

## An Assessment of the Effects of Bureaucratic bottlenecks on Public Project Delivery

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2025, 28(03), 908-914

Publication history: Received on 01 November 2025; revised on 10 December 2025; accepted on 13 December 2025

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2025.28.3.4107>

### Abstract

While bureaucracy is critical in maintaining order and ensuring compliance, it has often been criticized for creating inefficiencies in public project delivery. In developing countries like Nigeria, bureaucratic bottlenecks have become a significant hindrance to infrastructure development with issues such as delays due to prolonged approval processes, excessive paperwork, and fragmented coordination among agencies. This study therefore assessed the implications of bureaucratic processes on effective public project delivery with a view to recommending measures to enhance efficient project delivery. Two objectives were developed, and they include : to examine bureaucratic processes involved in public project delivery and to appraise the effects of bureaucratic bottlenecks on public project delivery. Descriptive survey design was adopted, focusing on the Agu Awka–Umuchu 132kV Double Circuit Transmission Line Project and the Anambra International Convention Center. Using Purposive sampling, 282 questionnaires were distributed to government officials, engineers, project contractors, community representatives and stakeholders involved in the projects. Five (5) main aspects of bureaucratic processes in public project delivery. The most significant effects of bureaucratic bottlenecks are Project Delays and Idle Capital(4.50), Cost Overruns (4.33), loss of Public Confidence and Negative Economic Ripple effects (4.13). The study, through interactions with stakeholders, recommends that strategic measures such as e-governance and digital workflow systems, coupled with decentralized decision-making, are critical to enhancing bureaucratic efficiency and project delivery outcomes.

**Keywords:** Bureaucracy; Public projects; Project delivery; Construction industry; Completion time

### 1. Introduction

Bureaucratic process is defined as the structured rules, procedures, and steps required in organizational and governmental decision-making to ensure accountability and transparency (Okonkwo, 2019). While bureaucracy is critical in maintaining order and ensuring compliance, it has often been criticized for creating inefficiencies in public project delivery (Edino, Bisong, and Inakefe, 2021). In developing countries like Nigeria, bureaucratic bottlenecks have become a significant hindrance to infrastructure development (Abba, 2018). For example, public projects are frequently delayed due to prolonged approval processes, excessive paperwork, and fragmented coordination among agencies (Eze, 2020). Findings from preliminary assessments and media investigations reveal that bureaucratic bottlenecks have adversely affected the timely execution of the project. These include overlapping responsibilities between federal and state agencies, lack of timely disbursement of funds, and security-related setbacks that further delay administrative processes (Chukwuemeka, 2024 and Eweh, 2024). The resulting delays have not only disrupted the project timeline but also undermined public trust in governance and service delivery. According to a 2023 report by the Anambra State Ministry of Works, over 60% of public infrastructure projects in the state have exceeded their initial timelines and budgets primarily due to bureaucratic inefficiencies.

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The aim of this study is to assess the implications of bureaucratic processes on effective public project delivery with a view to recommending measures to enhance efficient project delivery. Two objectives were developed, and they include : to examine bureaucratic processes involved in public project delivery and to appraise the effects of bureaucratic bottlenecks on public project delivery. To achieve this aim, the study was delimited to two(2) main public projects in Anambra State: (a)Agu Awka–Umuchu 132kV Double Circuit Transmission Line Project.(b)The International Convention Center Awka (ICC), Anambra State. The findings of this study benefit policymakers, project managers, local communities and other stakeholders.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Bureaucratic Processes involved in Public Project Delivery

Bureaucratic processes in public project delivery are necessary to promote due process, transparency, and accountability in government infrastructure execution. However, when these processes become overly complex, delayed, or poorly coordinated, they contribute to inefficiencies, project delays, cost overruns, and abandonment. This section evaluates how each stage of the bureaucratic cycle manifests in real projects within Anambra State. Bureaucratic processes in public project delivery typically include:

- **Project Initiation and Approval:** Both projects underwent prolonged initiation stages due to multi-level approval requirements. In the case of the Agu Awka–Umuchu project, delays were reported between the Federal Ministry of Power, the Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN), and state authorities. Community site conflicts and federal-state jurisdictional overlap further prolonged the process (Abdul, 2024). Similarly, the ICC project was initiated under Governor Willie Obiano's administration in 2018, but faced slow pre-approval documentation processes and environmental reviews, leading to late mobilization in 2019 (Awka Times, 2021). In both cases, bureaucracy slowed project initiation, and approval took longer than necessary due to unclear administrative structures and multi-agency involvement.
- **Budget allocation:** Budget disbursement challenges were a common bottleneck. Although over \$785 million was allocated to the Agu Awka–Umuchu project, progress was minimal due to irregular and delayed fund releases, resulting in temporary abandonment and unfulfilled contractor mobilization (Abdul,2024). In contrast, the ICC project enjoyed steady funding during its early phases but encountered setbacks in subsequent years, especially with inflation adjustments and delays in counterpart funding for auxiliary facilities like the hotel and internal roads (ANSIPPA, 2024). Both projects reveal the inefficiency of Nigeria's disbursement systems and the consequences of rigid fiscal processes.
- **Contractor Procurement:** Contractor selection processes in both projects highlight challenges in Nigeria's public procurement framework. For the transmission project, Cartlark International Limited was awarded the contract amid controversies regarding capacity and track record. Several months passed before actual site activities began, suggesting procurement delay or contract review complications (Nigerian Electricity Hub, 2024). Similarly, the ICC involved multiple contractors (e.g., ZTC Nigeria Ltd, Zhongtian Construction, Stansat Technologies), but inconsistencies in project phases led to delays in internal infrastructure. Coordination between contractors and supervising ministries was inconsistent, highlighting bureaucratic gaps in procurement follow-through and project integration (Awka Times, 2021).
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- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks undermined both projects. In the Agu Awka–Umuchu case, limited on-ground supervision allowed delays to persist for years without formal intervention or penalty enforcement. Reports showed minimal presence of independent monitors or audit reviews (Anambra Ministry of Works, 2023). The ICC project also suffered from inadequate supervision, particularly in later stages. While the main structure was completed, the lack of close monitoring meant that auxiliary components like parking, landscaping, and road infrastructure remained either incomplete or uncoordinated at the time of commissioning (ANSIPPA, 2024). This suggests that monitoring and evaluation systems were either under-resourced or not prioritized.
- **Final Commissioning:** The Agu Awka–Umuchu project has yet to be officially commissioned as of 2025, despite partial mobilization since 2021. The lack of formal commissioning reflects incomplete delivery and a failure to achieve service activation, driven largely by bureaucratic and security-related delays (Abdul, 2024). On the other hand, the ICC was commissioned in March 2022 by Governor Obiano. However, commissioning took place before full project completion. Several facilities, like the hotel, some utilities, and landscaping were still under development at the time (ABS Radio TV, 2022). This reveals a trend in Nigerian public projects where political timelines often override technical readiness. Each of these stages requires formal documentation, approvals from multiple government agencies, and adherence to regulatory frameworks. According to Adebayo (2017), delays are often embedded within these processes due to hierarchical bottlenecks, inter-agency overlaps, and excessive centralization.

The comparison of the Agu Awka–Umuchu 132kV Transmission Line Project and the Anambra International Convention Center reveals systemic inefficiencies in Nigeria's bureaucratic structures for public project delivery. In both cases, bureaucratic processes intended to promote transparency and structure have instead contributed to delays, fragmentation, and wasted public resources.

## 2.2. Effects of Bureaucratic Bottlenecks on Public Project Delivery

The consequences of bureaucratic inefficiencies in public project delivery extend far beyond administrative delays. They manifest in measurable economic losses, operational stagnation, reduced public trust, and missed developmental opportunities. The Agu Awka–Umuchu 132kV Double Circuit Transmission Line Project and the Anambra International Convention Centre (ICC) offer practical illustrations of how bureaucratic dysfunction can derail the performance of critical infrastructure projects in Anambra State. Key effects include:

- **Project delays and idle capital:** Bureaucratic bottlenecks often result in substantial project delays, where approved and disbursed funds remain un-utilized due to stalled execution. In the Agu Awka–Umuchu project, despite over \$785 million allocated for execution, site activity has remained minimal over the years. Repeated administrative reviews, approval backlogs, and inter-agency miscommunication have resulted in idle capital, wasted planning cycles, and missed implementation milestones (Abdul, 2024). The ICC project, although eventually commissioned, also experienced phased delays. While the main hall was completed and inaugurated in 2022, related components like the hospitality wing, parking lots, and utility systems lagged behind due to slow bureaucratic follow-up, delaying full utilization (Awka Times, 2022). These inefficiencies suggest that even when capital is available, procedural delays can effectively paralyze execution.
- **Cost overruns:** Delays caused by bureaucracy frequently lead to cost escalations, as inflation impacts materials, remobilization becomes necessary, and labour costs accumulate. For the Agu Awka–Umuchu transmission project, inflationary adjustments and contractor demobilization due to administrative hold-ups have resulted in financial inefficiency and contract re-evaluations (Ibrahim and Musa, 2021). The inability to adhere to the original project timeline also introduces repeat procurement costs and the need to renegotiate terms with contractors, further increasing financial exposure. In the case of the ICC, the staggered construction approach, caused in part by bureaucratic funding and procurement procedures, also led to increased costs in later project stages. Inflation affected the cost of imported furnishings, HVAC systems, and security installations, leading to budget revisions (ANSIPPA, 2024). These instances reflect a trend where poor bureaucratic timing indirectly triggers fiscal waste.
- **Loss of Public Confidence:** Delayed or poorly executed infrastructure undermines public confidence in the government's capacity to deliver on its promises. The Agu Awka–Umuchu project was seen as a critical

intervention to improve power supply across several communities. However, its stagnation has left communities disillusioned, with residents viewing the project as another failed federal promise (Nwafor, 2021). Similarly, the ICC project was widely publicized as a legacy development to promote tourism and economic engagement. However, reports of incomplete facilities despite an official commissioning drew public criticism and skepticism about political motives behind the inauguration (Awka Times, 2022). These outcomes reveal that bureaucratic inefficiency has reputational costs, damaging the credibility of political institutions and reducing citizen participation in governance processes.

- **Negative economic ripple effects:** Infrastructure projects are catalysts for broader economic growth. When bureaucracy stalls their execution, the multiplier effects expected from such investments are lost. In the Agu Awka-Umuchu project, the delay in delivering a stable high-voltage power line means that local industries continue to rely on unstable or expensive private power alternatives, reducing their competitiveness and discouraging new investments in the region.

The ICC, while partially operational, cannot yet deliver its full economic value due to unfinished components like the on-site hotel, which would support extended conferences, tourism, and job creation. According to ANSIPPA (2024), the absence of these components has limited revenue generation, making the structure more symbolic than economically functional at present. This suggests that bureaucratic inefficiency not only wastes resources but also prevents economic transformation in communities that rely on such projects for empowerment, infrastructure access, and employment.

The impact of bureaucratic bottlenecks on public project delivery is evident in both the Agu Awka-Umuchu Transmission Project and the Anambra International Convention Center. These effects go beyond simple delays, they include cost escalations, wasted capital, public distrust, and lost economic potential. In environments where accountability is weak and bureaucracy is rigid, the government fails to deliver on its social contract. Projects that could have improved lives and transformed communities remain either uncompleted or underutilized. Addressing these outcomes requires administrative reform, real-time performance tracking, inter-agency collaboration, and transparency mechanisms that hold every stakeholder accountable from conception to commissioning.

### 3. Methodology

A descriptive survey design was adopted, focusing on the Agu Awka-Umuchu 132kV Double Circuit Transmission Line Project and the Anambra International Convention Center. Using purposive sampling, 282 questionnaires were distributed to government officials, engineers, project contractors, community representatives and stakeholders involved in the Agu Awka-Umuchu 132kV Double Circuit Transmission Line Project and the Anambra International Convention Center. These stakeholders included government officials, engineers, community representatives, and Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) representatives. Out of the 218 questionnaires distributed, 155 were successfully retrieved and found suitable for analysis, representing a response rate of 70.9%.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Bureaucratic Processes Involved in Public Project Delivery

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on bureaucratic processes involved in public project delivery using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). The responses are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** Aspects of Bureaucratic Processes in Public Project Delivery

S/N	Bureaucratic Process	5	4	3	2	1	$\Sigma F$	Mean	Ranking
1	Project Initiation and Approval	65	55	20	10	5	155	4.31	1st
2	Budget Allocation	50	60	25	15	5	155	4.18	2nd
3	Contractor Procurement	55	50	30	15	5	155	4.20	3rd
4	Monitoring and Evaluation	45	55	30	20	5	155	3.98	5th
5	Final Commissioning	50	55	30	15	5	155	4.13	4th
	<b>Average</b>							4.16	

Table 1 presents the five (5) main aspects of bureaucratic processes in public project delivery. Project Initiation and Approval ranked highest (4.31), indicating that lengthy and multi-layered approval procedures are the most critical bureaucratic step affecting project execution. This aligns with the observation of Adebayo (2017), who noted that delayed approvals contribute significantly to public project setbacks.

Contractor Procurement (4.20) and Budget Allocation (4.18) also ranked high, showing that procurement inefficiencies and delayed fund disbursements are major contributors to project delays. Final Commissioning followed closely (4.13), suggesting that bureaucratic protocols often extend even to the concluding stages of projects, sometimes delaying their utilization.

Monitoring and Evaluation recorded the lowest mean score (3.98), reflecting weak oversight mechanisms, consistent with the findings of Eze (2020), who emphasized the inadequacy of monitoring frameworks in Nigerian public projects. Overall, the finding suggests that respondents strongly agree that bureaucratic processes play a significant role in shaping the pace and success of public project delivery in Anambra State (4.16)

#### 4.2. Effects of Bureaucratic Bottlenecks on Project Delivery

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on the effects of bureaucratic bottlenecks on public project delivery using a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). The responses are presented in Table 2

**Table 2** Effects of Bureaucratic Bottlenecks on Project Delivery

S/N	Effect of Bureaucratic Bottlenecks	5	4	3	2	1	$\Sigma F$	Mean	Ranking
1	Project Delays and Idle Capital	75	55	15	5	5	155	4.50	1st
2	Cost Overruns	70	55	15	10	5	155	4.33	2nd
3	Loss of Public Confidence	65	55	20	10	5	155	4.13	3rd
4	Negative Economic Ripple Effects	60	55	25	10	5	155	4.13	3rd
	Average							4.27	

Table 2 shows that the most significant effect of bureaucratic bottlenecks is Project Delays and Idle Capital, which ranked first (4.50). This indicates that prolonged administrative procedures often lead to stalled projects, leaving allocated funds not utilized. This supports the findings of the Daily Post (2024), which reports that despite the disbursement of large sums for the Agu Awka–Umuchu transmission project, bureaucratic setbacks kept the project largely inactive.

Cost Overruns followed with (4.33), reflecting how delays caused by bureaucracy increase financial costs due to inflation, remobilization, and repeated contract reviews. This aligns with Ibrahim and Musa (2021), who noted that project delays in Nigeria are strongly correlated with higher expenditure.

Both Loss of Public Confidence and Negative Economic Ripple Effects ranked third (4.13 each). This highlights how citizens lose trust in government institutions when projects remain unfinished, while communities also suffer from lost economic opportunities. These findings are in line with Nwafor (2021), who observed that project abandonment reduces public trust, and ANSIPPA (2024), which emphasized that incomplete facilities at the ICC limited economic benefits.

The overall average mean suggests strong agreement that bureaucratic inefficiencies have severe and far-reaching consequences on public project delivery in Anambra State (4.27).

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the bureaucratic processes in public project delivery in Anambra State are dominated by Project Initiation and Approval procedures, followed by Contractor Procurement and Budget Allocation, while Monitoring and Evaluation was ranked lowest. This indicates that delays at the initial stages and in procurement remain the most significant challenges, with limited emphasis on oversight and accountability (Objective 1). The implications of bureaucratic bottlenecks were found to be most severe in terms of Project Delays and Idle Capital, followed by Cost Overruns. These

findings confirm that time wastage and financial escalation are the most visible consequences of bureaucratic inefficiency. Other notable effects include Loss of Public Confidence and Negative Economic Ripple Effects, both of which undermine governance credibility and economic growth (Objective 2).

### *Recommendations*

The study, through interactions with stakeholders, recommends that strategic measures such as e-governance and digital workflow systems, coupled with decentralized decision-making, are critical to enhancing bureaucratic efficiency and project delivery outcomes. Addressing these systemic inefficiencies and implementing proposed technological and administrative reforms are essential to strengthen public project delivery mechanisms and ensure sustainable infrastructure development anywhere in the world.

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## **Compliance with ethical standards**

### *Acknowledgments*

Special acknowledgment to everyone who made this study a success and to the Departments of Building, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State, for the support of data collection.

### *Disclosure of Conflict of Interest*

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

### *Statement of Ethical Approval*

All relevant ethical approval for this study has been obtained and maintained.

### *Statement of informed Consent*

All necessary informed consent were obtained.

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