

Public Administration in Nigeria: Practice, Problems and Solutions

***Sulaimon A. Muse & **Bolantle G. Boyejo**

* Department of Political Science, Michael Otedola College of Primary Education, Noforija – Epe, Lagos State.

** Dept of General Studies, Federal College of Fisheries and Marine Technology, Victoria Island, Lagos State, Nigeria

E-mail: boyebbee@Gmail.Com

Phone: +2348023678566.

ABSTRACT

Public administration all over the world is assumed as the vehicle with which the government drives home her policies and policy processes. It is a veritable means of managing the day-to-day government affairs. The public administration practice of any nation cannot be detached from the culture and way of life of the people. Consequently, public administration is also a reflection of some cultural practices, belief and ideology of a people. The aim of this paper is to examine the, problems and prospects of public administration in Nigeria. The paper will adopt the explorative method and will be majorly quantitative in approach. Data shall be provided from secondary materials; no interview will be conducted. The paper identified corruption, unnecessary political interference, insufficient computer literacy, lack of accountability and transparency as major problems confronting Nigeria administrative system. The following are suggested as some of the solutions to these problems by the paper, these are; attitudinal value re-orientation, exposure to information communication technology (ICT), better welfare package, continuous training and re-training, adequate monitoring of public servants and projects under their control.

Keywords: Public administration, Practice, Problems, Prospects, Public servants.

iSTEAMS Proceedings Reference Format

Sulaimon A. Muse & Bolantle G. Boyejo (2019): Public Administration in Nigeria: Practice, Problems and Solutions. Proceedings of the 19th iSTEAMS Multidisciplinary Conference, The Federal Polytechnic, Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. 7th – 9th August, 2019. Pp 21-30. www.isteam.net/offa2019 - DOI Affix - <https://doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/iSTEAMS-2019/V19N1P4>

1. INTRODUCTION

Public administration refers to the arts and science of managing governmental affairs. It denotes the means, arrangements and processes by which the policies, programmes, purposes and goals of government are fulfilled. Public administration refers to the methods and means of carrying out the activities of government. It implies the strategies, processes, and ways through which the policies and programmes of government are implemented. Public administration encompasses the art of governance at all levels, such as state, national and international (Oyediran, Nwosu, Takaya, Anifowoshe, Badejo, Ogboghodo and Agbaje, 2002). In essence, it is that action part of government through which the goals and purposes of government are realized, its main concern is the implementation of government decisions and political values (Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosunde, 2002). According to Adamolekun (1983), public administration is concerned with the activities that come directly under the government of any society. It is directed towards the understanding of governmental processes and procedures. Public administration can be described as determined actions taken in pursuit of a conscious purpose in the public domain. It is the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources in the public aimed at making those happen which one wants to happen.

Public administration has been described as organizing and maintaining human and fiscal resources to attain public goals. It consists of all those operations having for their purpose the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy. Public administration is a detailed and systematic application of law (Tendero, 2000). In a nutshell, public administration is nothing but the policies, practices, rules and regulation and so on in action, particularly in the public domain.

Public administration is essentially a cooperative group effort in public setting. Secondly, it covers all the three branches of government machinery, the executive, the legislative and the judicial. He further added that since public administration plays a crucial role in formulation of policies therefore it is a part of the political process as well, for instance, bills and acts. Public administration is different from private administration in numerous ways and that it interacts with various private groups and individuals in providing services to the community (Ologbenla, 1998). The aim of this paper is to examine the, problems and prospects of public administration in Nigeria.

2. METHODOLOGY

In view of the explorative method being adopted by this paper, it will majorly be quantitative in approach. Consequently, data shall be provided from secondary materials, no interview will be conducted.

Principles of public administration

Principles are the driving forces in the heart of public administration. In a sound practice of public administration, several things must be put in place for it not to be said to be good, but must be seen to be good, and which have been generally referred to as the practice of a sound public administration. These include, but not limited to: legitimacy, social inclusion, social equity, accountability and transparency, improving budget provisions, empowerment, safety and security, decentralization, checks and balances and responsiveness.

Legitimacy, to Landell-Mills and Serageldin (1991), a sound public administration depends on the extent to which it is perceived and accepted by the general citizenry to be legitimate, committed to improving general public welfare and responsive to the needs of the citizenry, competent in assuring law and order and in delivering public services, able to create an enabling policy environment for productive activities and equitable in its conduct, favoring no special interests or groups. It has adequate management capacity to enhance access to justice person by reason of poverty. The administration must make sure that the people are not deprived of their rights especially when they are facing criminal case, civil case and so on.

According to Lutz and Linder (2004), **social inclusion** is one of the indices of a sound public administration and emphasizes on the inclusiveness of all and sundry. In other words, it emphasizes participatory governance or simply put public participation whereby everyone regardless of wealth, gender, age, race or religion, is given the opportunity to productively and positively participate in public decision making and administration. It utilizes the power of information and communication technology to promote citizens' access and participation in the development process. Also, access to official records, and to documents and papers pertaining to official acts, transactions, or decisions, as well as to government research data that are used as basis for policy development, shall be afforded the citizen, subject to such limitations as may be provided by law. It must also promotes and strengthens partnerships of various types to achieve objectives.

The above description of social inclusion in public administration can simply be said to be absent today in most modern democratic states as inclusiveness is guaranteed merely on paper, particularly through the universal suffrage where the adults have the right to vote and be voted for. In reality, the direct link between the public and administrators at the local level is often absent, particularly where there are no local elections and the central or provincial administration merely appoints representatives. In such cases, local representatives are directly responsible to the higher level of administration and only indirectly to the local population. Representation and inclusiveness in decision-making at the

local level is therefore not guaranteed at the local level through public structures (Lutz and Linder, 2004). However, social equity and inclusion have been recognized globally as preconditions for sustainable global development particularly by the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This premise has also been upheld as one of the targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It has earlier been enshrined in the role of public participation in economic and human development.

According to Olowu (1993), another hallmark of a sound public administration is **accountability and transparency**, public accountability is the foundation of integrity. It is the soul of public administration. It unmask the government of the day of whatever façade it wears. Public Office is a public trust. Public Officers and employees must at all times be accountable to the people, serve them with utmost responsibility, integrity, loyalty and efficiency, act with patriotism and justice and lead modest lives. Accountability is no doubt one of the cornerstones and core elements of sound public administration because, public participation or popular participation is a strong catalyst for accountability. It is so because, it is a means for the participating public or communities to hold public authorities accountable for service delivery. It is then logical to deduce that accountability is an offshoot of public/popular participation in public administration. The two are simply reinforcing.

Accountability is an amorphous concept that is somehow difficult to define in precise terms. However, Adamolekun (2008) described it basically as holding public officials responsible for their actions. Olowu (1993) specifically defined public accountability as the requirement that those who hold public trust should account for the use of that trust to citizens or their representatives. He went further to say that it signifies the superiority of the public will over private interests and tries to ensure that the former is supreme in every activity and conduct of a public official.

It is a common saying in political discourse that weak accountability is a key explanatory factor for poor development performance of any public institution. The performance here may be service delivery which is the primary purpose of any public enterprise. An administration that is accountable will always commit itself to developing and nurturing the capability required to ensure efficient and effective performance of the task of service delivery. Adamolekun (2008) cited the Nigerian experience since 1999 as an illustration of bad administration, where rigged and fraudulent elections is accompanied by weak accountability and those of Brazil and United Kingdom during the same decade as illustration of free and fair elections is accompanied by strong accountability.

Improving budget process is a cardinal principle of a good public administration. This is in view of the fact that budgeting has gone beyond just being an annual ritual. It is a very strategic essence of a sound public administration in view of available scarce resources to the government. It is through the instrumentality of budgeting that priority projects are identified and implemented for development. According to Adamolekun (2008) a good budget must put in a process that effectively involve all stakeholders, such as elected officials, governmental administrators, employees and their representatives, citizen groups, and business leaders and must reflect their needs and priorities which will serve as a positive force in maintaining good public relations and enhancing citizens' and other stakeholders' overall impression about government.

Empowerment, this implies the degree of freedom that the citizens enjoy in calling the government to accountability. It include the existing level of participatory process, access to information, civil freedom, the involvement of the civil society in public participation and access to basic needs of the citizens. When these are present in any public administration, it is a sign of positive development, but if it is absent, such an administration and the public must work together and provide an enabling environment for this to happen.

Safety and Security, one of the major tasks of any government is to provide safety and security to its citizens. Political, economic and social development will only thrive where there is peace, safety and security. Therefore, it should of great concern to any administration the number of safe areas in the community. If the numbers of safe places are on the increase we can conclude that the community is relatively peaceful, but if otherwise, plans have to be put in place to achieve this.

Free access to courts are not denied to any **Decentralization**, a sound public administration must ensure that there are effective and efficient legislations assigning responsibilities to various units in the public sphere for effective basic services in health, agriculture, public works, and social welfare and environment and natural resources. It is must be instrumental in ensuring free, fair and legitimate elections. Hence, various departments are held in-charge to make sure that there will be fair and legitimate elections, such as that the various departments in the government sometimes help to conduct the election to be fair and legitimate. Elections may be insufficient, but they are a necessary and essential element of democracy. By allowing certain government posts to be filled through the choices made by the electorate, elections function as a mechanism for determining the legitimacy of the political leadership, while at the same time guaranteeing the representational requirements of a modern public enterprise. It is because of these characteristics that elections create opportunities, as minimum as they maybe, for altering the status quo and serve as a vehicle for political and social change (United Nations, 2007).

It is based on a **system of checks and balances** between the executive branch and the judiciary and legislative. The principle of the separation of powers has been adopted in Nigeria and many other countries in order to avoid arbitrary rule and abuse of authority. The so called checks and balances among the three arms of government -executive, legislative and the judiciary – are no more than means of control by each and upon each of the departments. It is the duty of the public departments to exercise moderation in their dealings with one another and their treatment of the people, the public. This principle was instituted in the constitution for the purpose of impeding each branch from trespassing and seizing the power vested to others. Moreover, the provisions of the constitution in establishing limitations on the exercise of government authority also provide means of moderation.

Responsiveness, a public administration that worth its salt must be responsive to the yearnings, needs and demands of the public, in whose interest the public department has been set up and in whose interest the trust of governance has been placed on. In other to continuously earn the confidence and trust of the public, it must be responsive to the needs of the public and the teaming masses whose lives and survival depends largely on the affective and adequate response of such department. Many properties and lives that would have been saved, have been lost due to the failure of the public institutions to respond on time to the needs of the citizenries, in cases of fire accident, car accident, armed robbery attacks and so on.

3. PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

Consequently, governance at the local level plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of public utility provision to the vast rural population (Ibok, 2014). Understandably, the way of governance does affect the efficiency of public goods provision, meaning that over the years certain factors have been identified as hampering effective and efficient public administration in Nigeria. These problems are:

Corruption has become the order of the day in the public administration of Nigeria, these include outright falsification of age by the public servant with a view of prolonging their years of service, thus preventing the more energetic, more effective youth from legal job opportunities. In many instances, government officials have been detected having fake educational results, just to ensure that they gain employment at any cost. In some other cases, public servants in Nigeria have been involved in kickbacks, over-invoicing, over-budgeting, embezzlement, misappropriation illegal diversion of funds and so on. The sole aim of doing all these is to short circuit the system, to benefit illegally from the public fund and siphon the public treasury as much as possible (Lawal, 2000).

Associated with the above is the problem of **political interference**. This has detrimental effects on public administration in Nigeria, as public policies in the country are often politicized to serve the selfish interests of the minority at the expense of general interest of the people. Appointments into the public service is often times based on sentiments, parochialism, political patronage and party affiliation, thereby creating room for mediocrity and non-performance. These appointees serve the interest of those that appointed them at the state level instead of the interest of the general public (Ibok, 2014).

Absence of accountability, accountability is a powerful instrument for effective and efficient administration. It prevents abuse of power on the part of the chief executive and his team. Accountability ensures that the public is satisfied that the government is being run efficiently and effectively. It conjures the image that the governed are not being exploited by those in power. Although there are enough constitutional provisions and administrative guidelines to checkmate government officials in both the private and public domain, but, such provisions have been jettisoned in all ramifications as the people no longer have confidence in their leaders because of lack of accountability, especially the common practice of sharing federal allocations meant for the provision of basic needs for the people by the executives and their patrons, a situation which has generated agitation among Nigerians, which are seen as a conduit pipe for stealing public funds by few criminals (Akindele, Afolabi and Ayeni, 2012).

Furthermore, Ibok (2014) believes that it is well known in “political discourse that weak accountability is an explanatory factor for poor developmental performance of most public institutions. The performance here may be service delivery, which is the primary purpose of governance. A government that is accountable will always commit itself to developing and nurturing the capability required to ensure efficient and effective performance of the task of service delivery”. In other words, the lack of accountability by successive governments at both local and national levels affects the level of participation and involvement at the local government in particular, as people automatically become apolitical as a fall out of lack of accountability in the conduct of government officials.

According to Lawal (2000) a number of factors are responsible for the non-involvement of people in their own affairs. These include: loss of interest in the project that will not be of benefit to the leadership of the local government, illiterate and unenlightened citizens, and lack of political will by the leadership to run an open administration due to selfish interest, poverty of socio-political philosophy for change and misplaced priorities. There also exist the mismanaged of local government fund and misplacement of priorities.

Unnecessary bureaucratic bottleneck, otherwise known as red-tappism is another problem militating against the smooth running of public administration in Nigeria. Work schedules that is supposedly to be undertaken in less than three hours do take three to four weeks with files moving from one table to the other. In some, situation, the files are left untreated as the officers/personnel that expected to treat such files are not readily available to treat the files (Adamolekun 2008)

High level of general indiscipline, this is another problem facing public administration in Nigeria, this is because a good number of the personnel in Nigeria public administration do exhibit lateness to work, negligence, and general lack of job commitment, some are involve in commercial activities of buying and selling in their offices during official hours, most are not even on their seats to deal with state issues, some are in the habit of sleeping on duty (Ajayi, 1995).

Lack of computer literacy, with the advent of globalization and information communication technology (ICT), the world have a have seemingly become a global village. However, due to the fact that a good number among public servants in Nigeria are not computer literate, the country has not really being able to tap tremendously into the gains and advantages of information communication technology (ICT). The public servants cannot independently operate a computer system, some cannot perform any operation using their electronic mail-emails and so on (World Bank, 2001).

Obsolete machines, equipment and facilities, in most of the ministries their exist the presence of outdated machines, equipment and facilities, most of the machines that have been done away with the advent of more innovative, effective and efficient ones in the developed world still find their way into the Nigerian public service. Manual typewriters which are no longer in vogue all over the world are still very much available in our courts and justice department. Nigerian secretaries are still in the habit of typing, reading and distributing minutes of meetings which can easily be sent to the email of members and then projected at such meetings (UNDP, 1997).

4. SOLUTIONS TO THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROBLEMS IN NIGERIA

As it has been well identified, dissected and analyzed above, it is crystal clear that there are visible hindrances to the practice of public administration in Nigeria. However, this paper would not be of any academic value if the other side of the divide, which is the positive aspect of public administration in Nigeria is not thoroughly considered, which will constitute the prospect aspect of this work.

Nigeria's public administrative style can still be the envy of the world, if and when the following are given due consideration for implementation by all stakeholders that are involved in the running of the country's public administration practice. These are;

Continuous attitudinal value re-orientation, there is a dare need for attitudinal value reorientation, collective and individual change as Nigerians. The government that holds the public departments in trust for the public must have attitudinal change, likewise the governed. Positive attitudes such as diligent to work, dignity, honesty, cooperative team spirit, patriotism, discipline and so on, must be imbibed by all and sundry. This is because, the cultural practices of the people that are prevalent in the environment cannot actually be divorced from the public administration of such a society. Furthermore, negative attitude and behavior such as stealing, dishonesty, fraudulent acts, greed, tribalism, nepotism, and favoritism must be eschewed particularly by the public officeholders.

Frequent exposure to Information Technology and Communication, there is urgent need for the public servants to be exposed to ICT. This should not be a periodical exercise for a continuous one that will expose the public officers to modern technological architectures and updated knowledge on ICT. This is imperative because the world is now a global village, and any nation that fails to take every opportunities from the ICT does so at its own disadvantages. Furthermore, it will facilitate easy access to information, make the job faster and reduce to the barest minimum the problem of bureaucratic bottlenecks, with official files moving at snail speed from one table to the other. Hence, lesser time is consumed and with less physical stress and energy, while coming out with optimum productivity.

Continuous training and re-training, is also needed if Nigeria public administration system is to get out of the present quagmire. The training should be in form of seminar, workshops, symposium, refresher courses, and oversea courses and so on. It should be a continuous exercise for the public office holders. This will enhance their skills development and facilitate easy transaction between the citizens and the public office holders.

Synergy, there should be strong synergy among the public departments, the civil societies and the public office holders, this is because presently, there exist lack of synergy among the three, often times, their relationship is based on suspicions, hence the public and the civil societies are often shut out in the decision making process by the public officials. This situation has left the public, the civil society and the public officeholders who are supposed to be of mutual benefit to one another to become mutual enemies and competitors as needed vital document that can aid researches being carried out by the public and the civil society are never made available to them. In doing this, the necessary contributions that are supposed to be provided by the civil society is often denied. This has been counterproductive and the country has been the worst for it.

High level of unqualified personnel, particularly in the rural communities and the local government areas also mitigate against the public administration in Nigeria. the reason for this is not far- fetch, it is the unnecessary and continuous interference from the political class and the traditional rulers who are always hell bent on imposing their preferred candidates on the public administration system, even when it is obvious that such people are not qualified to assume such positions. This has to stop if Nigeria is to move forward in the pursuit of her public administration goals and objectives (Wittek, 2014).

Inadequate resources, constitutes another setback in the public administration system in Nigeria, this is against the back drop of the fact that the financial commitments and responsibility of the government are enormous, but the resources with which to implement these commitments are meagre. Hence, important projects like good roads, standardized primary schools, modern markets that are germane in the lives of the vulnerable ordinary citizens are left unattended to even when such projects have been approved for implementation by the central government. Consequently, the government has to do more in the area of budgetary allocation to critical areas in the lives of the ordinary citizens in the country if Nigeria public administration is to be able to withstand the test of time (Goldfrank, 2011).

Failure to monitor projects, projects that have been approved by the government are left un-monitor either implemented or not implemented. In most cases, in the official gazette documents of the government such projects may have been implemented in the public but, in real fact they are not implemented. There is therefore the need to enshrine in public works, project monitoring committee which composition will include the ordinary citizens, the civil society and the city government (Wittek, 2014).

Lack of adequately trained personnel, there is need for continuous training and retraining of the public work force. A situation where workers are left untrained for upward of ten years do not augur well for the growth and development of the skills of such workers. Furthermore, it make the implementation and execution of public policies very difficult to attain. Therefore, various types of training should be organized by experts for the workforce locally and they must be exposed to international conferences and seminar so as to be on the same page with the international best practice and the international environment (Omar, 2013).

Negative mindset, a good number of ordinary citizens do have negative mindset towards the public services, the government and any government programmes even when such programmes are put in place to better the lot of the citizens i.e. the free polio vaccination. This negative mindset has to change for better through continuous orientation and reorientation of the citizens on government programmes and policies. This is as a result of false promises, unfulfilled promises by successive government (Alonge, 2005).

5. CONCLUSION

The paper has attempted a critical evaluation of public administration in Nigeria with a focus on the practice, challenges and solutions. One of the major findings of the paper is that while public administration is supposed to be a tool or conveyor belts towards the planning, execution and monitoring as it is in some other climes, it is under serious challenges and inefficiency in Nigeria. Consequently, the paper identified corruption, unnecessary political interference, insufficient computer literacy, lack of accountability and transparency as major problems confronting Nigeria administrative system. The following are suggested as some of the solutions to these problems by the paper, these are; attitudinal value re-orientation, exposure to information communication technology (ICT), better welfare package, continuous training and re-training, adequate monitoring of public servants and projects under their control.

REFERENCES

1. Adamolekun, L. (2008). *The Governors and the Governed: Towards improved Accountability for achieving Good Development Performance*. Spectrum Books Limited, Ibadan, Nigeria.
2. Adamolekun, L. (1983). *Public administration: A Nigerian and comparative perspective*. Longman Press Nigeria Limited, Ikeja, Lagos.
3. Alonge, F.K. (2005). *Principles and Practice of Governing of Man, Nigeria and World Perspectives*. Ibadan: University Press PLC.
4. Akindele, S.T, Afolabi, Y. A and Ayeni, O. O. (2012). Democratic governance and participatory budgeting: A theoretical discourse of Nigeria experience. *Review of Economics and Finance*. Academic Research Centre of Canada. 2 (6), 85-96.
5. Goldfrank, B. (2011). *Lessons from Latin America's Experience with Participatory Budgeting*. In : Shah,
6. Anwar (ed.): *Public Sector Governance and Accountability Series*. Participatory Budgeting. Washington, D.C: The World Bank, 91-121.
7. Ibok, E. (2014). Local governance and service delivery in Nigeria. *Caribbean Journal of Science and Technology*, 2:530-542.
8. Landell-Mills, P and Serageldin, I. (1991). *Governance and External Factor*. A Paper presented at World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics, April 25-26
9. Lawal, S. (2000). *Local government administration in Nigeria: A practical approach*. In Ajayi, K. (Ed.). *Theory and practice of local government*, University of Ado-Ekiti (UNAD), Ado-Ekiti. p 60.
10. Lutz, G. and Linder, W. (2004). *Traditional Structures in Local Governance for Local Development*. Berne, Switzerland: University of Berne.17
11. Ologbenla, D.K. (1998). *Introduction to Political Science*. Olucity Press, Lagos
12. Olowu, D. (1993) *Organizational and institutional mechanisms for enhancing accountability in Anglophone Africa: A review in Rasheed and Olowu (Eds). Ethics and Accountability in Africa Public Services, AAPAM, pp.221-237.*
13. Omar, M. (2013). *Governing Nigerian Urban Centres*. Public Policy and Administration Research. International Institute of Science, Technology and Education (IISTE). Vol.3, No.1. ISSN 2224- 5731.www.iiste.org.
14. Oyediran O, Nwosu H, Takaya B, Anifowoshe R, Badejo F, Ogboghodo k and Agbaje A (2002) *New approach government*, Longman Nigeria PLC.
15. Oyeneeye, I, Onyenwenu and Olosunde, B (2002). *Round-up Government for Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. A Complete Guide*. Longman Nigeria PLC, Ikeja, Lagos.
16. Tendero, A. (2000). *Theory and Practice of Public Administration in the Philippines*.Fiscal Administration Foundation Inc. (FaFI): Mandaluyong, Metro Manila.



17. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (1997). Reconceptualising Governance. New York: UNDP.
18. United Nations (2007). Public administration and democratic governance: Governments Serving Citizens. 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government. Building Trust in Government 26-29 June 2007, Vienna, Austria.
19. Wittek, J. (2014). Review of a Decade of Participatory Budgeting as a Mechanism for Civil Society Participation- A Case Study for Peru. Essay on Development Policy. NADEL MAS Cycle 2012-2014. Pp 17-20.
20. World Bank (2001) *State and Local Governance in Nigeria: Public Sector and Capacity Building Programme*. Africa Region Final Draft Report.