Benchmarking Public Service Delivery in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

The study critically evaluated public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) benchmarking with the global service delivery average. Relying on cross-country time series data from 2010 to 2020, the study covers 30 Sub-Saharan African countries. In the methodology, it adopted Governance Effectiveness Index and Road Quality Index as indicators of service delivery performance. The findings revealed significant discrepancies in service delivery among SSA countries, While some countries like Mauritius and Botswana performed above the global average, others like Chad and Angola lagged much behind. It identified challenges like inadequate funding, corruption, political instability, and infrastructure deficits facing many countries of the region. The study concluded that improving public service delivery in SSA required robust governance, increased infrastructure investment, technological integration, and development of human capital. Its recommended adoption of transparency measures, and leverage on public-private partnerships to enhance service delivery and promote sustainable development in the region.

Keywords: Service Delivery, Sub-Saharan Africa, Best Practices, Governance, Infrastructure, Accountability

INTRODUCTION

Public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a critical area of focus due to its significant impact on the region's socio-economic development and overall quality of life. Public services encompass a wide range of essential functions, including healthcare, education, water supply, sanitation, transportation, and social services. The effectiveness and efficiency of these services are vital for enhancing human capital, reducing poverty, and fostering sustainable economic growth.

Historically, the landscape of public service delivery in SSA has been complex and multifaceted. The legacy of colonialism left many countries with centralized and often inefficient administrative structures that have struggled to meet the diverse needs of their populations (Calderón & Servén, 2010). Post-independence efforts to expand access to basic services were often undermined by economic crises, structural adjustment programs, and political instability. Despite these challenges, recent decades have seen renewed efforts to improve public service delivery, driven by global development goals and technological advancements (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019).

The importance of effective public service delivery cannot be overstated. It is fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and addressing the socio-economic disparities that persist in the region. Access to quality healthcare and education enhances human capital, while reliable infrastructure services such as transportation and water supply are essential for economic activities and overall public health. Moreover, efficient public service delivery fosters public trust and strengthens governance, creating a stable environment conducive to development.

This paper aims to critically evaluate the current state of public service delivery in the region. It explores the nature and evolution of service delivery, examines global best practices, assesses the performance of SSA countries, and identifies the challenges that impede progress. By leveraging cross-country time series data

from 2010 to 2020, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of governance effectiveness and infrastructure quality across 30 SSA countries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Public Service Delivery in sub-Saharan Africa

Public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) involves a broad range of services provided by the government, including healthcare, education, water supply, sanitation, transportation, and social services. The effectiveness of these services significantly impacts the quality of life and economic development in the region. Historically, public service delivery in SSA has been characterized by a mix of public, private, and non-governmental organization (NGO) interventions. However, the sector faces numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and governance issues (Ayee, 2013).

The provision of public services in SSA is often hindered by bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, which impede the timely and equitable distribution of resources (Hope, 2017). Political instability in some countries exacerbates these issues, leading to inconsistent and unreliable service delivery (Resnick & Birner, 2010). Despite these challenges, there have been concerted efforts by both national governments and international organizations to improve the quality and accessibility of public services.

In many SSA countries, the legacy of colonialism has left a fragmented and uneven public service delivery system. The centralized administrative structures inherited from colonial powers often do not cater to the diverse needs of the population. Decentralization has been proposed as a solution to these challenges, aiming to bring services closer to the people and enhance accountability and responsiveness (Bardhan, 2002).

Importance of Public Service Delivery in an Economy

Public service delivery is crucial for economic development and poverty reduction. Effective public services enhance human capital by improving health, education, and social well-being, which in turn boosts productivity and economic growth (World Bank, 2018). Access to quality healthcare reduces disease burden and mortality rates, enabling a healthier workforce. Education, another critical public service, equips individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in the economy and drive innovation (Barro & Lee, 2013).

Infrastructural services, such as transportation and water supply, are foundational to economic activities. Reliable transportation networks facilitate trade and mobility, while access to clean water and sanitation is essential for public health and overall quality of life (Calderón & Servén, 2010). Social services, including social protection programs, provide safety nets for the most vulnerable populations, reducing inequality and fostering social cohesion (Barrientos, 2011).

In SSA, where many countries are striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the role of public service delivery cannot be overstated. Improved public services can help address the socio-economic disparities that persist in the region, promoting inclusive growth and development (United Nations, 2015). Furthermore, efficient public service delivery can enhance governance and public trust, fostering a more stable and conducive environment for economic activities (Grindle, 2004).

Global Best Practices in Public Service Delivery

Globally, best practices in public service delivery emphasize transparency, accountability, efficiency, and citizen-centric approaches. Countries with exemplary public service delivery systems often implement robust governance frameworks that promote accountability and reduce corruption. Transparency in public administration, through open data initiatives and citizen engagement, ensures that resources are allocated and utilized effectively (Holzer & Schwester, 2011).

The use of technology and innovation to streamline service delivery processes is a global best practice in delivery of government services. Establishment of e-government platforms and digital services will go a long way to reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks and make services more accessible to the people. Estonia's e-government system, for instance, has transformed public service delivery through offering of a wide range of online services, thereby reducing the need for physical interactions and improved quality of life for its populations. Continued research and adaptive policy measures will be growing efficiency (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013).

Decentralization of services, empowering local governments is also a global best practice in managing and delivering public services. This approach can enhance responsiveness and tailor services to the specific needs of local communities. For instance, Brazil's decentralized health system has improved access to healthcare services in rural and underserved areas (Atkinson et al., 2000).

Collaboration between public and private sectors, as well as with civil society, is also crucial. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) can leverage private sector expertise and resources to improve service delivery. In the education sector, PPPs have been successful in expanding access to quality education in countries like the United Kingdom and India (Patrinos et al., 2009).

Evolution of Public Service Delivery in sub-Saharan Africa

The evolution of public service delivery in SSA has been shaped by various historical, political, and socio-economic factors. Post-independence, many SSA countries inherited centralized and often inefficient public administration systems from colonial powers. Initial efforts focused on expanding access to basic services such as education and healthcare. However, economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s, coupled with structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed by international financial institutions, led to significant cutbacks in public spending on services (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999).

The 2000s saw a renewed focus on improving public service delivery, driven by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Governments and international donors prioritized investments in health, education, and infrastructure. Reforms aimed at decentralizing service delivery gained momentum, with countries like Uganda and Kenya implementing policies to transfer authority and resources to local governments (Bossert & Beauvais, 2002).

In recent years, the emphasis has shifted towards integrating technology and innovation in public service delivery. Countries like Rwanda have made significant strides in digitalizing services, improving efficiency and accessibility (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019). The adoption of mobile technology has also been instrumental in expanding access to services, particularly in remote areas (Aker & Mbiti, 2010).

Despite these advancements, the evolution of public service delivery in SSA remains uneven. While some countries have made notable progress, others continue to struggle with deep-seated challenges such as corruption, political instability, and inadequate funding (Fukuyama, 2013). The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the fragility of public service delivery systems in the region, underscoring the need for resilient and adaptive approaches (Pereira et al., 2020).

The Performance of sub-Saharan Countries in the Area of Public Service Delivery

The performance of SSA countries in public service delivery varies widely, reflecting differences in governance, economic capacity, and institutional frameworks. According to various indicators, including the Human Development Index (HDI) and the World Bank's Service Delivery Indicators (SDI), there are significant disparities both within and between countries (World Bank, 2019).

Countries like Mauritius and Botswana are often cited as top performers in public service delivery. Mauritius, for instance, has achieved high levels of access and quality in healthcare and education, underpinned by robust governance and a commitment to social welfare (Bräutigam, 1997). Botswana's success can be attributed to

prudent economic management and substantial investments in public services funded by diamond revenues (Acemoglu et al., 2001).

On the other hand, countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan struggle with severe challenges. In the DRC, decades of conflict and poor governance have devastated public service delivery, leaving large segments of the population without access to basic services (Englebert, 2003). South Sudan, the world's youngest country, faces similar issues compounded by ongoing conflict and political instability (de Waal, 2014).

Regional initiatives, such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Development Bank's High 5s, aim to improve public service delivery across the continent. These initiatives emphasize the importance of good governance, infrastructure development, and human capital investment. However, their success depends on effective implementation and the commitment of national governments (African Union, 2015).

Challenges facing Public Service Delivery in sub-Saharan Africa

Public service delivery in SSA faces a multitude of challenges that hinder its effectiveness and efficiency. One of the primary challenges is inadequate funding. Many SSA countries have limited fiscal space, constraining their ability to invest in public services. Dependence on external aid further complicates the sustainability of public service delivery (Mosley et al., 2004).

Corruption is another significant challenge. Misallocation of resources and lack of accountability undermine public service delivery, reducing the quality and accessibility of services (Transparency International, 2019). Corruption also erodes public trust, making it difficult to implement reforms and policies effectively (Hope, 2009).

Political instability and conflict are pervasive issues in several SSA countries. These conditions disrupt service delivery and destroy infrastructure, creating a vicious cycle of poor governance and underdevelopment (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). For example, in countries like Somalia and Central African Republic, conflict has decimated public service delivery systems (Menkhaus, 2006).

Human resource constraints also pose a challenge. Many SSA countries face shortages of qualified personnel in critical sectors like healthcare and education. Brain drain, where skilled professionals migrate to more developed countries, exacerbates this issue. Moreover, inadequate training and capacity-building initiatives limit the effectiveness of the existing workforce (Clemens, 2007).

Infrastructure deficits are a major impediment to public service delivery. Inadequate transportation networks, unreliable power supply, and poor information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure hinder the provision of services, particularly in rural and remote areas. Addressing these deficits requires substantial investments and long-term planning (Foster & Briceño-Garmendia, 2010).

Additionally, the impact of climate change is an emerging challenge for public service delivery in SSA. Extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, disrupt services and strain already limited resources. Building climate-resilient infrastructure and integrating climate adaptation strategies into public service delivery plans are crucial for addressing this challenge (Niang et al., 2014).

Public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa is a complex and multifaceted issue, influenced by historical, political, and socio-economic factors. While there have been significant strides in improving access and quality of services, numerous challenges persist. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes enhancing governance, increasing investments in infrastructure and human capital, and leveraging technology and innovation. By learning from global best practices and adapting them to local contexts, SSA countries can improve public service delivery, contributing to sustainable development and improving the quality of life for their populations.

METHODOLOGY

The countries of Sub-Sahara Africa, as shown in Figure 1, are Namibia, Rwanda, Mauritius, South Africa, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, and Cape Verde. Others are Seychelles, Swaziland, Burundi, Botswana, Gambia, Guinea, Uganda, Ivory Coast and Zambia. The rest are Benin, Mali, Ethiopia, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Malawi, Zimbabwe and Lesotho; including Gabon, Nigeria, Cameroun, Mozambique, Angola, DR Congo, Madagascar, Mauritania, Chad, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sao Tome & Principe.

Figure 1: Map showing Sub-Saharan African countries.

Source: worldgeo.pressbooks.com

The study relied on cross-country time series data spanning a period of 11 years (2010 – 2020) for 30 sub-Saharan African countries. Service delivery is measured with two (2) indicators, namely 'Governance Effectiveness' and 'Road Quality Index'. Data for Governance Effectiveness were obtained from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI, 2021). It is a dataset summarising views on the quality of governance. It is an aggregate indicator of six broad dimensions of governance, "voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption" (WEF, 2020). The six aggregate indicators are based on over 30 sources of underlying data reporting the perceptions of governance of a wide range of surveys and expert assessments across the world. The estimation of governance performance ranges from -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong).

Data on the Road Quality Index were obtained from the Global Competitiveness Index published annually by the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020). It is an assessment of the quality of roads in countries across the world engaging data from the WEF Executive Opinion Survey, an extensive survey and a long-running tapping of the opinions of over 14,000 business leaders in 144 countries. The road quality index is measured on a scale of 1 (low) to 7 (high).

The data were rebased to percentages and the 11-year average score for each country was computed for each dataset using the following method.

i.   Governance Effectiveness: A country's score is obtained by taking the 11-year average, which is negative in some cases. The negative is generally eliminated by addition of 2.5 to the average score of all countries. The result is then divided by 5 and multiplied by 100 to obtain the percentage score for the country.

ii. Road Quality Index: The available data for RQI covers a period of 10 years (2010 – 2019). In some cases, there are missing data for some countries. A country's score is obtained by taking its average score for the number of years for which it has data. The percentage score is obtained by dividing the average score by 7 (maximum point) and multiplied by 100

The performance score of each country for service delivery is finally obtained by obtaining her average score in the two indices. The data were analysed using percentages and a one-sample t-test.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Service Delivery in sub-Sahara Africa (2010 - 2019)

S/N	Countries	G. E.	R. Q. I.	SD
1	Angola	28.15	33.74	**30.95**
2	Benin	39.63	41.73	**40.68**
3	Botswana	58.43	58.40	**58.42**
4	Burkina Faso	37.71	37.20	**37.46**
5	Burundi	25.19	43.57	**34.38**
6	Cameroon	33.20	38.94	**36.07**
7	Chad	20.54	36.96	**28.75**
8	Ethiopia	38.82	52.97	**45.90**
9	Gabon	33.61	35.57	**34.59**
10	Gambia	36.38	58.91	**47.65**
11	Ghana	47.11	50.34	**48.73**
12	Guinea	28.66	32.45	**30.56**
13	Kenya	41.76	58.20	**49.98**
14	Lesotho	37.46	41.71	**39.59**
15	Liberia	23.60	43.40	**33.50**
16	Madagascar	27.46	34.56	**31.01**
17	Malawi	37.74	45.63	**41.69**
18	Mali	30.44	46.97	**38.71**
19	Mauritania	33.01	33.07	**33.04**
20	Mauritius	68.54	64.46	**66.50**
21	Mozambique	35.26	33.53	**34.40**
22	Namibia	52.55	75.03	**63.79**
23	Nigeria	28.86	37.04	**32.95**

24	Rwanda	51.83	67.93	**59.88**
25	Senegal	42.95	51.04	**47.00**
26	Sierra Leone	26.40	43.39	**34.90**
27	South Africa	56.93	67.80	**62.37**
28	Uganda	38.91	46.19	**42.55**
29	Zambia	37.60	47.89	**42.75**
30	Zimbabwe	24.80	44.30	**34.55**
	SSA Average	37.45	46.76	**42.11**
	Global Average	**49.90**	**58.14**	**54.02**

Source: Field Report 2023

Descriptive analysis in Table 1 reveals that Sub-Saharan African countries performed below global averages in the areas of Governance Effectiveness (37.45%) and Road Quality Index (46.76%), This amounts to 42.11% in the region's overall performance in Service Delivery, which falls below the global average of 54.02%

In terms of country-specific performance in service delivery, Table 1 reveals that some countries in the region perform above the global average. They are Botswana (58.40%), Mauritius (66.50%), Rwanda (59.88%), Namibia (63.79%), and South Africa (62.37%). Chad has the poorest service delivery with 28.75%.

Table 2: Test Statistics for SSA's Public Service Delivery

One-Sample Statistics				
SSA	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Service Delivery Performance	30	42.1075	10.82058	1.97556

Source: Researcher's computation

Table 3: SSA's Public Service Delivery Statistics

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 54.02					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
SSA	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Service Delivery Performance	-6.030	29	.000	-11.91250	-15.9530	-7.8720

Source: Researcher's computation

A one-sample *t*-test is carried out to measure the significance of the difference between SSA countries' performance in public service delivery and the global average. The statistics are shown in Table 2 and Table 3. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the test, revealing that scores for 30 countries are tested; and the mean score (performance) is 42.1075. Table 3 shows the test value of 54.02, which is the global average for service delivery. The SSA's average is 11.91250 less than the global average as indicated by the negative sign. Although SSA's average is lower than the global average, to determine whether the difference is significant, reference is made to other figures in the table. A p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 implying that the difference

is significant. Also, the 95% confidence interval of -15.9530 and -7.8720, which indicates a non-inclusion of 0, implies the presence of a significant difference between the two means. In conclusion, public service delivery in sub-Saharan African countries is significantly different (lower than) from the global average.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study findings align with the existing literature in highlighting the complex and multifaceted nature of public service delivery in SSA. The study confirms that public services in SSA are provided by a mix of government, private, and non-governmental organizations, with significant challenges including inadequate infrastructure, limited financial resources, and governance issues (Ayee, 2013). This is consistent with the literature's emphasis on the legacy of colonialism and centralized administrative structures that fail to cater to diverse population needs (Bardhan, 2002).

Both the study and the existing literature underscore the critical role of public service delivery in economic development. The study's findings support the view that effective public services enhance human capital, improve health and education, and boost productivity and economic growth (World Bank, 2018). The emphasis on infrastructure services like transportation and water supply as foundational to economic activities is also corroborated by the study (Calderón & Servén, 2010).

In disparity, while the existing literature provides a historical perspective on the evolution of public service delivery in SSA, focusing on post-independence efforts, structural adjustment programs, and recent technological advancements (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999; Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019), the study emphasizes recent data from 2010-2020. The study shows varied progress among countries, with some making significant strides in digitalizing services (Rwanda) and others still grappling with basic service provision.

The study's quantitative analysis provides a more detailed assessment of the performance of individual SSA countries compared to global averages. The study reveals that countries like Mauritius, Botswana, and Rwanda perform above the global average in service delivery, while others like Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo lag significantly (World Bank, 2019). This detailed country-specific performance is less emphasized in the existing literature, which tends to focus on broader regional trends.

The literature highlights various global best practices, including transparency, accountability, e-government, decentralization, and public-private partnerships (Holzer & Schwester, 2011; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). The study, however, provides specific data on the implementation and effectiveness of these practices in SSA. For instance, it shows how Rwanda's strides in digital services have led to improved efficiency and accessibility, aligning with the literature's emphasis on technology and innovation (Aker & Mbiti, 2010).

In summary, the study corroborates many findings from the literature on public service delivery in SSA, particularly regarding its nature, importance, and challenges. However, it also provides more specific and recent data on the performance of individual countries and the implementation of best practices. The disparities noted between the study and the literature highlight the dynamic and evolving landscape of public service delivery in SSA, emphasizing the need for ongoing research and adaptive strategies to address persistent challenges and leverage opportunities for improvement.

CONCLUSION

Public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa remains a complex and evolving challenge with significant implications for the region's socio-economic development. This study highlights the critical role of public services in enhancing human capital, fostering economic growth, and reducing poverty. Despite notable progress in some countries, the overall performance of public service delivery in SSA remains below global averages, hampered by persistent issues such as inadequate funding, corruption, political instability, and infrastructure deficits.

The comparison between the study's findings and the literature reveals both areas of alignment and divergence. While the historical and contextual challenges are well-documented, the study provides contemporary insights into the specific performance of individual countries, showcasing both successes and ongoing struggles. Innovative approaches, particularly in leveraging technology and decentralization, offer promising avenues for improvement.

Moving forward, it is crucial for SSA countries to adopt comprehensive strategies that enhance governance, increase investments in infrastructure and human capital, and foster public-private collaborations. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a sustained commitment from national governments and international stakeholders, guided by the principles of transparency, accountability, and citizen-centric service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa, the following recommendations are proposed based on the review of literature and the results of the quantitative analysis of this study.

i. **Strengthen Governance and Accountability**: Governments should implement robust governance frameworks to reduce corruption and improve accountability. This can be achieved through the adoption of transparency measures such as open data initiatives and citizen engagement platforms. Strengthening institutions that oversee public service delivery is crucial for ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

ii. **Increase Investment in Infrastructure**: Significant investments are needed to address infrastructure deficits, particularly in transportation, water supply, and information and communication technology (ICT). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be instrumental in mobilizing the necessary financial resources and technical expertise for large-scale infrastructure projects.

iii. **Promote Decentralization**: Decentralizing public services can enhance responsiveness and tailor services to local needs. Empowering local governments with the authority and resources to manage public services can improve efficiency and accountability. Capacity-building initiatives should be provided to local authorities to ensure effective implementation of decentralized services.

iv. **Leverage Technology and Innovation**: Embracing digital technologies can streamline public service delivery processes and make services more accessible to citizens. E-government platforms should be expanded to cover more services, reducing bureaucratic delays and increasing efficiency. Mobile technology can also be leveraged to extend services to remote and underserved areas.

v. **Enhance Human Capital Development**: Investing in the training and capacity-building of public service workers is essential. Addressing the issue of brain drain by creating conducive working conditions and competitive remuneration packages can help retain skilled professionals. Continuous professional development programs should be implemented to ensure that the workforce is well-equipped to meet evolving service delivery demands.

vi. **Implement Climate-Resilient Strategies**: Integrating climate adaptation strategies into public service delivery plans is crucial. Building climate-resilient infrastructure and adopting sustainable practices can mitigate the impact of climate change on public services. Governments should also prioritize environmental conservation and sustainable resource management.

By adopting these recommendations, sub-Saharan African countries can improve the quality and accessibility of public services, thereby enhancing socio-economic development and the well-being of their populations.

Suggestion for further studies

Future research should explore the impact of digital transformation on public service delivery in sub-Saharan Africa, examining how technology can bridge service gaps. Comparative studies between SSA countries and other developing regions could provide deeper insights into effective strategies. Additionally, investigating the role of community participation and local governance in enhancing service delivery can offer valuable perspectives. Longitudinal studies assessing the sustainability of implemented reforms and their long-term effects on service quality and accessibility are also recommended to inform ongoing policy adjustments.

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