

# Tragedy of Public Administration in Nigeria: Implications for National Development

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## Abstract

Public administration exists to play a pivotal role in national development through strategic formulation of development induced policies. Unfortunately, public administration in Nigeria has for a long time experienced some challenges in implementing public policies that facilitates national development and this has triggered nefarious problems some of which include squalor, widespread unemployment, despotic leadership, poor human resource management, pervasive security crisis, inflation, and a volatile political environment. Sadly, the consequence of this ugly situation is that it has facilitated the reign of bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency in local governance. In the light of this, the paper conceptualized public administration and national development stating the theory adopted. Qualitative technique was employed and the findings from this paper revealed that one of the causes of the failure in public administration is that there is no history of institution building and consolidation in public administration in Nigeria.

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### **Background to the Study**

Public Administration in its various dimensions has emerged as the overriding contemporary issue. It occupies the attention of the United Nations in the arrangement of the Sustainable Development Goals. New ways of supporting the developing countries are evolving into the plans and schedules of the specialized agencies of the UN that implement development programmes in developing countries (Fajimbola, 2020). Therefore, public administration remains an inevitable part of any political system in order for it to function effectively. Fundamentally, public administration exists to play a pivotal role in national development through strategic formulation of development induced policies (Thovoethin and Adio, 2011). On the basis of this, there is hardly any nation that does not require administration. From its elementary form to its multi-dimensional nature, administration is indispensable to all human organizations. In fact, Public administration is so fundamental that for any society to achieve a successful policy programme that brings about national development, public administration remains a necessity (Akhakpe, 2006). Thus, Public Administration is the foundation on which democracy that leads to national development thrives and advances (Abegunde and Ogunlade, 2020). In several countries, governments have been toppled or violently overthrown on account of poor administration and so the public administration crisis has been responsible for the change of regimes or the defeat of many powerful political parties in various countries of the world (Olojede and Fajonyomi, 2001).

Regrettably, public administration in Nigeria have for a long time experienced some challenges in implementing public policies that facilitates national development (Inakefe, Bassey and Innah, 2021). Essentially, public administration in Nigeria is bedevilled with nefarious problems some of which include -squalor, widespread unemployment and underemployment, despotic leadership, poor human resource management, educational collapse, pervasive security crisis, infrastructural underdevelopment, malnutrition, inflation, inefficiency in local governance, nationwide impunity and a volatile political environment. However, this dangerous indicator exists side by side Nigeria's visible and vast national wealth and potentials (Isaac, 2018).

Unfortunately, bureaucratic corruption which has by the way become part and parcel of the Nigerian culture, public sector and by extension, the larger socio-political environment has sabotaged every opportunity and chance for Nigeria to ever attain national development. Nevertheless, attempts by various successive administrations have been made in the past to identify the tragedies of public administration in Nigeria that thwarts its potentials in achieving national development. Nonetheless, it is disturbing that such corrective measures have not only fallen below administrative and societal expectations, but it has also not yielded any effective or sustainable outcome due to the lack of political will to pursue administrative reforms in a brave, holistic and consistent manner. Therefore, the lack of sustained implementation and campaign against corruption in the public sector is at the bottom of the numerous failed attempts at solving the national development quagmire in its larger context (Akhakpe, 2001).

Thus, in order to address the subject matter, this paper is organised into some sections. The first examined conceptual and theoretical issues, the second addressed the methodology employed, the third analyzed the tragedy of public administration in Nigeria and its implications for national development, the fourth discussed the recommendations aimed at solving the challenges identified and then the conclusion. Documentary method was adopted for this study. Hence, data was sourced from local, national and international academic publications. These consisted of relevant textbooks and academic journals. The data gathered from the aforementioned method was analyzed using qualitative descriptive technique.

### **Conceptual Literature**

Public Administration is a specialized academic field which essentially deals with the machinery and procedures of governmental activities. It is therefore the study of the management of public agencies that carry out public policies in order to fulfill the state purposes in the public interest (Afegbua, 2021). In other words, it is concerned with the means of achieving the prescribed ends of political institutions. Hence, Public Administration can be seen as the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish the common goals of government and so such common goals include safeguarding the frontiers, maintenance of law and order, fire prevention, communication, public health, education etc (Fatile, Majekodunmi, Oni and Adejuwon, 2013). In similar vein, Public Administration is the fulfillment or enforcement of public policy as declared by the competent authorities. It deals with the problems and powers, the organization and techniques of management involved in carrying out the laws and policies formulated by the policy making agencies of the government (Gberevbie, 2017).

National development is a process of growth in the direction of modernity and particularly in the direction of nation building and socio-economic progress. This reveals that national development is the realization of the potential of human personality which can be best achieved through the reduction of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Similarly, national development can also be seen as self-reliance and increased cultural independence which indicates the culmination of life sustenance, self-esteem and freedom of choice. Hence, national development is a multi-dimensional process involving changes in structures, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty (Sapru, 2013).

### **Reasons for Failure in Public Administration in Nigeria**

According to (Aluko, 2006, Ogunwa, 2022, Ishaya, 2018, Falola, 2023, Eneanya, 2015) There are several factors that are responsible for the tragedies of public administration in Nigeria. Some of which will be addressed below.

- 1. Inconsistent Institutional Framework and Policy Failures:** In every successive administration there are no consistent development policies laid down in Nigeria. No consensus has been reached as to which policy approach to adopt, whether it should be rural development or urban development, development from below or

development from above. Essentially, many of Nigeria's development plans have failed either as a result of poor planning or poor executive capabilities. In most cases the plans have been too ambitious and unachievable. For example, the first National Development Plan that expected more than 50% of revenue to be generated externally through aids ended up in wasteful expenditure on white elephant projects with little or nothing to show for it in the real productive sector. Unfortunately, this problem of mismanagement conjoined with inconsistency has led to the total destruction of the civil service and has continued to lead to the tragedies of public administration.

2. **Crisis in the Approach to Public Service Delivery:** There is no history of institution building and consolidation in public administration in Nigeria. Each administration coming into power relishes the dismantling of old structures and establishing new ones in order to claim the glory of embarking on new policy programmes instead of correcting past mistakes and errors, the public servants start all over again and end up committing the same blunders. This accounts for why over the years there have been various development institutions such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution (GR), Directorate of Food Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Agricultural Development Project (ADP) and nothing substantial to show for it. Hence, resulting in one of the reasons for the failure of public administration in Nigeria
3. **Absence of Strong Public Opinion against Corruption:** In a society where the public outcry over corruption in public institutions is weak, the government officials often take advantage of the apathy of the people to enrich themselves illegally and even when the media brings issues of corruption to the open, members of the public lack the requisite knowledge, intellectual skills, resources and drive to sustainably hold public servants accountable for their abuse of power
4. **Cultural Factors:** Pressures on public officials also contribute to prebendalism which leads to the tragedies of public administration in Nigeria. These pressures come from friends and kinsmen seeking favour from relations who are public servants and serve as either as bureaucrats or policy makers. They often assume that the occupation of these positions by their kinsmen or family friend is another opportunity to engage in the primitive accumulation of wealth. Therefore, officials in government bureaucracy and civil servants appear to encourage nepotism and favouritism during recruitment, placement and promotional exercises thus enabling mediocrity and the selfish bastardization of public administration in Nigeria. Thus, the failure of public administration stems from Nigeria's socio-cultural values. In other words, the practice of clientelism and godfatherism play a significant role in destabilizing public administration. These menace involves individuals in positions of power engaging in a system of exchanging favours between friends and families (irrespective of the level of incompetence or lack of expertise) for political support while influential personalities exert their influence to sway political decisions and so the ostracism phenomenon further sabotages any hope of public administration in Nigeria.
5. **Neopatrimonialism:** The biggest cause of crisis in public administration in

Nigeria is from the politicians. There is no inefficiency in the bureaucracy without political connections. The politicians flagrantly disregard the code of conduct for civil servants in the pursuit of power. They interfere with cases of ethical misconduct before the courts and influence the administrators to do their bidding. Hence, leading to the collapse of public institutions and consequently the failure of public administration in Nigeria

6. **The Prolonged stay of the military in government:** At the beginning of military rule in 1966, the leaders at the federal and state level were rational decision makers. Each succeeding regime however seemed to have built on and enlarged the worst characteristics of its predecessors. However, public servants at the local government level feared the military and shunned all forms of unethical conducts that destroyed public administration. Nevertheless, with the introduction of military appointed sole-administrators from the civil service, impunity became institutionalized at the very top to the grassroot levels of governance and public service. Thus, when the military government found itself in office for more than a year, the military rulers believed they were firmly entrenched in the saddle. They therefore began to spurn all legal and administrative rules and procedures and became a law unto themselves. This ugly situation led to the unfortunate failure of public administration in Nigeria.
7. **Absence of Credible Party Ideologies:** Another cause of challenge for public administration in Nigeria is the lack of party ideology in the Nigerian political system which is often responsible for the poor performance in governance, and which leads to the failure of public administration in Nigeria. This happens because the political parties often fail to present an articulate and coherent manifesto or programme. Thus, the choices of the electorates are usually limited wherein the voters are disempowered from choosing genuine and credible candidates. In addition to that, some nefarious politicians also buy the conscience of some party functionaries, administrators and bureaucrats so much that they do not have the moral and legal justification to challenge the politicians to court or demand accountability in governance. Again, some of the elites who consist of the politicians, technocrats and administrators often connive and collaborate to ensure the continuous menace of ethnicity, political patronage, rent seeking, corruption and political violence in order to create political apathy and increase the level of ignorance and fear so that the people will not have the capacity to demand for political justice that brings about effective public administration in Nigeria. Therefore, because of the absence of effective institutions or mechanisms to enforce good governance in context and character, some politicians in cahoot with some corrupt administrators and bureaucrats often engage in political and administrative impunity which then leads to the deterioration of public administration in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper employed the Behavioural theory to explain and underpin the tragedy of public administration and its implications on national development in order to facilitate a

deeper and holistic understanding of the issues involved. Thus, the behavioural theory was derived from the writings of John Watson, an American Psychologist in 1913 and the central premise of this theory is that the collective human behaviour or actions, decisions and interactions in administrative situations is what determines the success or failure of any administrative system. Thus, the basis of this theory focuses on the internal dynamics of civil servants within the public sector and the impact of their actions on efficiency in public service delivery which ultimately translates to national development and by extension good governance. Essentially, this theory pays attention to the individuals within the public sector and the basic argument is that human actions constitute or determine the centrepiece advancement or destruction of every administrative system (Gberevbie, 2017). Hence, this theory argues that there is no administrative system without a behavioural pattern inherent in them that determines how developed or underdeveloped such a society would be and so the efficiency, inefficiency, dispositions, orientation, norms, beliefs, expectations, values that run the psyche of the public servants and administrators will determine the success or ineptitude of the governance structure. In other words, a primordial orientation of an administrator will facilitate the ineffectiveness and inefficiency in service delivery (Babayo, Mohammed and Bakri, 2017).

This theory therefore is relevant to this study because it revealed the human factors responsible for the tragedies of public administration in Nigeria which often manifest in the form of lack of government transparency, contempt and negligence in public service delivery, ethnic bigotry, high handedness in public service delivery, administrative impunity, weak accounting practices, large unsupervised public investments, sale of state-owned properties and poorly paid government officials. Which unfortunately results in bureaucratic corruption, public policy failures and poverty. In the light of this, it revealed how the actions of public servants in the administrative affairs of a nation can either lead to its development or state failure.

### **The Tragedy of Public Administration in Nigeria: Implications for National Development**

The fact that public administration plays an important part in determining the national development or underdevelopment of any nation is incontestable (Fajonyomi, 2007). Thus, according to Frederick (2014; Eneanya, 2015 and Joda, 2011) The underdeveloped state of Nigeria is to a large extent the consequences of the failure of public administration in Nigeria. Essentially, the sum total of the menace on a state is that the economy crumbles leading to untold hardship for the masses of the state. This is because finances meant for investment in the various sectors of the economy are drained into the private pockets of the ruling oligarchy, the trend continues to the lowest ebb in the state bureaucracy. Where attempts are made to invest, such investments become drainage pipes as contracts for such capital-intensive investments are over inflated, paid upfront and finally abandoned. Sadly, such developmental projects become subsequent avenues by successive administration to further swindle state wealth in the guise of performing magic wands where past predecessors failed.

Construction of sub-standard infrastructure is another tragedy of public Administration and a negative implication for national development. Roads, bridges, electrification projects, schools, water, projects etc that are poorly constructed do not only form the basis for draining huge amounts of state wealth, they also constitute death traps and sometimes maim people when they collapse. Even Where such projects exist, they fast deteriorate become unusable thereby defeating the purpose for which they were established and ultimately sinking the people deeper into penury, unemployment, economic vulnerability and infrastructural underdevelopment.

Thirdly, another tragedy of public administration and its negative implication for national development is that the failure of public administration in Nigeria enthrones leaders without leadership pedigree especially in nascent democracies and authoritarian regimes such as found in the Less Developed Countries (LDCs). In a bid to obtain legitimacy, such leaders resort to vote buying and the use of thugs and other unlawful means to sustain themselves on the throne since they were imposed on the masses against their wish. Thus, the combined effect of both the political and economic warfare against the people is that it is bound to produce glaring consequences on the social life of the masses. Social vices like ethnic violence, politically sponsored vandalization and arson, political thuggery, economically motivated kidnapping, sexual violence, marginalization, the formation of amorphous groups etc ensue. These groups take advantage of the foisted poverty resulting from the lacuna or gaps in poor administration.

Another tragedy of public administration and its negative consequences for national development is the decrease in foreign investments. When there is a constant policy failure in any country, foreign investment is driven away. Thus, poor administration makes the economy porous, underdeveloped and vulnerable to high risks, uncertainties and cynicism at the international community. Investors do not want to invest in an environment where they cannot forecast the future of their business with utmost certainty and assurance and so the tragedy of public administration and the negative effect on national development is that it creates an economically volatile and suspicious business climate that discourages investors who want to invest billions of dollars into the Nigerian economy.

Furthermore, in the world of business, no country is absolutely autonomous. The more there is consistency in policy formulation and implementation in the country to attract investors, the more Nigeria develops. Hence, it is apparent that unemployment reduces each time new companies spring up in Nigeria. Foreign investments like MTN, chevron, volkswagen, Dunlop company to mention a few employ thousands of Nigerians. These companies pay taxes to the Nigerian government and consume many services that raise revenue to Nigeria. They also sleep in domestic hotels, patronize local food industries, pay and make use of domestic transport services, transact in the local banks, advertise on Nigerian media services and equally partner with home institutions and groups in the provision of certain social services. Thus, this automatically accelerates socio-economic development that brings about national stability.

Again, it is pertinent to note that no country is totally independent no matter how wealthy it is. Countries in the committee of nations live in a set of interactions on administration, developmental policies, international trade, technology, culture, tourism, sports, entertainment etc and because countries want to live in harmony with each other, each tries to behave in a way that is internationally friendly and ethical. That is why there are international human rights laws, sustainable development goals, international trade, laws on the sea, international sports laws, environmental laws and technological regulation laws that member nations adhere to. Infact, nations have to meet standards in order to gain international respect and dignity among their fellow nations and like many other nations, Nigeria is an active player in many global activities. However, Nigeria's image in the international community has been dented by mal administration so much that Nigerians face embarrassment and denials of opportunities around the world that will empower them to contribute to the development of Nigeria and this is pathetically so because of the failure of public administration in Nigeria.

Another tragedy of public administration and its negative implications on national development is the damage to the Nigerian tourism industry. Tourism is a great employer, a source of revenue and also a source of national development to many countries around the world. In Morocco, Mauritius and Kenya, tourism accounts for over 50 % of their country's GDP. Tourism in Nigeria falls under the informal services which accounts for only 20% GDP of the economy. Essentially, a country's touristic value is enhanced by its people, administration, collective orientation, culture and social security. Nigeria's geography and unique cultural diversity is a comparative touristic advantage. However, a rich culture and a serene aesthetic environment are not enough to invite tourists to Nigeria. Tourists want to visit a place where their security is guaranteed. Unfortunately, with the constant ethno- religious crises, artificial fuel scarcity, uncontrolled hike in prices of commodities, inflation, political violence, environmental pollution, disorganized transportation agencies, flight schedules and other unethical practices precipitated by the failure of public administration, national development cannot happen.

Again, another tragedy of public administration and its negative effects for national development is that it increases the social vulnerability upon which violent conflicts grows. When the system is crashed by the failure of public administration, anarchy and impunity becomes introduced into the system leading to high-risk forms of violence and damages to lives and properties and so the failure of public administration creates tendencies for citizens with selfish interests to use tribal, religious and resource allocation issues to fuel instability in the nation. For instance, Nigerians have witnessed different types of religious and resource control related crisis which are obviously a result of the failure of public administration particularly in places like Kaduna state, Bauchi state, Taraba state, Imo state, Lagos state, Kwara state, Kogi state, Kano state, Zamfara state, Plateau state, Niger Delta region and Borno state. Millions of Nigerians have lost their lives in various preventable violence in Nigeria. In Nigeria these tragedies of public administration further create the loopholes which inconsiderate and narcissistic political elites use in generating ethnic bigotry and political violence.



In similar vein, one of the tragedies of public administration in Nigeria and its negative implication on national development is that it erodes the loyalty of citizens in the government and public institutions. When some citizens feel socially excluded, ethnically marginalized, politically segregated, economically underprivileged or treated unjustly in their own country, they become passive about nation building and national development. Thus, when citizens lack access to basic needs, they become aggressive and cynical at government policies and so the failure of public administration causes a general sense of frustration and apathy. Honest and hardworking citizens who ought to positively contribute to national development tend to either migrate out of the country or become tempted to join in the annihilation of public institutions. Therefore, when citizens are not patriotic to the nation, there is no dedication to development. Hence, for every nation to develop, it needs patriotic citizens. Unfortunately, the failure of public administration is a threat to patriotism and consequently national development because it kills the affection and passion citizens should have for their nation thereby hindering national development.

The next tragedy of public administration and the negative consequence for national development is the high rate of poverty, destitution and food insecurity. Poverty in Nigeria is linked to the failures of public administration in Nigeria, and this has caused a lack in terms of basic human needs like adequate nutritious food, decent housing, clean drinkable water, clothing and health care services. Thus, with the increased rate of poverty, many people have become victims of oppressive governance, malnutrition and epidemic diseases. Paradoxically, Nigeria's natural resources is estimated to surpass the wealth of all the nations of West and Eastern Europe put together, but Nigeria is recorded as one of the world's poorest countries. Poverty has brought untold travails such as inflation, unemployment and has also caused an escalation in the prices of essential commodities especially for low-income earners. Hence, with the statuesque of poverty and deprivation to basic needs, national development becomes unachievable.

Lastly, one of the tragedies of public administration and the negative effect for national development is the fall in the educational standards in Nigeria. Education is the most important tool for development in any community and nation. The scientific and economic advancement of the developed nations of America, Europe and Asia is directly a result of quality education. A country with innovative intellectuals is bound to progress. Genuine intellectual development is inevitable for Nigeria's development and so the failure of public administration in Nigeria damages the educational standard by spreading unethical practices such as indiscipline, inefficiency, lawlessness and impunity into the academia.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The objective of this study is to examine the tragedy of public administration in Nigeria and its implications on national development. In the light of this, successive administration have toyed with public administration in the past. Some of the political opportunists took the reigns of government to satisfy their selfish whims and caprices

while the majority of Nigerians suffer and are still suffering from the collapse of public administration in Nigeria and this is why the Nigerian system thrives on a very firm siege of pervasive political, administrative malevolence and turpitude because there is always an obsessive passion by the public servants, administrators and political elites to always leech on the masses. Unfortunately, no nation where charlatans, administrative juggernauts and reprobates are public servants ever survives. Thus, the greatest hinderance to Nigeria's development is the failure of public administration. In the light of this, the immunity clause is one of the ways of restoring power to the people. This will not just enable the people to hold the public servants accountable, but it will also help to keep the public servants in check and keep them in continuous remembrance that they are actually public servants appointed to serve. Thus, this will produce the emergence of genuine servant leaders and administrators whose priority is to really serve the people and deliver the nation from total ruin and damnation. Lastly, effective and sustainable bills should be passed sentencing public servants and elected officials who do not live up to their campaign promises or fulfill them adequately to prison. This will curb the tragedies of public administration to the bedrest minimum and force administrators to walk their talk.

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