of delivery can be disregarded in favour of one supplier who is ready to offer a bribe to corrupt officials.

Another possible case of corruption is the ordering of goods and services, which are not authorized in the budget. In this case, corrupt officials will simply disregard the budget as approved by the legislature and will purchase, for instance, luxury cars instead of trucks or other needed equipment. Commitment of resources for goods and services not

authorized in the budget will pre-empt commitment for those that are authorized unless, of course, the size of the budget is increased.

Political corruption occurs when political decision-makers independently, or in collusion with corrupt officials, divert public resources in a way that will reduce the welfare of the society or will be contrary to public interest. Corrupt behaviour and/or corrupt activities, which take place during the budget execution phase, where economy and administrative decisions are predominant, are qualified as administrative corruption. Political corruption in budget implementation has particularly damaging effects on the allocation of resources because it will produce an allocation that will be different from the one that would have been arrived at through a corrupt-free process.

The extreme case of political corruption is the capture of the apparatus of the state by a political group in order to use the redistributive functions of the state to divert public resources to the members of the group. By also capturing the legislative powers of the state, the political group in power will use legislation to lock out rival political groups. In such a situation, those who are locked out will have to buy access to state economic activity by paying bribes. Thus, political corruption will generate administrative corruption.

RECENT TRENDS IN COST MONITORING AND AUDITING

THE DUE PROCESS MODEL:

Due process means normal process, logical approach, official approach and/or optimum ways of doing things. Ezekwesili (2004:36) provides a definition to “due process”, thus:

it is the application of the principles of openness or transparency, competency or qualification and competition or equal opportunity to the conduct and award of federal government contracts to ensure that the winner, the cost and the quality are right for every kobo of the Nigerian public treasury that is spent in the purchase of goods, services or works.

Nwokedi (2002:3), lists some of the ways in which civil servants have been defrauding governments in the budget process as follows:

- i. cancellation, alteration and rough handling of the vote books,
- ii. variations in project cost without proper authorization,
- iii. wrong classification e.g use of capital funds for recurrent expenditure,
- iv. use of selective tendering instead of open competitive bidding,
- v. poor handling of documents (contract document, payment vouchers and so on),
- vi. inadequate monitoring and supervision of utilization, and
- vii. undue delay in project/programme execution resulting in higher costs.

“Due Process” articulates the normative framework of an efficient and effective budget implementation process particularly as it relates to the acquisition and delivery of goods and services, the key elements of the public procurement system through planning, acquisition and contract administration phases.

The components of due process include:

- i. Development of procurement planning capacity;
 - definition of requirements,
 - market research,
 - feasibility analysis,
 - scheduling and cost estimation,
 - planning for recurrent and common use,
 - purchases,
 - selection of contract form,

- allocation of resources to planning activities.
- ii. Development of contract administration capability;
 - contract administration teams,
 - performance monitoring,
 - internal quality control,
 - control mechanisms,
 - cost control and payment,
 - dispute settlement.
 - iii. Supplies and material management;
 - contract administration teams,
 - performance monitoring,
 - internal quality control,
 - control mechanisms,
 - cost control and payment,
 - dispute settlement.
 - iv. Supplies and material management, all items listed above are embodied in the public procurement system are at three levels.
 - v. Procurement system that generates value for money, enhances competition, fairness, transparency, accountability and ethical standards.
 - vi. Procurement system that is responsive to the citizenry as object of public policy, and systems that focus on best practices that eliminates fraud, waste and abuse.

Due process is aimed at cutting down or eliminating frivolous expenditure and has provided for increased efficiency and flexibility in the procurement activities of the government. Okaro (2004:20) is of the opinion that “the indifference of the operators of public sector or administration is one factor that has obviously militated against prudent financial management. He further opines that apart from the issue of endemic corruption, other factors impinge on the ability of the operators to implement an efficient financial management. They include poor remuneration of office holders and misplacement of value system. The due process mechanism certifies public funding for only those projects that have passed the test of proper project implementation packaging of the **BMPIU**. This is to be backed by the proposed Public Procurements Reforms Act.

The necessity for the Due Process mechanism, apart from it being in consonance with global) trends in public procurement reforms, can be derived from the picture painted by the Auditor- General of the Federation's report on queries for the 2001 fiscal year which revealed some disturbing public sector practices as listed hereunder:

- Non-compliance with record keeping rules,
- Over invoicing,
- Non-retirement of cash advances,
- Lack of audit inspection,
- Payment for jobs not done,
- Double debiting,
- Contract inflation,
- Lack of receipts to back up purchases.
- Fragrant violation of financial regulation, and
- Release of money without approval.

The Due Process audit is expected to advance some benefits to governance and the citizenry. The benefits include:

- transforming government into prosperous and self-sustaining economy and thereby improving the living standards of the public people.
- fighting penury and poverty from all angles,
- enthroning improvements in the welfare and quality of life of the citizenry,
- engendering grassroots and integrated rural development and concentrate resources on the provision of basic-infrastructure and amenities across the nation and thereby increasing the tempo of infrastructural development in the nation,
- promoting staff morale and motivation and strengthening the rule of law.

VAEUE-FOR-MONEY AUDIT

Value-for-money audit is the examination of an organization's operations for economy, efficiency and effectiveness, so as to bring to light examples of wasteful or unrewarding expenditure or failure to maximize receipts, financial position and weaknesses leading to them. The budget implementation process is noted as being earned out under the constraints of value-for-money, accountability and transparency. Value-for-money is generally accepted as covering three basic elements of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Economy is the practice of management of the virtues of thrift and good “house-keeping” An economy would occur where there is overstaffing or the acquisition and use of over-priced facilities.

Efficiency entails making sure that the maximum useful output is gained from the resources devoted to each activity, or alternatively, that only the maximum level of resources are devoted to achieving a given level of output. An operation could be said to have increased in efficiency if either lower costs are used to produce a given amount of output, or a given level of cost resulting in increased output. Identifying the performance of work with no useful purpose or the accumulation of surplus materials that are not needed to support operations would reveal inefficiency. Effectiveness is ensuring that the output from any given activity (or the impact that services have on a commodity, is achieving the desired results. To evaluate effectiveness, we need to establish that the desired goals are being achieved. A goal as an operating objective should be seen as concrete expression of a policy objective.

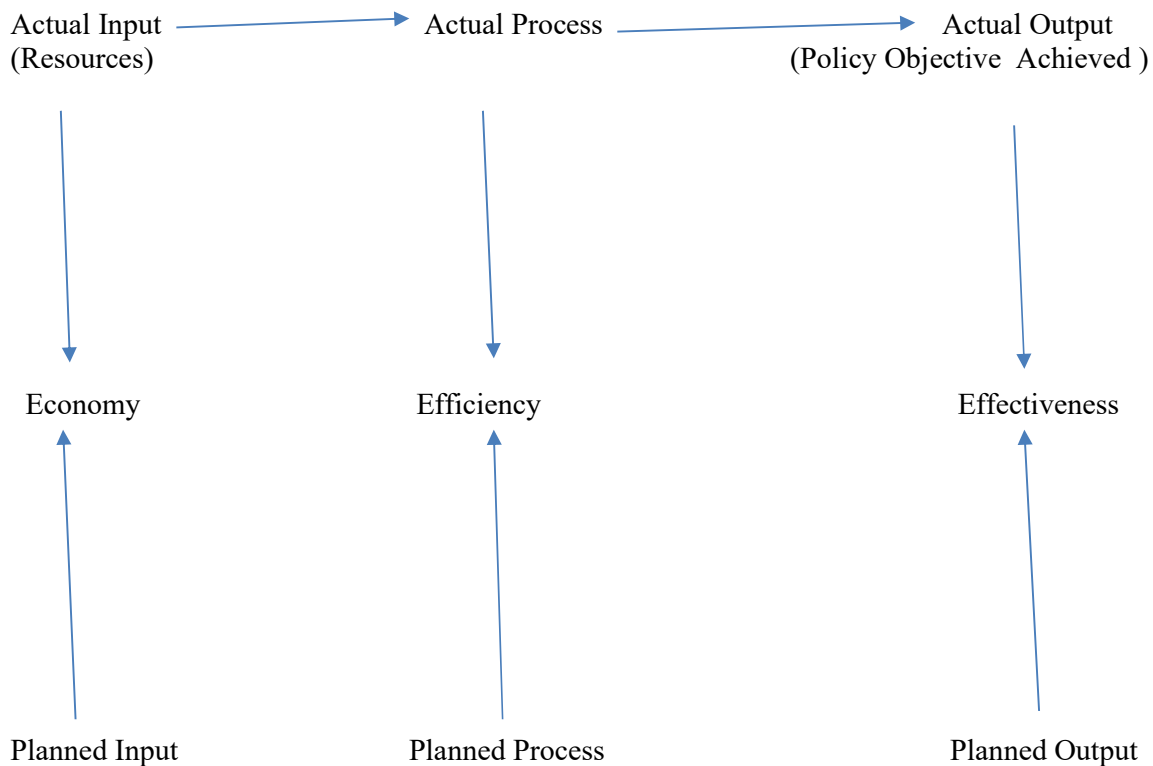
The three elements of value-for-money have to interrelate and resonate for better result. Economy and efficiency are similar as both relate to saving resources. Economy ensures that input costs are minimized. Efficiency ensures that maximum output is achieved at the maximum level of input cost. Efficiency, therefore, subsumes economy. It follows that a project cannot be efficient and uneconomic but it can be both economic (cheap) and inefficient. Effectiveness is far more positive element. Effectiveness means that a service provided properly meets a desired need. It should be emphasized that the attainment of economy and efficiency is of little practical use if effectiveness is disregarded. The value-for-money audit, entails audits of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Financial operations and legal compliance audit, under the value-for-money concept, determine whether:

- i. financial operations are properly conducted in accordance with the rules,
- ii. the financial reports of the entity are presented fairly according to legal provisions under related pronouncements,
- iii. the entity has complied with applicable laws and regulations in all its ramifications.

Similarly, the programmed and operational results audit determines whether the desired results or benefits are being achieved, and whether the objectives for which the entity is established are being met. It also determines whether management has considered alternatives, which might yield desired results at the lowest possible cost.

Fig. 3.1
The Three E Matrix of Value for Money



In summary, the value for money audit is a review of:

- **Input** - The resource consumed in terms of money, materials and human effort.
- **Output** - The goods produced, services rendered or other results.
- **Impact** - The ultimate effect in terms of achieved objectives and policies.

COST AUDIT

Cost audit is the detailed checking of the costing system, techniques and accounts to verify their correctness and to ensure the adherence to the objectives of cost accounting.

Chukwu (2005:155) opines that cost audit is a systematic and accurate recording of detailed transactions and operations of manufacturing, contracting, extracting, transporting, supplying, servicing etc. so as to show the actual cost of each individual piece of work, service or separate process comprised in the operations of the business.

The objectives of Cost Audit include:

- to verify the arithmetical accuracy of cost accounting entries,
- to find out whether cost accounts have been properly maintained,
- to verify that statements are properly drawn up,
- to find out if each item of expenditure involved has been properly incurred or not,
- to detect any error or fraud which might have been committed and
- to assist in reducing the amount of detailed checking by the external auditor.

Cost audit is, therefore, the verification of the correctness of cost accounts and of the adherence to the cost accounting plans.

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCUREMENT MODELS.

THE WORLD BANK MODEL

The World Bank issued the World Bank Guidelines (WBG) for Procurement under the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) loans and International Development Association (IDA) credits. The World Bank Guidelines are an example of procurement regulations enforced by a large global donor organization and the use of these regulations is a pre-requisite for all loans; and credits financed under IBRD and IDA.

The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure that the proceeds of any loan are used only for the purpose for which the loan was granted with due attention to considerations of economy and efficiency and without regard to political or other non-economic, influences or considerations. The World Bank asserts that the guidelines are also an attempt to codify the essence of best practices regarding procurement in the course of attaining set goals. The guidelines are not in themselves law although they share basic principles and procedures with the United Nations Commission for International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) model.

THE UNITED NATIONS' MODEL

On its part, the United Nations established the United Nations Commission for International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law (UML) on procurement of goods, services and construction, which was adopted by the United Nations Commissions for International Trade in 1994. The United Nations defines the UNCITRAL Model Law (UML) as an answer to inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the procurement process, patterns of abuse, and the failure of public purchasers to obtain adequate value in return for expenditure of public funds. The model law is purposely built to suit the needs of developing countries whose economies are in transition.

It is the explicit purpose of the model law to promote transparency, objectivity and efficiency thereby curbing corruption and abuse in the procurement process. The explicit purpose of the model law also includes to promote competition, transparency, objectivity and efficiency by the establishment of administrative and institutional structures for proper and continuous implementation of the system, procedures and practices that underpin the law. Also, clear guidelines are set out to punish inefficiency and ineffectiveness in the procurement process

In summary, the UNCITRAL model has the following elements:

- i. a legal or regulatory framework with implementing guidelines,
- ii. a means to monitor compliance with the laws and regulations,
- iii. a responsible manager of the public procurement system to measure its performance advise political leaders of its successes and deficiencies, improves it as necessary, and assist procuring entities in their buying operation,
- iv. standard terms and contracts,
- v. open and advertised tenders,
- vi. a means to identify and take advantage of potential economies of scale such as grouping various ministry requirements to obtain best price, and
- vii. high level procurement professionalism and buying expertise in each procurement entity development through organized staffing.

CONTENTS OF WORLD BANK AND UNCITRAL MODEL LAWS.

The contents are as follows:

- i. ensure that the procurement and contract procedures and processes followed by the ministry or parastatal on the individual contract comply with approved guidelines,
- ii. ensure that adequate systems are in place for project/procurement planning/preparation implementation and execution,
- iii. confirm that the general principles of economy, efficiency, effectiveness, equal opportunities, transparency and fairness are being complied with,
- iv. ensure that bids received were opened in public and the evaluation documents are in accordance with the guidelines,
- v. ensure that the contract is awarded to the lowest responsive evaluated bidder which ensured price competitiveness,
- vi. conform that the contract was adequately monitored all through the contract execution phase,
- vii. seek a professional opinion on compliance with the general guiding principle of economy and efficiency, technical compliance, physical completion and price competitiveness,

- viii. attend all relevant meetings and report the status of the project or contract on a regular basis,
 - ix. identify possible improvements in the project procurement practices in the light of the deficiencies,
 - x. ensure that project planning and preparation is adequate through feasibility studies, environmental impact assessment, financial and economic analysis etc,
 - xi. monitor that project procurement is in line with public procurement law, procurement guidelines and international best practices and
 - xii. regularly report the monitoring exercise for feedback and corrective measure purposes.
- The issues raised above should be adequately covered in an effective audit plan.

THE ROLE OF THE ACCOUNTANT AND AUDITOR IN BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION

The attainment of economy, efficiency and effectiveness in procurement activities is dependent upon the existence of a sound arrangement for the planning, appraisal, authorization and control for the use of resources. The auditor is the officer responsible under the constitution of the Federation of Nigeria to audit the accounts of all accounting officers and all persons entrusted with the collection, custody, receipt and payment of public funds.

Section 85(2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria makes it mandatory for the Auditor-General of the Federation (AGF) to audit all the public accounts of the Federation. The AGF is empowered by section 85(4) to conduct checks of all government statutory corporations, commissions, authorities etc. The constitution did not expressly empower the AGF to carry out value-for-money audit of procurement activities.

According to Afemikhe (2005:36) in the United States, the country's General Accounts office has the responsibility to audit economy, efficiency and effectiveness in statutory roles. However, in Nigeria, the Auditor-General of the Federation's scope of responsibilities include:

- Financial audit
- Regulatory audit
- Value-for-money audit (which includes economy audit, efficiency audit, and the effectiveness audit).

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) conduct committee, an audits as a matter of routine, of the Assembly and National Assembly charged with the responsibilities to consider the AGF's report submitted to the Assembly. One of the major constraints to effective audit and control system is the weakness of the office of the Auditor-General for the Federation. In his paper, the Auditor-General (2001) stated that he conducts the following audits as a matter of routine: financial audit, regulatory compliance audit, certification audit and monitoring and evaluation (value-for-money audit) but noted the main constraints in carrying out value for money audit in Nigeria to include:

- shortage of appropriate skill, .
- lack of financial support for such audits,
- materials and logistics support and
- unclear objectives of programmes/projects and weak accountability in government operations.

One of the basic principles of auditing is that the auditor should not only be seen as independent but should be truly independent. In order to ensure the total independence of the auditors in the public sector, the auditing system must be overhauled with particular reference to the appointment and removal of auditors especially at the higher level. Furthermore, the staff of the Office of the Auditor-General of the Federation must be properly trained to focus them on relevant value-for-money audits in support of government budget implementation objectives.

CONCLUSION

Governments traditionally use their budget process to decide and indicate what will produced in-house or what will be bought-in from others through the procurement system. Procurement is the process of acquisition of goods, services, works, and projects from third parties, including logical

aspects, thereof, from initial conception and definition of individual business or public sector needs through to the end of the useful life of a procured asset or service.

The paper identified the overall characteristics of a good public procurement system to include strong legal, organizational and professional framework to make the system robust and effective. Furthermore, the paper highlighted the need for a budget implementation process to be carried out under the constraints of value-for-money, accountability and transparency. It highlighted and discussed, in some details, the basic elements of value-for-money: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. A good public procurement system delivers value-for-money in procurement activities. The Due Process ensures that specific, uniform and variable system and procedures are being applied to ensure that only the goods and services that the government has procured have been actually delivered and paid for. The paper noted that the Due Process mechanism is a model which has proved its effectiveness.

Finally, the due process mechanism has been discovered to have struck the right cord confirming that system control is the correct way to go where moral suasion, threats, probes and emphasis on reparation have proved unsuccessful in guarding resources. Therefore, the study has shown that due process, value-for-money audit and cost audit are necessary in budget implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The due process mechanism underscores the need to measure performance post event and ensures the effectiveness of budget implementation. There is, therefore, the need to encourage professionalism in post project review technique of value-for-money concept, performance measurement and benchmarking so that the continuous process improvement inherent thereon can be imbibed as a national corporate culture. It is recommended that due process and value-for-money audits should remain in Government polity for economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. It is important to underpin the due process mechanism with structures, systems, and skills in order to ensure that it endures. If the Public Procurement Reform Programme of the due process is entrenched as a law and culture, Nigeria will save enough money to fund education, health, security, agriculture, social amenities and provide infrastructure for the economy to grow. Due Process is too centralized and must be decentralized in order to remove procurements spending units from the threshold of the resident due process team. The composition of this team at the moment includes permanent secretary/chief executive, three directors of the spending unit and a representative of BMPIU. This should be enlarged to include the Auditor-General.

Finally, it is necessary to codify into law the procurement of goods, construction and services using the World Bank and UNCITRAL model laws as best practice standards. A codified law that is uniformly applied ensures that the procurement practices are consistently applied from one government to another.

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