

The Privatization of Telecommunications Sector in Nigeria: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

Telecommunication as a source of information is germane to the growth and development of any nation. Its imperative arises from the impact it has on the socio-economic development, infrastructure and the wellbeing of the people. This simply means that in this modern world, for other sectors of the economy to thrive, telecommunication has a significant role to play. Given this backdrop; this paper has the objective to examine the impact of the privatization of telecommunications sector on the socio-economic development of Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the study employed purposive sampling method to select respondents across the major stakeholders in the telecoms industry. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. During the course of study, the paper discovered that privatization of telecommunications sector has enhanced the socio-economic development of Nigeria. However, the paper uncovered a lot of challenges in the sector. The paper therefore recommends based on the findings that the regulatory body as well as service providers need to wake up to their responsibilities for the efficient and effective service delivery.

Keywords: Privatization, Deregulation, Telecommunication, Development, Nigeria

1.1 Introduction

The concept of privatization has become a growing phenomenon in recent times in the contemporary world. The situation was encouraged by a great concern to reduce the control of the state over the public driven economy cum to promote the role vis-à-vis scope of private ownership and participation in the economy (Nwoye 2011; Nellis 1995 cited in Adams 2007; Adeyemo & Salami 2008; Igbuzor 2003). Prior to 1980s, countries around the world were known with different political and economic systems. Some states adopted socialist political and economic system while some aligned with capitalist political and economic system. A large number of countries practiced what was known as mixed economy; a mixture of private and public ownership type of the economy (Ogwezzy & Bello, 2013).

However, at the tale of the 20th century, which happens to be the end of Cold War between the East and West, there is a dominance of capitalism and neo-liberalism Ogwezzy & Bello (2013). And the situation culminated to the principle and idea of private ownership, which revolves around the transfer of the economy from the government to the private individuals. Hence, privatization became only economy system in the world Ogwezzy & Bello (2013). The above position was reinforced by Igbuzor (2003) when he remarked that the present economy situation in the world has necessitated the government to embrace market driven economy for the benefit of unprecedented growth and sustainable development. In similar vein, Osunde (2015), Ogwezzy & Bello (2013), Adeyemo & Salami (2008) agreed that many countries in the world that practiced mixed economy before have realized that the solution to economic development is to move from public sector economy to the privately driven economy. They maintained further that countries like the United Kingdom, France, Canada, and others have embraced private sector economy. And it has recorded a different economic direction such as lessen high level of joblessness, reduced the level of economic instability, discouraged local liability, and poor performance of the economy.

It is against this background that led to the privatization and other reforms in the public sector between 1988 and 1999 by both General Babangida and Obasanjo administrations. Before privatization and deregulation in the telecommunications sector in Nigeria, according to Adeola et al. (2016), El-Rufai (2016), NCC (2014) and Osotimehin et al. (2007) GSM services were exorbitant to acquire, expensive to obtain and costly to use. During the period, teledensity was just at 0.04% (about 400, 00 users) with the population of over 100 million people which was ranked as one of the lowest in the world. The total business in the sector was less than \$50m dollars (Adeola et al. 2016; NCC 2014; Osotimehin et al. 2007). They further remarked that there was unfavorable atmosphere for business activities in the country at that time and while there were more burdens on other infrastructures such as roads, postal services, inability to make emergency calls even in life threatening conditions resulting to the loss of many lives.

Arising from the above, that culminated to the promulgation of 1992 decree by General Ibrahim Babangida administration that led to the setting up of the regulatory agency in the telecommunications sector, known as Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) (Sodiq et al., 2011). NCC commenced operation in 1993 while full privatization and deregulation of the telecoms industry began in 2000 immediately Nigeria returned to civil rule.

1.2 Problem Statement

The early stage of Nigeria Independence marked the beginning of the country's journey into development. And to fast-track this journey, it became vital for the government to involve and control the economy. This is because, state was perceived to be the catalyst of economic development, expected to provide the essential services for the citizenry (Chidozie et al., 2015, Adeyemo & Salami 2008). Therefore, the government established State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) in different sectors of the economy.

However, these enterprises that were to be the catalysts of development as well as to make life meaningful to the citizens became cog in the wheel of Nigerian development, as these firms were characterized with poor performance as a result of gross mismanagement, ineptitude, massive debts, endemic corruption and so on (Chidozie et al., 2015). World Bank (1993) confirmed the failure of these enterprises, when an assessment was carried out in one of these public enterprises with other government firms in twenty developing countries; the result shown that Nigerian public enterprises ranked the least among these countries, concerning the quality service delivery vis-a-vis investment returns.

Indeed, the Nigerian Telecommunications industry was one of the leading sectors that experienced deregulation and privatization exercise. The sector was encountered with different hurdles before the reform ranging from ineptitude, erratic service delivery, corruption, and unfriendly attitude to customers among others (Adeola et al., (2016), El-Rufai (2016), Sodiq et al., 2011). They remarked further that aside from the above obstacles in the sector, that there were inadequate of GSM lines for the whole country. That phone penetration was totally poor equating one mobile line to 440 people, against the requirement and standard of International Telecommunications Union (ITU) of one (1) GSM line to one hundred (100) people suggested for developing countries. El-Rufai (2016) averred that the only phone lines that were made available by NITEL for the whole country before the privatization of the telecommunications sector were just 400,000 lines in the face of seven (7) billion dollars invested in the sector by the government. He went further that prior to deregulation of this industry GSM network in Nigeria was the most costly in the world.

Given this scenario, that led to the decree 75 of 1992 that gave birth to the establishment of the regulatory body in the industry, known as Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) (Sodiq et al., 2011). The commission commenced its operation in 1993, while full liberalization of the sector began in 2000 after Nigeria returned to democratic rule. The privatization of the telecoms sector cum the approval of licenses to different GSM service providers is a watershed in the history of telecommunications sector in Nigeria (Okonjo-Iweala, 2012).

Interestingly, since the advent of privatization in 1988, the policy has been a subject of debate among Nigerians concerning the impact of the policy to Nigerian socio-economic development. Based on the fact that the original initiative and push for policy in Nigeria came from international financial institutions, precisely the IMF and the World Bank as part of the agenda for SAP. People are of the view that there must be a secret agenda in form of economic imperialism especially the conditions attached to privatization as well as monetary aid and debt relief, as some of these industries being privatized were bought over by foreign interests, which is an evidence in the telecommunications sector. And this scenario

has given Nigerians some doubts regarding the contribution of privatization of telecommunications on the Nigerian economy. As it was rightly observed by Nwoye (2011) that the impact of privatization is yet to be established, that is still revolves around suggestions and assumptions. Meanwhile, several studies have been conducted on the privatization exercise in Nigeria especially on other privatized firms. However, this very topic has not been thoroughly explored. Arising from this gap is what this article addressed.

1.3 Objectives of this study

The following are the objectives of the study

1. To examine the contributions of privatization of telecoms sector in the socio-economic development of Nigeria.
2. To put forward possible recommendations government can adopt for the efficient service delivery in the sector based on the paper's findings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Privatization

The privatization and commercialization (PC) Decree No 25 of 1988, the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE) Act of 1993 and amended Bureau of Public Enterprise (BPE) Act of 1999 defined privatization as reorganization of part or whole of the property and other shares held by state or any of its agencies in businesses whether partly or wholly owned by the government. Osunde (2015) perceived privatization as transfer of assets or properties especially from government to private sector. Pamarcheche et al. (2007) confirmed Osunde's position when they maintained that the idea behind the concept is to reallocate government properties from the public to the private sector where the assets or properties are expected to be efficiently utilized. Raji et al. (2016) averred that the term privatization involves handing over of properties from the government to private entities. They went further, that the concept suggests disengagement of state or government from enterprises that can be best run or managed by private individuals. Nwoye (2007) also shared the same view with the above positions when he said the concept means the rearrangement of businesses and assets from the public to the private sector. Itheme (1997) described the concept as any of the methods government employ to bring out SOEs to contend or to allow individual ownership or management into state ownership or management. Ogundiya et al. (2011) viewed privatization as the selling out of state assets to the private individuals, which includes assets like revenue collection and law enforcement.

1. Deregulation

Deregulation and privatization are concepts that people often used interchangeably. However, deregulation as a concept is more comprehensive than privatization. The policy is a broad economic program that includes privatization. Both deregulation and privatization policies are carried out to pave

the way for economic liberalization, and market forces economy. Owojori, (2011) remarked that the policy of deregulation is a “processes through which the state legislations over the economy are removed or reduced for the benefit of market forces”. He maintained further that it means an increase in private participation in the economy which will eventually reduce government burden for the benefit of efficiency. Owojori (2011) advanced further that the basis of the policy is to draw both local and foreign investment to the nation’s economy. He therefore, advised that corrupt circumstances in the public sector can hinder the efficiency of the policy towards improvement.

Eme and Onwuka (2011) considered the concept of deregulation as partial or outright removal of government influences in the determination of the economic decisions. They shared common ground with Owojori, that deregulation is to promote efficiency, effectiveness, foreign investment, and channeling public funds towards other crucial sectors as well as to eliminate public sector monopoly. They however observed that despite the policy is a required instrument for development, that it should be a gradual process in order to give public sector the opportunity to salvage efficiency earlier than total privatization. Adebayo (2011) also aligned with the above submissions, when he advanced some explanations that led to both the privatization and deregulation in Nigeria. Among the explanations he put forward are: efficiency, accountability, employment, to enhance capital market and to reduce unnecessary borrowing.

In view of the foregoing, deregulation is perceived as the elimination of all barriers and laws that hampered the entry into the telecommunications industry. As Petrazzin (1995) rightly observed that deregulation implies reducing government power in the telecoms sector and to provide enabling atmosphere for competition in the sector. Petrazzin declared further that deregulation has mandated the government to bring some forms of regulations in the telecommunications industry in order to promote competition in the sector. The concept of deregulation is commonly believed as part of the privatization exercise aimed at promoting private participation as well as competition in the GSM industry for the benefit of quality service delivery. This above submission was corroborated by Akinrele (2002) when he noted that privatization and deregulation of telecommunications industry has led Nigeria into global system.

2. Development

From the foregoing argument on privatization, it is important to observe that the crux of the economic reform that led to privatization in Nigeria is to engender economic development. Therefore, there is need to understand what is this economic development? And what are the correlations between privatization and economic development? The concept of economic development has enjoyed a serious academic attention, and as such it is thought to connote different things to different people. Economic development revolves around an improvement in the state or society over a particular period of time (Fukuyama, 2014). Noruwa & Christopher (2012) averred that economic development comprises micro-economic stability, business environment that gives favorable atmosphere for investment in human capital, good governance, external trade, competition, standard institutions, and gender equality. Todaro and Smith (2014) maintained that economic development is the sudden positive changes that occur to a country’s Gross National Product (GNP) over a given period of time. Saboohi & Sushil (2010) remarked that Economic development entails freedom and enhancement of individuals’ lives, which comprises improvement in

technology, increase in income, availability of sound education, availability of health care system and increase in political consciousness.

Implicit from the above definitions, economic development can be seen as both qualitative and quantitative increase in economy. It also implies improvement in capital development and improvement in essential societal needs, such as health care system, housing, clothing, education, security, and other aspects that can enhance general well-being of the citizenry.

Given the above discussion, there is a strong correlation between the privatization of telecoms sector and economic development in Nigeria. Telecoms sector is a strategic area that can enhance economic development if it is totally explored. As there are quite a number of sectors that can gain or benefit from the privatization of GSM industry, based on the fact that GSM infrastructure is very crucial to eradication of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment in Nigeria. Hence, economic development can be referred to as low mortality rate, low level of diseases, high level of literacy, low level of the crime rate, increase in modern technology, high percentage of employment rate and increase in the overall well-being of the people.

2.2 Objectives of Privatization in Nigeria

Basically, privatization exercise is driven by the need to promote competitiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness in the economy. And the belief is that the private driven economy can perform better than government controlled economy. Given the experiences of state involvement in the economy in Nigeria, and coupled with the long history of the hurdles bedeviling public sector, according to BPE (2000) and the (1999) inaugural speech of President Olusegun Obasanjo privatization policy is desired to realize among other things the following aims and objectives:-

- i. To reduce the responsibilities of the state by allowing the government to give adequate attention to other crucial aspect of administration that cannot be performed by the private individuals;
- ii. To cut down the number of unprofitable ventures in the system;
- iii. To re-organize the public enterprises on the path to a new prospect of performance, sustainability and productivity;
- iv. To make available job opportunities, modern technology and to project the economy to global market;
- v. To give attention to critical areas in terms of budgets fundinds like education, health, security and infrastructure;
- vi. To ensure adequate returns and profits on public investments in commercialized enterprises via more resourceful businesses;
- vii. To discourage complete reliant on the government budgets funding especially commercialized enterprises;

2.3 The Development of Telecommunications Sector in Nigeria

The first telecoms infrastructure in the country was a wire linked between Lagos and London in 1886, and it was setup by the colonial masters. After some years later it was extended to some offices in Nigeria for

administrative purposes (Ebinimi & Clement 2009). The first commercial telephone line in Nigeria was established in 1923 between Itu and Calabar, this was the beginning of the development of telecom services in Nigeria. The development ushered in telephone lines to places like Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Benin, Kano, Oshogbo, Kaduna, and among others, between 1946 to 1953 (Fasunwon, 2014; Ebinimi & Clement 2009; Ajayi et al, 1999).

As at the time of Nigerian independence in 1960, there were few telephone lines 18,724, for the over 40 million people and this was absolutely inadequate (Ijewere and Gbandi, 2012). Based on this reality, immediately after independence several development plans were carried out towards the enhancement of state of the infrastructure vis-à-vis network in the country. Among the objectives of these development plans were; expansion of dialing facilities to connect the key towns and cities, fixing more telephone lines and the setting up of the institution in the telecommunications sector known as External Telecommunications Limited (NET) (Ajayi et al, 1999). However, the development plans objectives were not completely achieved, but some levels of successes were recorded which includes; the setting up of NET, linking of some towns and cities through Micro-wave radio transmission, rise the telephone lines from 52,000 to 241,000, fixing of International Telephone Switching Center (ITSC) and among others (Ijewere and Gbandi, 2012).

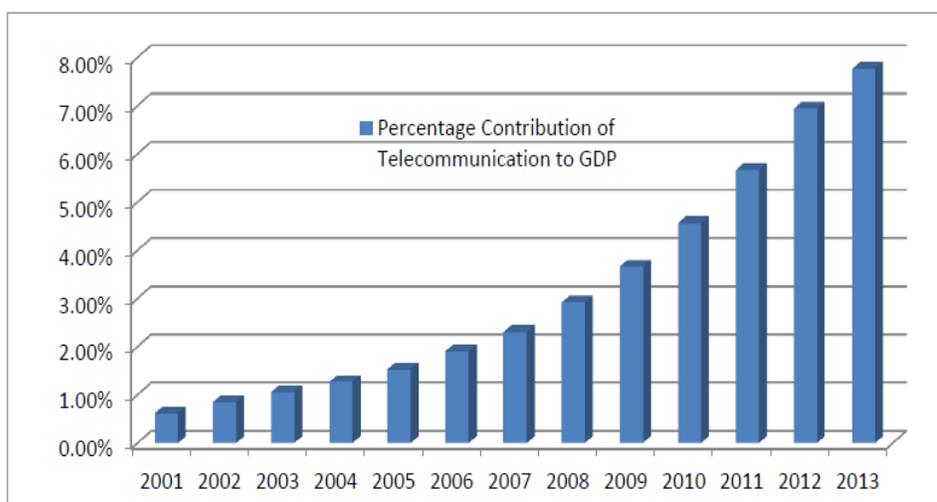
In 1985, the department of Telecoms was removed from the Postal and Telecoms section and it was amalgamated with NET and to be called Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL). The essence of this merger was for the institution to provide Nigerian with effective telecommunication services and to equally ensure that the services were accessible and affordable (Ijewere and Gbandi, 2012). In 1993 NITEL started the paging system, trunked radio and voice mail. The Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN) safeguarded the accessibility of telecoms services such as video telephone, electronic mail, telefax among others (Odukoya, 2007).

However, Nigerian telecoms sector was bedeviled with a lot of challenges such as inefficiency in terms of service delivery, misappropriation of fund, endemic corruption, erratic behavior to customers and exorbitant charges. These challenges coupled with other things culminated to the Decree 75 of 1992 which led to the setting up of the supervisory body known as Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). The commission began its operation in 1993 while full deregulation and privatization commenced in 2000 (Sodiq et al, 2011). The commission was saddled with among other functions to grant approval and licenses to GSM service providers, to promote private participation in the telecoms sector, regulation of tariffs, settle dispute that has to do with interconnectivity, supervision of operational standards for the network and other related functions in the sector.

In 1999, the commission granted licenses to telephone service providers such as MTN, Airtel, and MTel, while in 2002, license was given to Globacom service provider and Etisalat GSM operator got license in 2008 to operate as service provider Chidozie et al., (2015). Among the reasons advanced by the government for the privatization and the reform in the telecoms industry, is for efficient service delivery, to cut down government financial burden, to bring in modern technology, and so on (Chidozie et al., 2015). However, these GSM operators did not begin work till 2001 August when they were granted digital mobile permits by the NCC. It was this development that led to the landmark in the telecoms

sector in Nigeria (Okonjo-Iweala, 2012). The privatization of the telecommunications industry really culminated to the large number of telephone lines which was at 450,000 prior to privatization to 38,000,000 in 2007; the figure jumped to 86million in 2010 and in 2015 it rose to 151 million (NBS, 2016).

The privatization of telecoms sector has snowballed to unprecedented enhancement in the socio-economic of Nigeria. As observed by Fasanwon (2014) the private participation in the telecommunications industry has improved infrastructural facilities, boosted foreign investment, job opportunity, enhanced commercial activities, and overall production. NCC (2014) equally maintained that it has overwhelmingly impacted to Nigerian GDP. For instance, from 0.62% in 2001 to 8.53% in 2013, the GSM subscribers jumped from 2,217,040 in 2002 to 127,603,629 in 2013, and the teledensity also moved from 1.89 in 2002 to 91.15 in 2013.



Source: NCC (2014)

2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study has for its purpose, classical-liberal, neoliberal and Public choice theory. Classical-liberal is also known as market system principle, advocated by Adam Smith (1776) the wealth of the nation. As observed by Doyle (1997) other classical-liberalists holds that the interest of the market forces and that of state are not the same, that public sector is inefficient since public workers have no direct interest in the result of their schedules. The theory is of view that for the development to take place there is need to remove all forms of limitations to trade that are caused by state intervention. Neo-liberal theory, this theory only reinforced the classical view by giving more emphasis to the privatization policy. David (2015) remarked that neoliberal understanding is that the private sector economy will enhance economic growth, income distribution and efficiency.

In spite of the beautiful submissions of the above theories, they are still not immuned from criticisms, both from economic and political angles. Taylor and Gans-Morse (2009) noted that the critics are of the views that both theories failed to take into cognizance the exploitative penchant of the free market economy. Brown (2015) also declared that the theories jettison the principle of democracy.

Based on the weaknesses of the above theories, public choice theory was employed to further explain this paper for better understanding. The theory was put forward by James Buchanan and Gordon Tullock in 1962 and Buchanan in 1975 (Lucia and Thomas, 2015).

The theory submits that there are two types of goods in the society, which it referred to as public and private goods. Those public goods include education, health and security and they are to be made available by government to all and sundry. While private goods that has to do with profit making should be provided by the market forces in the state. As observed by Moberg (2014), Holland (2014) and Dagdeviren (2006) the proponents of public choice are conscious of outright transferring of the provision of public goods and services into private individuals. That full privatization will give room to over concentration of state resources in the hands of few individuals' especially foreign hands instead of being accessible to the down trodden masses. Public choice theory is in line with Adeyemo and Salami (2008) and Ugorji (1995) when they remarked that for a long period of time, Nigeria government has carried more than enough responsibilities regarding service delivery to its people. That this situation has often led to high level of public sector deficits that are financed through substantial borrowing. The implication of this privatization of the telecommunications sector in Nigeria is that it would give the state the breathing space in terms of spending; it would also reduce its participation in the enterprises that can be undertaken by the private sector.

Given this backdrop, that led to the privatization of the telecoms sector which has been a big success, and massive improvement to socio-economic development of Nigeria compared to the time when the sector was under the control of government. However, despite the privatization of the GSM sector has played a vital role to Nigerian socio-economic development, the role of the government still remains crucial as suggested by the theory. Arising from the above, that government set up regulatory agency NCC to regulate the conducts of GSM service providers against exploitation by the telecoms operators.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Nigeria which has its capital in Abuja. The country comprises thirty six (36) states. Nigeria is located in West Africa sub-region, shares borders with Benin Republic in the Western axis, Cameroon and Chad in the Eastern axis and Niger Republic in the Northern axis. The country's current population is over One Hundred and Eighty Five Million (NBS, 2016). Nigeria got her independence on the 1st of October, 1960 from Britain.

Both primary and secondary methods of data were adopted in this paper. The primary method was based on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Three Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) sessions were conducted; each group comprises seven participants from selected stakeholders through purposive sampling method. The secondary method of data collection was also employed in this work via the use of

relevant materials like textbooks, journals and relevant published articles on the internet in order to bring out reliable findings.

3.1 Participants and Procedures

It has been observed that Focus group is one the most common attributes of qualitative research method and commonly used tool to capture perception into people’s experiences, belief, and feelings that trigger their behaviour (Rabiee, 2004; Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Thus, in order to achieve the objectives of the study, focus groups consisting of seven participants for each group that made up twenty one (21) participants from selected subscribers of telecommunications in Nigeria were engaged in three focus group discussions sittings conducted in the three selected places in Nigeria. These places are Abuja, Lokoja and Lagos respectively. Each respondent was fully represented in focus groups discussions included academic and non-academic subscribers.

An open-ended interview protocol was employed to guide discussion; one of the researchers facilitated the focus groups with the assistance of two graduate students. All the group discussions were recorded with the consent of the participants. The anonymity of respondents in the focus groups is protected in this report, and in some cases the use of “they” or “their” as the first person singular pronoun has been chosen to protect the personality of participants and to show how their perceptions are representative of various focus group participants.

Table 1: Participants’ information

	CODING ID	PARTICIPANTS	Group 1(A) AGE	EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND
1	P1-FGD1	Hon. Puke Tunde Anthony	Age: 53	Ex-commissioner for Youth & Sports
2	P2-FGD1	Dr. Kehinde Lamidi,	Age: 51	PhD, Lecturer
3	P3-FGD1	Mr. Tope Ehindero	Age: 55	M.Sc. Holder, lecturer
4	P4-FGD1	Mr. Samuel Ipinmoroti	Age: 35	Site Engineer
5	P5-FGD1	Mrs. Acharu Tony Okeme	Age: 36	M.Sc., Civil Servant
6	P6-FG1	Dr. Akowe Joel	Age 47	PhD, Lecturer
7	P7-FGD1	Mr. Pedro Akande	Age: 57	M.Sc. Holder, Civil Servant

		<i>Group 2 (B)</i>		
	Participants			Qualifications
1	P1-FGD2 Mallam Abdullahi Mahdi	Age: 40		M.Sc. Lecturer
2	P2-FGD2 Dr. Ebenezer. E. Lawal	Age: 59		PhD, Lecturer
3	P3-FGD2 Dr. Chukwu Emeka	Age: 48		PhD, Economics Analyst
4	P4-FGD2 Mallam Rabiuh Muhammed	Age: 37		M.Sc. Lecturer
5	P5-FGD2 Dr. Abraham Peter	Age: 42		PhD, Lecturer
6	P6-FGD2 Prof. Lucky Ovwasa	Age: 57		PhD, Lecturer
7	P7-FGD2 Mrs. Regina Mike	Age: 42		PGD Bus, Civil Servant
		<i>Group 3 (C)</i>		
	Participants			Qualifications
1	P1-FGD3 Mr. Shedrack Igiku	Age: 57		M.Sc. Guardian & Counselor
2	P2-FGD3 Mr. Olorunfemi Emmanuel	Age: 32		B.Sc. Civil Servant
3	P3-FGD3 Mr. I .B Joseph	Age: 49		HND, Civil Servant
4	P4-FGD3 Mr. Edy Godwin	Age: 50		B.Sc. Civil Servant
5	P5-FGD3 Miss Mary John	Age: 27		B.Sc., Civil Servant
6	P6-FGD3 Mrs. Ajayi Bosede Mary	Age: 45		M.Sc. Teacher
7	P7-FGD3 Hajia Amina Muhammed	Age: 47		HND, Civil Servant

4. Data Analysis and Results

In this section, the group interviews conducted were recorded and transcribed and pass through several stages of analysis. First analysis was carried out in order to ascertain a general sense of the data and reflect on its implication.

Next, a thorough analysis was conducted and data was divided into different parts that reflected specific opinions, attitudes, thoughts and experiences of all the participants. At the end of this analysis several issues were fashioned out, and the issues were classified into groups that were finally regarded as as key

findings. Data from across all focus groups was again analyzed so it could be structured into different groups. Thus, these groups were analyzed to decide the interconnectedness of issues which were later considered into themes and sub-themes. Arising from this, a picture of the privatization of telecommunications sector in Nigeria prospects and challenges emerged. Hence, the analysis centered on the direct views and opinions of the subscribers below served the bases for the analysis.

Table 2: Summary of perceptions of the participants on each sub-theme

Summary of Thematic Analysis of Focus Group Discussion	Participants perceptions	References
Theme 1: Enhancement of socio-economic development		
<i>Sub -themes:</i>		
Boosts Nigeria Economy	7	8
Easiness Business	3	4
Increase access	10	11
Increase efficiency	12	13
Theme 2: Efficient implementation Measures		
Sub-theme: Maximize efficiency		
Customers' Interest	6	6
Enabling Environment	11	12
Facilities Upgrade	11	14
Regulation, Penalty and Sanctions	7	8

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork

4.1 Theme 1: Enhancement of socio-economic development

In order to have an insight into what privatization of telecommunications is all about, from the minds and perspectives of all participants, the researchers made efforts to explore what privatization of telecommunications represents. Therefore the following sub-themes that emerged captured it all as explained below

1. Boosts Nigeria Economy

In reaction to the first objective of this study, privatization of telecommunications was seen as a boosts to the country economy by the participants. As participant 2 of the group3 maintained thus;

“The privatization of telecoms industry has led to foreign direct investment for Nigeria. He explained that if one is to consider the ownership of these GSM service providers, you will discover that most of them are owned by foreigners”. In conjunction with the above description, other participants also

expressed the same view. Most of the participants equally explained that the privatization of telecoms has brought in e-banking, e-commerce and other online transactions which were hitherto not available”.

2. Increase Access

On this view, few participants see the privatization of telecoms sector as negative, but many others said the exercise has helped in stimulating access to so many opportunities in business and commercial activities. For example, participant 3 from group 3, participant 7 from group 1 and many other participants described what privatization of telecoms sector implies thus:

“Privatization of telecoms industry is a good thing that was brought to Nigeria, it began during the administration of Obasanjo and it made us to know that telephone is not only meant for the rich people. Privatization exercise has made it easy for everybody to have access to phone unlike before when it was controlled by the government. That through phone you can access information anywhere in the world and is the best for us in Nigeria”.

3. Increase efficiency

Another explanation of privatization of telecoms that appeared from the data analyzed is the sub-theme that held the perceptions on the fact that it brings increase in efficiency. For this perspective twelve of the respondents articulated their opinions. To start with, they maintained thus:

“Before privatization, the telecoms were more or less on the way out in Nigeria. Now with small amount of money one can communicate to any part of the world. Before it was not so. It is one of the achievements of Obasanjo administration in this country”.

4. Easiness of Business

Regarding the above perception, participants unanimously agreed that privatization of telecommunication in Nigeria has improved the way business is carried out, that it has brought in so many business innovations. For instance, a focus group participant who was quick to confirm this was participant 3 of group 1 who said:

“There is no gainsaying that the privatization of telecoms has modernized the way things are done in Nigeria. In fact, in every facet of life telecommunications has been able to touch every aspect of life”.

4.2 Theme 2: Efficient implementation Measures

In order to realize the aims set out for privatization of telecommunications certain requirements must be on ground. It is acknowledged that telecoms sector remains one of the critical sectors that support the actualization of the macroeconomic objectives of economic progress in addition to development in most

countries. Given this backdrop, Adeola, et al. (2016) and Borduas (2015) opined that telecom is a *sin qua non* for a modern state to realize its potential and to achieve its developmental objectives. As a result of this views on measures that can lead to efficient implementation need to be explored. It is on this note therefore, the data generated from the focus groups participants show that all possible efforts are needed to maximize efficiency of the privatization as well as the need to follow procedures for successful implementation.

1. Enabling Environment

Based on the fact that most of the hurdles being confronted by telecoms in Nigeria are associated with environmental issues like electricity, security and government taxes. Therefore, it has become imperative for government to create a favorable environment for the privatization to remain efficient. Most participants interviewed have this to say:

“There should be policies thrust on the part of government to spur the provision of telecommunications services in these areas. Favorable environment that would bring about competition and quality services, government should also provide and improve security for these telecommunications operators’ equipment against vandalization and armed robbers that too would go a long way in improving their services and government can as well reduce the tax pay by these GSM operators. If all these are done, it would enhance quality services”.

2. Facilities Upgrade

As much as the interviewees fault the government on the problems posed by inadequate security and heavy tax on the providers of the telecoms, the participants also expressed concerns on the facilities of these operators thus, called for upgrade. Most of the participants have this to say:

“In fact, these service providers need to upgrade their facilities because there is a gap these service providers have not been able to fill. They have to improve on their facilities so that people can enjoy the services they paid for. Addressing the challenges from another perspective, some participants called attention on the lack of appropriate telecommunication coverage in the rural areas, therefore said: GSM operators still need for better penetration of the rural areas”.

3. Customers' Interest

To achieve effective implementation of privatization of telecoms in Nigeria it is vital for the service providers to improve on their corporate social responsibility which means to ensure that customers’ interest is given enough consideration. Given this perception, many participants expressed their views thus:

“There is need for GSM operators to improve their corporate social responsibility. They went further that service providers should consider citizens’ interest. That the crux of the privatization of the sector is to

serve people well the people interest has not been maximally considered. That citizen's interest must be accommodated".

4. Regulation, Penalty and sanction

It has been noted that for the privatization of the telecommunication sector to thrive, sustained and beneficial to Nigerian people, there is need for government to step up on its regulatory role and equally impose sanction and penalty on any service provider that violate the regulation and guidelines of the privatization. It is against this background, most participants unanimously have these to say:

"Government should review the policies regulating the privatization as most of these policies are obsolete already. Majority of the participants suggested that there are areas that government still needs to come in for a robust telecommunications services. The informants equally said that the regulatory body must also be seen to do its job. That is, NCC must not compromise with the telecom operators at the expense of the citizens who happen to be subscribers or customers. Summarizing these perceptions, most participants concluded that, government should strengthen the regulatory agencies (NCC, BPE) so that the agencies can perform its statutory responsibilities".

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study aimed at examining the contributions of privatization of telecoms sector in the socio-economic development of Nigeria. The objective of the study was to put forward possible recommendations government can adopt for the efficient service delivery in the sector. It was discovered in the course of findings that the privatization of telecommunications industry has contributed overwhelmingly to the socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Given the data from the findings, the study therefore recommends that in order to realize the aims set out for privatization of telecommunications that certain requirements must be on ground. That, it has become imperative for government to create a favorable environment for the privatization to remain efficient. Again, the service providers have to improve on their facilities so that people can enjoy the services they paid for. Also for a robust telecommunications in Nigeria, it is vital for the service providers to improve on their corporate social responsibility which means to ensure that customers' interest is given enough consideration. Finally, it has been noted that for the privatization of the telecoms sector to thrive, sustained and beneficial to Nigerian people, that there is need for government to step up on its regulatory role and equally impose sanction and penalty on any service provider that violate the regulation and guidelines of the privatization.

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