

Corruption and Effective Public Service Performance in Nigeria

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Abstract

Effective public service performance is a sine qua non for sustainable development. The problem of effective public service performance in Nigeria is caused by corrupt practices that have engulfed the system. It is the contention of this paper that there is a correlation between corruption and public service performance in Nigeria. Thus, the elite theory was found suitable to explain the prevalence of corruption in the public service system as a framework of analysis. The study equally adopted the secondary method documentary method in its data gathering and analysis, these includes textbooks, newspapers, journals etc. This discourse examined the problems of public service performance in Nigeria. It also, examined the relationship between corruption and public service performance with emphasis on budget implementation among other programmes. The study revealed that corruption unarguably is responsible for the abysmal performance of the programmes. The study observed that top government functionaries over the years are indeed the perpetrators of this official crime. Also that corruption in the public service has retarded productivity, economic growth and development of the country. This study suggested that an attitudinal change and promotional reward system to corrupt free officials should be encouraged among staff and government officials as a way of promoting service oriented public service.

Keywords: *Corruption, Public service, Performance, Efficiency, Effectiveness.*

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Background to the Study

The machinery for implementing government policies is the public service. The effectiveness of public service performance is determined by the socio-political environment under which it operates. As an important instrument for execution of policies and programmes of government, the public service is expected to be competent, and effective devoid of corruption practices. In Nigeria, the economic and political landscape is surrounded by corruption. According to National Planning Commission (2005) “systemic corruption and low levels of transparency and accountability have been major sources of development failures. To perform its functions effectively, public service needs to be divested from all sorts of corrupt acts.

As expected effective public service performance is a pre-requisite for sustainable development. This notion is anchored on the fact that government ability to deliver on her promises for better living is based on the efficiency of its public service performance. Therefore, the inability of the Nigerian public service to perform optimally had over the years constituted a challenge, yet to be resolved. It is a known fact, and Nigerian experience exemplified to this, that corruption is pronounced in the public service, its efficiency as well as ability to effect policy directed toward sustainable development goals like reduction of poverty, remains very low. The behavior of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends is corruption. It is a general term covering misuse of authority as a result of considerations of personal gain, embezzlement, stealing or misappropriation of public funds. Corruption has become highly rampant and permeates every sphere of state and society. Corruption in political and administrative arena hinders equality, efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness, accountability and justice etc.

Corruption in Nigeria exist at an alarming proportion. In government via public service, it thrives in the areas of project costing; ghost workers syndrome, contract awards and subsequent abandonment, payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers; embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds among others. The impact of corruption on the Nigerian society includes abysmal public service performance, inadequate infrastructure, bad governance, pervasive dehumanizing poverty and general underdevelopment. This accounts for the inefficient and unimpressive governance in Nigeria.

Corruption remains endemic as well as extremely prevalent in the public service which affects its effectiveness and performance. There are instances where corruption within the public service manifested over the years: the haphazard or ineffective implementation of federal budgets between 1999-2002 could be gleaned from the people which the senate indicted over “an alleged non-implementation of all appropriation Acts since the dawn of democracy (in May 1999)” (Eminue, 2005). The persistent challenge in the Nigerian health sector is human resources' crisis, which has the tendency to cripple the sector. Inadequate investment, weak administration and corruption remain the cause of poor health workers welfare and the widespread inefficiency in the healthcare workforce (Odusile, 2017) etc.

Statement of the Problem

Corruption has become a major problem in government. Corruption emanates from the top level and so, the higher echelons of government are infested with the disease of corruption. Politics has been converted into pursuit of personal ends. The public office has become an opportunity to “strike gold and enjoy loaves and fishes of office”. The sharp decline in the standards of conduct of public service, and in such circumstances, governance, administration

and management have lost their relevance. For example the non implementation of government policies, financial fraud and crises of confidence within the ministries and its agencies. The alleged fraud and embezzlement and contract scam involving the Minister of Petroleum for State and NNPC Group Managing Director. The minister had lodged a detailed/ documented complaint with the president of the Federal Republic and substantive oil minister, on the junior minister's alleged sidelining and insubordination by the NNPC Group Managing Director, in all matters on high level appointments, promotions, and award of contracts well exceeding 20 billion dollars. Another is the non implementation of budgets by the various Ministries and Agencies of Government. The crisis of confidence in the health sector over allegations of fraud between the Executive Secretary, National Health Insurance Scheme and the Minister of Health which has resulted to incessant strike actions by health workers. These problems are no doubt caused by corruption. Worse is the fact that despite the rapid growth in the size and power of the public service, there has not been an accompanied noticeable improvement in performance to the public or increased labour productivity in the public sector. The pertinent question is: how has corruption affected effective public service performance for sustainable development in Nigeria? This forms the focus of the study.

Objective of the Study

This paper sets out to examine corruption and effective public service performance with the intent to ascertain the adverse effect on the sustainable development goals with special focus on such government economic policies like budget implementation, ailing health sector, NEEDS among others. This paper is further structured as follows; introduction, which highlights the issue of corruption and effective public service performance, the statement of the problem of the study; part two is literature review focusing on conceptual clarification and theoretical framework; section three discusses the problems of corruption in the public service, section four evaluates the impacts of corruption on effective public service performance, while section five is on the findings, conclusion and recommendations

Conceptual Clarification

Corruption

Corruption in its many facets has been viewed in several ways just as there are multiple phases of corrupt practices in the society. The concept of corruption varies. It embraces a broad spectrum of activities ranging from fraud, embezzlement to bribery among others. Corruption is one of the most intractable social ills or pathology ravaging the Nigerian state, the effects and implications of which lack coherent and definitive bounds. The simplest definition of corruption is that it is the misapplication of public resources to private ends. In broader sense, however, corruption can be defined as “an arrangement that involves an exchange between two parties (the demander and the supplier) which has an influence on the allocation of resources either immediately or in future, and the use or abuse of public or collective responsibility for private end.

Igwe (2010:14) had argued that corruption is universally decried and constitutes a phenomenon in itself and invariably the outcome of a conglomeration of discrete failure such as failure of institutional control over bureaucrats or a failure of the legal system that checkmates the behaviour of those who perpetrate the crime; corruption is a system of deep institutional weakness that leads to inefficient economic policies. It reduces economic growth, like long term foreign and domestic investments. Preye and Weleayan (2011:47) view corruption as the pervasion of integrity of state affairs through bribery, favour or moral

depravity. Corruption involves the injection of additional but improper transactions aimed at changing the moral course of events and altering judgments and positions of trust. It consists in the doer's and receiver's use of informal, extra legal or illegal act to facilitate matters.

This definition of corruption maybe inadequate in the explanation of the concept. Hence the focus of corruption must be aligned carefully towards the political elite class, civilian and the military alike. Thus, according to Yagboyaju (2005:78) the concept of what has come to be known as corruption is

Any act perpetrated by political class, civilian or military or a highly placed public official aimed at changing the moral or lawful course of events, especially when the perpetrator uses such a position of authority for the purpose of personal or group interest (such as acquiring wealth, status or power) at the expense of public interest.

Dike (2003) cited in Erunke (2014:32) corroborated the point of view of Yagboyaju (2005:78) when he situated corruption at the highest level of political authority in Nigeria. Thus, corruption occurs when the politicians and other important state decision –makers whose duties are to formulate and implement policies on behalf of the electorate are themselves corrupt. In this sense, corruption could be said to have taken place when public policy formulation and legislation are tailored to benefit political office holders to the abject neglect of the mass of the people. For the purpose of this study we are interested in Bureaucratic corruption. This mostly is prevalent in the public service and every other public institution.

Ayua (2001:11) contended that bureaucratic corruption has been the main target of most definitions of corruption. It arises when for example, underhanded deals are made between public authorities and elements in the private sector in order to get special favours. This include for instance, the design or selection of uneconomical projects because of opportunities for financial kickbacks, procurement fraud, including payments, collusion, misrepresentation, the delivery of substandard goods and services, illicit payments and or receipt of spent money...Bureaucratic corruption also includes extortion, misappropriation of funds, nepotism and favouritism, personal use of official and government secrets and improper exercising of power.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Efficiency and Effectiveness are common and inter-related concepts associated with organizational endeavours (Okpo and Onwubiko, 2006:14). Ikelegbe (1994:5) asserts that efficiency simply describes input/output relations, effectiveness refers to the degree to which an organization can or is able to achieve high output with minimum input. Efficiency is the extent to which the resources of a programme or organization are used in a manner designed to maximize cost effectiveness. It is a measure of how well a programme was conducted regardless of the outcome it produces.

In public agencies and programmes, Okpo and Onwubiko (2006:14) aver that efficiency is often times regarded as a “non – measurable proposition” for the fact that in government and public service, the emphasis is on goals attainment or realization of policy, programmes or organizational goals and objectives. Generally, we can say that an organization is effective depending on whether stated intentions, planned or projected output and objectives are realized or not.

Public Service

Public service is loosely defined by Caiden (1971) cited in Peter (2016:17) to mean the collectivity of specialized government institutions or agencies established by law, financed by public money and staffed by professionals and career bureaucrats for the purpose of executing public policies. For Ezeani (2006:8) public service is much broader than the term civil service as the former (Public service) refers to the totality of services that are organized under public (that is government) authority. Simply put, public service is a body or department in the executive arm of government with the responsibility to assisting in the planning and implementation of government policies. It comprises ministries, agencies, parastatal, corporation and such like. Since it is institution established to deliver essential services to the people, it is non-profit-oriented. According to Lewis and Cartron (1996) cited in Peter (2016:18) public service is a trust. Therefore, the citizens expect public servants to serve public interest with fairness and to manage public resources properly on a daily basis.

Performance

Performance is a consequence of an action. In the context of public service, according to Prasetya and Kato (2011:15), performance is the attained result of skilled workers in some specific situations. This implies that, it is an act, process or art of performing an official duty. It can also be described as how well or badly a person does a particular job or activity.

Performance is an action that involves a lot of efforts aimed at achieving a purpose. That is the activities of a public servant most especially in terms of his/her efficiency in producing certain quantity of goods and services. This scenario or act has the potential of easily diminishing, truncating as well as stifling the sustainable development goals of the nation.

Theoretical Framework

Elite Theory

There is a growing body of literature on the fact that elite group has been a veritable tool for perpetration of corruption especially at the level of governance. In line with the above, this paper adopts Elite theory as a framework for analysis. Proponents of elite theory includes Vilfredo Pareto (1923-1948), Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Robert to Michels, (1876-1936), Jose Ortega (1855-1983) among others. They contend that public policy is the values and preferences of the governing elite. The theory explains that every society is ruled by a minority that possesses the qualities necessary for its accession to full social and political power.

In other words, all societies are made up of two classes of people – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class is very few and performs all political functions including making and implementation of policies, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages derivable from it. Whereas, the second class, the masses are directed and controlled by the first class. Elite do not only control and dominate the commanding height of the economy, they equally exercise legal monopoly over means of coercion, dominate the structures and institutions of politics and also shape the ideological and philosophical direction of the society (Ihonbere 2009:13; Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2010:5).

The development of governing elite in Nigeria has much to do with the colonial background of the country. After independence, Nigerian elites which took over power from the erstwhile colonial administrations imbibed the culture of self-serving ethos that is, exploitation of the people and the country for selfish purposes (Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2010:5). The Nigerian elite

by their activities have continued to be a cog in the wheel of economic growth and development. This is because they see governance as a means to an end, they are self centered with tendency for unbridled materialism. Consequently, the elite group is not different from its colonial progenitor, an instrument of exploitation and a tool for primitive accumulation. Public policy which includes implementation of economic policies is characterized by sharp corrupt practices by the governing elites and top public servants which has hindered economic growth and development.

Problems of Effective Public Service Performance in Nigeria

According to Dahida and Akangbe (2013:10), Public service management in developing economies like Nigeria since the end of colonial rule and onwards, under which persons tainted with corrupt genes ascended into the realm of leadership, public service has not been any better. The continued existence of structurally weak unethical control mechanism has helped to create a variety of loopholes that have tended to facilitate and sustain corrupt practices. In this situation or context, unethical practices in the form of corruption in developing economies'(Nigeria) public service manifests itself in any of the following according to Peter (2016:8) bribery involving the promise, offering or giving of a benefit that improperly affects the actions and decisions of public servants whose benefit accrue to the public servant, another person or an entity; embezzlement involving theft of resources by control of such resources, for example, hospital staff that steal medicines and in turn sell these to private pharmacists, abuse of power involving a public servant using his/her vested authority to improperly benefit another public servant, person or entity (or the vested authority to improperly discriminate against another public servant, person or entity), for example, during a tender process but before actual selection of a successful contractor the head of department expresses his/her wish to see the contract awarded to a specific person; fraud involving actions or behaviours by a public servant, other person or entity that fool others into providing a benefit that would not normally accrue to the public servant, other persons or entity, for example, a public servant that registers a fictitious employee in order to collect the salary of that fictitious employee.

Furthermore, problems that derail public service performance can be viewed in, for instance; extortion involving coercing a person or entity to provide a benefit to a public servant, another person or entity in exchange for acting (or failing to act) in a particular manner, for example, a public health official threatens to close a restaurant on the basis of fabricated health transgression unless the owner provides the public health official with regular meals. Nepotism involving a public servant ensuring that family members are appointed to public services or that family members receive contract from state resources, for example, a head of department appoints his/her sister's child to a position even when more suitable candidates have applied for the position. Favouritism involving the provision of services or resources according to personal affiliations like ethnic, religious, party of a public servant, for example, a regional manager in a particular region ensures that only persons from the same tribe are successful in tenders for the supply of foods into the manager's geographic area of responsibility.

Again discussions on Nigeria's development has also identified corruption at various dimensions and magnitudes as the foundation of the problem of the public service. But in as much as it was accepted, corrupt practices are much deeper than just what we see it as; people being corrupt to get rich or being corrupt to sail beyond the scope of underdevelopment and imperial induced poverty in Nigeria. The public service in a nutshell cannot realize the goal of

government which are intended for better living conditions for the citizens due to numerous manifestation of corrupt practices. The acts impede the objectives for which governments in developing economies are meant to perform.

An Evaluation of Corruption on Effective Public Service Performance in Nigeria 1999 – 2017

In this section of the paper, we try to x-ray some policies of government that have through corruption like mismanagement by way of misapplication, injudicious utilization or diversion of funds to extraneous uses and outright embezzlement have had deleterious impact on the public services performance in Nigeria. The implementation of budgets from 1999-2002 shows that they were not regarded as an article of faith: that the trend shows a virtual slide into financial anarchy, inability to develop its human resources and infrastructure makes it impossible to plan its investment—thereby rendering it impossible for the expected inflow of foreign investment into the country (the report of senate committee on alleged non-implementation of all Appropriation Acts, 2002).

According to the committee (headed by Senator Idris Abubakar), 'non-implementation of budget' erodes the confidence of the international community in (Nigeria's) ability to positively reform (her) procedures on the economy in a post –military era." It further revealed that "capital provisions in all the budgets from 1999-2002 have always been recorded in recurrent budget." Asserting that "the most guilty parties have been the presidency and the public service, the report revealed, "operation of funds outside the consolidated Revenue fund has continued in clear violation of constitutional Revenue provisions which negatively affects the appropriation of the budgetary process. For instance, although the 2002 Budget made provision for an expenditure profile of N6.2billion, actual expenditure was N31 billion. That "illegal expenditure of public fund affecting budgetary performance that existed within the period" could be glanced from "the grant of N10million to the government of Niger republic without appropriation and legislative approval" (The Guardian, 2002:14).

Another instance of this is the National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) which was launched on May 29, 2004. The National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) reforms specifically address the international targets, which were set in 1991 to improve economic well-being, social and human development and ensure environmental sustainability and regeneration. The National Planning Commission in 2004, stated that the National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) thrust corresponds with the United Nation's Millennium Declaration, that ushered the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) now Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Realization of the eight goals of the MDGs (develop a global partnership for development) cannot be feasible when a country stands in isolation without development support from bigger economics of the world as a result of corruption on the part of public service functionaries or officials. Ubani et al (2013:32) assert that the Obasanjo administration through the National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) reforms boasted that one of the government's goals was to fight corruption to a standstill just like the present administration has started, but there were traces of official corruption among the elected public officers in collaboration with the public service personnel's, despite the efforts of the anti corruption agencies.

Also, the National Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) was aimed at promoting private enterprise through privatization and deregulation of the economy, but official scams, non-performance by the firms that got the nod had characterized the “so called privatization” by the Bureau for Public Enterprise (BPE). For instance, the TRANSCORP that acquired NITEL and MTEL from government have failed to deliver in the sector.

In line with the numerous economic policies that have failed the nation is the Transformation agenda programme. Usigbe (2011) cited in Ubani et al (2013:33) has identified the key policies which the agenda was to pursue to include:

- i. Ensuring greater harmony between fiscal and monetary policy.
- ii. Pursuit of sound macroeconomic policies, including fiscal prudence supported by appropriate monetary policy to contain inflation at single digit.
- iii. The budget process shall be reviewed to provide greater clarity of roles between the executive and legislature to ensure that the appropriate bill is enacted into law.
- iv. The existing revenue allocation formula shall be reviewed to achieve a more balanced fiscal federalism.
- v. Institutionalizing the culture of development planning at all level of government and ensuring that the annual capital budget allocation takes a cue from medium and long term development plans.

However, the programme was faced with threats and challenges of corruption by the elected representatives of the people which hampered the actualization of this lofty economic policy. The policy was affected by the lack of synergy between political office holders and public service officials; bankrupt leadership, embezzlement of funds, award of contracts to friends and relations for self ends. The recent developments in the health sector of the economy is a case of corruption in the public service affecting stability and growth in the nation's health institutions. Sadly, there has been accusations of fraud between the health minister and the executive secretary of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) (Odusile, 2017:6).

Accordingly, a persistent challenge in the Nigerian health sector is human resources crisis which has the tendency to cripple the sector. Inadequate investment, weak administration and corruption remain the cause of poor health workers' welfare and widespread inefficiency in the healthcare workforce. No doubt the crisis of confidence within the health workforce is a big constraint to health system development and sustenance in the country (Odusile, 2017:6).

The Findings of the Study

As the foregoing analysis has clearly demonstrated, the study revealed the following findings:

1. That corruption is indeed a frightening problem in Nigeria. It pervades every segment of the national life. It undermines the goals of development.
2. That corruption accounts for the abysmal performance of most government policies and subsequent collapse of such programmes as have been seen in the discussions in this study.
3. That public funds are often arbitrarily handled, used for private purposes by top government functionaries over time. This act of criminality accounts for poor and non-implementation of key government policies and projects like non budget implementation etc.

4. That socio-economic conditions have gone bad leading to instability in government and retard action of productivity, economic growth and sustainable development of the country.

These findings justified the views of Yagboyaju (2005:78) that “any act perpetrated by political class, civilian or military or a highly placed public official aimed at changing the moral or lawful course of events, especially when the perpetrator uses such a position of authority for the purpose of personal or group interest (such as acquiring wealth, status or power) at the expense of public interest. Also, the view of Dike (2003) cited in Erunke (2014:32) when he situated corruption at the highest level of political authority in Nigeria. Thus, corruption occurs when the politicians and other important state decision makers whose duties are to formulate and implement policies on behalf of the electorate are themselves corrupt. In this sense, corruption could be said to have taken place when public policy formulation and legislation are tailored to benefit political office holders to the abject neglect of the masses.

Conclusion

This study x-rays corruption and effective public service performance. It observed that corruption will thrive in the face of poverty, adversity and hardship. It is therefore incumbent on the government to create an enabling environment for improvement in social welfare system through the payment mechanism for appropriate wages for the public servants and general improvement in the conditions of the people. The introduction of the due process unit in the presidency is to ensure that extant regulations are complied within the award and execution of government contracts. The public service must ensure the survival of this system. Corruption is not about officials requesting remuneration for the work they already collect a salary to do. It is really about frustrating the regulatory principles of economic policies or contractual obligations so that they would derive benefits in the long-run to the detriment of the economy. The result of this is that citizens are now alienated from the public office holders? This has affected the economic policies and effective public service performance of the country.

Recommendations

Following the discoveries and findings highlighted in this discourse, the study recommended as follows, that:

- i. There should be an attitudinal change and promotional reward system to corrupt free officials to encourage staff in the public service and government officials as a way of promoting service-oriented public service in Nigeria.
- ii. Public service rules and regulations should be backed by political will and the preparedness of government to impose total adherence to rules and regulations to promote good public service performance.
- iii. There should be visionary leadership to ensure effectiveness, and integrity, all of which are vital to actualize good public service system devoid of corruption.
- iv. Adequate punishment should be meted out to any public service official involved in any act of corruption, no matter how highly placed.

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