

The Role of Bureaucracy in Good Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Good governance depends on bureaucracy, because it is the main part of the implementation of the decision of government. On the one hand the ministers make the decision and on the other hand, the bureaucrats implement it. This study therefore examines the role of bureaucracy in good governance in Nigeria. It theorizes bureaucracy from two major perspectives: Weberian and Marxian. The study discovers that the public bureaucracy in Nigeria has been hounded by unstable political environment, economic crisis, social menace, constitutional lapses, unfavorable public policies such as the federal character, bureaucratic bottle neck (red-tapism, rigidity, centralization, and excessive bureaucratic layers), and poor conditions of services among others. All of these factors have impeded the effective performance of the Nigerian bureaucracy in several ways. In effect, this work concludes that, these have slowed down the processes of socio-economic and political development of Nigeria which can only be resolved when bureaucrats become more pragmatic in the understanding of what constitute good governance.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, governance, government, administration, civil service, public service

INTRODUCTION

Governance is the most widely used concepts in contemporary Public Administration yet it has been misunderstood, traditionally governance can be broadly defined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's social and economic resource for development. The concept of governance is closely linked to the workings of the nation-state or its governing capacity. There is no standardized recipe for good governance, it is the result of effective learning by the state to cope with challenges and crisis it comes across during its evolution. The key elements of good governance are respect for the rule of law, special care for the disadvantaged and the weak, tolerance and broad-mindedness which allow accepting and embracing unity in diversity peculiar to a country like Nigeria.

The discourse on good governance in recent years owes its origin in the 1992 World Bank's document entitled Governance and Development. Based on its experience in developing countries, the World Bank came to realize that "good governance" was a concern worthy of attention in considering projects for assistance. Seven specific aspects of "governance" were identified by the Bank and Development committee as: Public sector management; Accountability; Legal and Regulatory

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Framework; Transparency and Information; Human Rights; Participatory Approaches; and Military Expenditure. In essence, Democratization and Human Rights are the key features of good governance (World Bank, 1992). The Civil Bureaucracy is the term used to describe the system of authority relationships that exist between men, offices and methods that government uses to implement its programmes.

The primary function of the civil servant is to advise the political executives or appointees on all aspects of governmental activities to ensure the formulation of policies which is in consonant with the objectives of the government of the day for the realization of good governance. Advice in the context of policy formulation or initiation necessary implies the collection of relevant data, together with carefully considered alternatives, which would enable policy decisions to be made by the political heads. Related to this function is to ensure that policy decisions of government are faithfully implemented. With this role of the civil servant that makes up bureaucrats, it will be seen that bureaucracy (civil service) is about the most significant single institute affecting the lives of the citizenry in a polity. Its influence is pervasive, in today's Nigeria where she is striving to attain good governance.

Despite the important role of bureaucracy to government, in Nigeria, experience has shown that many of government policies are marred by poor implementation strategies such as bureaucratic procedures adopted by the civil service, charged for the implementation. A World Bank (1995) report states that, "Nigeria's public sector lacks transparency and accountability" Adebayo (2001) adds that employees entering the civil service through the spoils system might lack the required technical skills for their positions. These challenges notwithstanding, bureaucracy still poses the most efficient system for organizing people. Therefore, the role of bureaucracy in good governance in Nigeria is the major motive this work is undertaken.

FOUNDATION OF BUREAUCRACY

In the literature on public administration, the terms bureaucracy, civil service and public service are used as a synonym of administration, this study will use them thus. State bureaucracy or the civil service is known to be part and parcel of the executive branch of government. The institution is charged with the responsibility of formulating and implementing policies and programmes of the government. While it is the duty of the political executive to determine and direct the focus of policies, the State bureaucracy is the administrative machinery through which the objectives are actualized. The State bureaucracy could therefore be described as the agency through which the activities of government are realized. There are two main contending views on the study of bureaucracy; namely the Weberian and Marxian. According to the Weberian standpoint, bureaucracy is viewed as a large-scale, complex, hierarchical and specialized Organization designed to attain rational objectives in the most efficient and effective manner. The realization of such rational goals and objectives are maximized through the bureaucratic qualities of formalism and impersonality in the application of rules and regulations in the operation and management of Organizations. The classical bureaucracy

of Webber is seen as a very superior Organization mainly because of the qualities such as hierarchy, division of labour anchored specialization, policy of promotion and recruitment based on merit, impersonality in the conduct of official duties, security of tenure and strict observance of rules and regulations amongst others (Weber, 1964). The Marxian view bureaucracy as an instrument of oppression, exploitation and damnation in the hands of the dominant class who control and manipulate the state and its apparatus in the society, according to Marx, bureaucracy is most specifically conceived as instrument usually employed by the ruling class to accumulate wealth and maintain their domination and control of the state. To a very large extent, the future and interest of bureaucracy are closely interlinked with those of the ruling class and the state. In support of Marxian view on bureaucracy are scholars like Waldo (1982), who analyzes bureaucracy with this remark “few things have a worst reputation than bureaucracy (Adamolekun, 1986). Say the word and every one immediately thinks of red tape, stupid and rigid rules, waste and cold impersonal lazy clerks. This notion connotes the feeling about bureaucracy in many parts of the world often associated with pejorative expression and used to decry the inefficiency, rigidity and lapses that characterize public services.

The other two Marxian characterization of bureaucracy worthy of note are those of alienation and incompetence. It is by the process of alienation that the social forces escape from the control of man, attain an autonomous status and turns against man. In the case of bureaucracy, it is by alienating the populace that bureaucracy becomes an independent and oppressive force, which is felt by the majority of the people as a mysterious and distant entity that regulates their activities. This attitude is reinforced by the bureaucrats’ tendency to create special myths and symbols around it that mystify its action and position. In this process, bureaucracy becomes a close system that jealously guards its secrets, prerogatives and presents to the outside world a united front of silence and hostility (Nnadozie, 2007). The bureaucracy broadly defined, refers to that machinery of government designed to execute the decisions and policies of political office holders.

The political leaders make policies, the public bureaucracy implements it. If bureaucracy lacks the capacity to implement the policies of the political leadership, those policies, however well intentioned will not be executed in an effective manner (Anise, 1984, Okafor, 2005). It is one thing to promise, development and it is quite another to achieve it, viewed from this strand, the role of bureaucracy in the process of economic, social and political development looms large indeed. According to Okafor (2005), the role of bureaucracy is critical to all areas of development process. In Nigeria, public bureaucracy is a very vital element of the development process. Bureaucracy capacity is not sufficient condition for development, but it is most assuredly a necessary condition.

GOOD GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE

Governance deals with institutional processes and the rules of the game for authoritative

decision-making. Governance has three important aspects; namely: the form of political regime; the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources; and the capacity of government to design and formulate policies to discharge government functions, they differ significantly in terms of specificity and normativity. For some, governance implies particular kinds of institutional processes and outcomes. In moving from the definition of governance to good governance, normative views of what 'ought to be' become even more prominent. However, definitions vary in the degree to which they imply particular policies or policy outcomes like stable macroeconomic policy reduction of poverty, or efficient revenue collection or particular institutional forms and processes such as democracy, widespread participation in the development decision-making or strong legislatures/executives. Moreover, given such broad definitions it is often not clear how governance can be distinguished from development.

Beyond concerns about definitions of governance and good governance is a contentious debate about measurement, indicators and inferences. Such debates are important because they are predicted on questions about how characteristics such as the rule of law, transparency and accountability can be operationalised and compared across or within countries at different moments in time in ways that are verifiable. The concept of governance frees itself from administrative conventional formalism. Governance is more of a network of multiple agencies and Organizations than a 'fixed government' agency or department. On the other hand, the broad sense of democracy is equal to good governance. Democratization and human rights are the key features of good governance. Good governance also implies economic, human and institutional development in bringing socio-economic change. Good governance deals also with cause-effect relationships. Although the measurement of good governance is problematic and inexact, it is worth the effort to attempt.

BUREAUCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

In many ways, bureaucrats helps the government to implement the policy. No policy can be put into effect without administration. In fact, they are expected to play a key role both in policy formulation and in policy implementation. The bureaucrats who determine the policy, create rules and regulations which are reasonable under the law. Administration can control the unfavorable policies; they have adjudicatory power by which they can give judgment on disputes created by regulation. Downs (1967) posits that "it is ironic that bureaucracy is primarily a term of scorn. In reality, bureaucrats are among the most important in every part of the world. Not only do they provide employment for a very significant faction of the world's population, but they also make critical decisions that shape the economic, educational, political, social, moral and even religious lives of nearly everyone on the earth. The ability of bureaucrats to outlive their real usefulness is part of the mythology of bureaucracy". Bureaucracy plays an effective role in administration and no modern state including Nigeria can function and progress without it. The role and importance of bureaucracy in modern governance

with particular interest to the governance of Nigeria are enormous. During the colonial administration in Nigeria (1900-1960), the role of bureaucracy was essentially concerned with the maintenance of colonial law and order and collection of taxes and levies. The colonial bureaucracy was created in the first instance, to prosecute imperial policies. At Independence on 1st October 1960, things changed. The post independence era witnessed “the transformation and redefinition of the role of the civil service to that of nation building that is assisting the new government to plan and accelerate the pace of Nigeria’s socio-economic development”. The role of bureaucracy as coordination of federal ministries, advising the political officials, formulating and implementation of government’s policies, gathering and supplying of data for policy makers, ensuring continuity of services and public relations services. Example of this role of bureaucracy in governance can be sited in Nigeria Second Republic which commenced on 1st October 1979, after 13 years of military rule in Nigeria with Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) as the executive President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, during this period the civil service of the federation (who is also the bureaucrats) performed these roles.

- Coordination of the activities of the Federal Ministries and Extra-ministerial departments.
- Advising the Head of Government on the appointment and deployment of Permanent Secretaries.
- Formulation of policies and allocation of office accommodation and staff quarters.
- Provision of staff for newly established and ad hoc bodies
- Management of the careers of officers in the administrative cadre and all Senior Management Staff on GL 14 and above.
- All functions at present performed by the Federal Ministry of Establishment and the Public Service Department of the Cabinet Office.
- Liaison with Heads of State Civil Services.
- Providing direction to the services, maintaining high morale and spirit-de-corps.
- Review the machinery of government, restructuring and re-organization of Federal Ministries and Extra-Ministerial Departments.
- Promotion of good relationships between Ministries and Civil Servants.
- Relations with the following special bodies (a) National Science and Technology Development Agency (NASTDA), (b) Federal Civil Service Commission.

All the roles highlighted above are so crucial to the smooth running of any administration to the extent that one can be tempted to conclude that bureaucracy is indispensable, thus can make or mar any administration. From the foregoing also, it can be deduced that bureaucracy opens the communication link between the ruling government and other members of the society. This is to say that it plays the role of the intermediary between the government and other members of the system. The public bureaucracy is entrusted with the public property, according to Baker (1971) as cited in Okafor and Bode-Okunade (2005) the public has entrusted the ministers with the government of

the country, and the ministers in turn entrust the Civil Service with the property of the public” the public property may be either tangible or non tangible, the tangible property include cash, stationeries, building, equipments vehicles, furniture, stores etc. The civil servants are responsible not only for their safe custody and maintenance but also for their proper and effective utilization. The public bureaucracy has significant role of neutrality to play in the administration of government whether autocratic or democratic. Weber explains that political neutrality “not only meant the absence of political activity or bias on the part of the bureaucrat, but also bureaucracy would respond to the will of government, no matter what is the political affiliation” However, the role of bureaucracy may vary significantly under each of the systems. The success of a government rests as much as the way the public bureaucracy functions. An efficient and neutral public bureaucracy is sine-qua-non to a healthy democratic system, and a healthy democratic system is a good condition for efficient public bureaucracy. Though, to some, bureaucratic institution and democratic institution are two antithetical poles, with different objectives (Blau, 1972).

The bureaucratic accountability is the core of public administration in a democracy. Under a constitutional system of government such as Nigeria, bureaucrats should be subordinate to the constitution as interpreted by the judiciary, and to their hierarchical superiors within the Organization. Democratic government also postulates the subordination of the bureaucrats to the people and their elected representatives. The administrators are accountable to their political chiefs who in turn are answerable to the legislature. These tools are ways to make bureaucrats accountable in a democratic government. For example, constitutions, public meetings, parliamentary question times, public information services, parliamentary public account committees, auditing etc, these instruments can make bureaucrats more accountable for good governance in a democratic state such as Nigeria. A clear transparency should exist in the government policy as well as its implementation; the transparency that exists between the policy makers and the bureaucrats makes a government to become good government. But what is happening in Nigeria context is that, at times neither our politicians nor our bureaucrats are accountable and transparent, therefore there is a huge gap between theory and practice of administration. Very often, neutrality is elusive. To conclude, one could say that by implementing the ideal principles of bureaucracy our systems could be reformed to activate the proper role of bureaucracy for the best interest of good governance.

“Bureaucracy is the most efficient system for organizing people”. “With all its faults, it is still the most efficient structure that has yet been discovered when attempting to coordinate the actions of large groups of people towards a specific goal” (Gortner, 1981). In fact, Blau (1972) argues that antagonism towards bureaucracy usually results from the ruthless efficiency of bureaucracy, not its efficiency. And that “people antagonize bureaucracy because it is “efficient in carrying out its task as defined by the bureaucracy” when people rebel, they are upset by the bureaucracy impersonal objectivity and efficiency, for it tends not to recognize human and individual characteristics.” In contrast,

Argyiades (1996) opines that public bureaucracy in Nigeria has been hounded by unstable political environment, economic crisis, social menace, constitutional lapses, unfavorable public policies such as federal character, bureaucratic bottle neck (red-tapism, rigidity, centralization and excessive bureaucratic layers), poor condition of services etc. all of these factors have in one way or the other impeded the effective performance of the public bureaucracy in the country.

CHALLENGES OF PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY IN NIGERIA

The civil bureaucracy in Nigeria is beset with a number of problems that have hampered its effective role in the governance of the country. The important roles of bureaucracy notwithstanding, experience has shown in Nigeria that many of government laudable policies have been marred by poor implementation strategies (that is to say, bureaucratic procedures) adopted by the civil service, charged for the implementation. The civil service has a way of putting obstacles in the way of policies formulated by the political officials, especially those policies on which they hold divergent opinions. Various tactics are employed to thwart implementation of policies about which they are skeptical, ranging from procrastination, discovering insurmountable obstacles or effecting unworkable solutions, and many others (Greenwood and Wilson, 1990 as cited in Okafor and Bode-Okunade (2005). One major problem confronting the public bureaucracy is high level of corruption associated with the public bureaucracy in Nigeria.

A World Bank (1995) report states that, "Nigeria's public sector lacks transparency and accountability". This is further confirmed by a publication in Transparency International which rated Nigeria as the second most corrupt nations in the world (Nigerian Tribune 3, 2002). In addition a World Bank (1995) has identified the causes of corruption among public officials: "it is no secret that inadequate salaries direct public officials into unprofessional forms of behaviour. When senior jobs produce opportunities to collect bribes, to evade income-inhibiting restrictions on private trade, to win government contract for one's family or association, or to misappropriate public funds, incentives are created to do one's job in ways that are inconsistent with the public interest." Adebayo (2001) adds that as regards personal qualifications, employees entering the public and civil services through the use of spoils system might lack the required technical skills for their positions. Moreover, on-the-job training programmes are weak and ineffective. The fallout of this process is the emphasis on filling slot rather than matching employees' skills with the needs of the position.

Furthermore, a political neutral, professional core of senior administrators is rare in Nigeria. (Ejiofor and Analogu, 1987, Okoh (1988) and Okafor (2005) provided reasons that account for this practice. First, political leaders in Nigeria are under intense pressure to reward their supporters. Second, few political leaders accept the premise of a neutral civil/public service. Third, incoming political leaders, would want to shape the ideological direction (if any) of the public/civil service for their easy control. Moreover, the ethno-religious hostilities in Nigeria and the crisis of confidence from the populace tend to reinforce and compound the problems of Nigerian public

bureaucracies. As identified by Okafor (2005) while quoting Soley (1989) “public bureaucrats, regardless of their dedication to national goals and the norms of professionalism, tend to be viewed as biased and self serving by the masses” (Okafor, 2005). Nnoli (1980) adds “the masses tend to make the basic proposition that bureaucrats are influenced by religious, ethnic and other parochial considerations and act accordingly. As a result of the above thesis, the populace became ignorant of the role of the bureaucracy occasioned by their poor orientation and see government jobs as ‘nobody’s job and which must provide for everyone”. Other problems that are associated with bureaucracy, the world over are its rigidity, resistance to change, lack of innovation, impersonality, and “excessive aloofness, ritualistic attachment to routines and procedures” (Kramer, 1977). This capsule is what some refers to as red-tapism that hinders quick action and effective communication among public bureaucracies. The problem of rigidity and resistance to change by bureaucracy has contributed to the failure of many civil service reforms in Nigeria right from colonial times till date.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The association of bureaucracy cannot be totally isolated from the factors enumerated in the study. Except these problems are addressed, the problem of its survival is dicey. In the final analysis, the vitality of democracy depends on the capacity of government to deliver essential services and to resolve the problems that confront the society and the world. And this, in turn, depends very largely on the competence, integrity and motivation of professionals in government services (the bureaucracy). Finally, bureaucracy, being one of the longest standing institutions in Nigeria, will continue to be relevant to governance, its shortcomings notwithstanding. Based on all that has been discussed, the following recommendations are made:

- i. If the civil service is to attain the desired results of good governance in Nigeria, far reaching reforms are needed, such as, recruitment and promotion of civil servants should be based on merit system as opposed to spoils system. This is because the enthronement of federal character principle of recruitment and other spoils system have sacrificed efficiency and effectiveness in the Nigerian public service, while rules and regulations are sine qua non for systematic and orderly government.
- ii. There is a need for the mental attitudes and believes of the civil servants to be reoriented, so that they can cope with the policies of new government. Furthermore, there is need for strong political elites, who are able to articulate political goals and to establish and maintain a framework of both political and legal institutions.
- iii. Nigeria equally needs a bureaucracy that is characterized by a high degree of deconcentration and decentralization of the decision-making process, a bureaucracy in which there is effective communication and coordination appreciates the thoughts and feelings of the people when formulating and implementing policies.

- iv. Corrupt officials should be sacked, the behaviour of civil service personnel must change, they must be trained and retrained to embrace the spirit of achievement, and prudent use of materials and human resources instead of the waste that have characterized public bureaucracies over the years.
- v. Finally, adequate incentives and motivation must be provided for public bureaucrats, which will not only attract talented people to the service, but also make them to perform effectively and honestly. Beyond this, Nigeria as a society should begin to change its value. In a decent society, money is not everything, but in Nigeria where money is considered to be everything, people can go to any length and use any means to acquire wealth. Our value and priority must change. Integrity, honour and good name must be preferred above ill-gotten wealth that is when we can create a decent new society.

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