

The Impact of the Environment on Nigeria's Public Administration

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ABSTRACT The practice and discipline of public administration in Nigeria is beclouded by problems which are internal (self-inflicted) and external (environmentally induced). These problems impact negatively on public institutions and in the employees of government such that what is demanded from government by the citizens becomes a far cry from objective commitment on the part of government and on the deplorable results that comes from administrators performance. Through the approach of systems school of analysis, this paper tries to find out why the negative synthesis of failure is persisting in the Nigeria administrative machinery especially from the angle of the impact of environmental factors on leadership, administration and on the citizens themselves. The paper looked at how such indices as political, economic, socio-cultural, and other related factors becomes mutually reinforcing on the system. It went on to suggest how a proper enthronement of democratic practices together with a just and an impartial administrative operation would bring about concordance in the polity.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a federation with three tiers of government at the center, the state and the local government. The various national constitutions that have been used to govern Nigeria since independence in 1960, has always provided for three independent arms of government –the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. Nigeria is a very diverse nation which according to Okediji (1976a) is made up of a 'multi-national, multi-ethnic and a multi-lingual form-ations. Oite (1976b) posited that 'there are over 250 ethnic nationalities in Nigeria' An account by Otoho (2002) reveals that Nigeria has a population estimated to be well over 111.8 million and a land area of 923, 763 square kilometers. Continuing, this same account provides that according to the 'UNDP's Human Development Report (1997), Nigeria was ranked 141st of 175 countries'. This is interpreted to mean that Nigeria ranks low on the human development index of the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP).

Government always rely on the administrative machinery of a state to transform that state for the better. Citizens control over the operation of public agencies is a core necessity in every democracy. It can not be attained when there is insufficient knowledge on the fit between what citizens desire and what governments offer. There is always that unwritten understanding or an informal agreement or what Rousseau (1913)

termed 'social contract'. By electing a government, people lend, alienate, or give up their power to political rulers on condition that it be used to satisfy what Hampton (1986) termed 'certain of their most important needs'.

The ideas of Hobbes (1957) Locke (1960) and Rousseau, all invoked the notion of a social contract as a basis for political authority and for reasons why citizens should obey their government. Locke's government of consent, Hobbe's philosophy of absolutism and Russeau's social contract all form a link of continuity between such government and the governed. Under such an arrangement, the needs of the people such as personal security, social order, welfare, social services and general prosperity must be delivered by governmental authorities and by the public sector (administration). Governments are put in place to serve the people and may not be re-elected if they fail to accom-plish minimum requirements. Therefore, gover-nments and the public servants according to Vigoda (2000) have to work faithfully and diligently for the sake of society and its members.

It has to be recognized that the public administration system in a country is in a causal relationship with its environment. The environ-ment therefore determines to a great extent the structure and functioning of the administrative system and the latter in turn is capable of modifying its environment to advantage. Indeed, the capability of a people to collectively manipulate their

environment to their advantage has been used by Bendix (1960) to define 'development'. However, when the environment is topsy-turvy, the capability of the administrative system to manipulate its environment is hampered. Seriously, these factors of revulsion, renders the administrative system weak in implementing the nation's collective decisions.

The impact of the environment on public administration consist of the pressures and influences emanating from the Socio-cultural, political, pressure group, interest group, trade union, economic, national and international environments, which often constrain the structure, process and output of public administration. These are factors which though are external to public institutions, but impinges upon administration thereby affecting the efficiency, effectiveness and goal attainment of public administration and government.

This paper attempts to discuss the major reasons responsible for the poor performance of Nigerian Public Administration judged from the environmental impact on it. Also, it will examine the implications of the identified shortcomings on the polity and suggest ways in which these reasons for failure can be effectively tackled by public management in Nigeria.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Public Administration as a field of study always poses critical questions that demands for deep intellectual reflections. As a field of study that examines the practice of managing the business of government and as a body of knowledge that looks into the process of management in the public sector, public administration is best considered from the standpoint of interrelationships and that of comparison. Public administration in modern societies is characterized by its performance in the various concerns of housing, health services, transportation, education, welfare, social services, law and order etc. The social welfare state has extended far and wide and Nigeria being a country that operates the mixed economy system, her performance in the field of governance and administration has to be compared with how successfully other democratic nations have performed.

According to Riggs (1962), any truly scientific study of public administration must be comparative and to be truly comparative, it must

be 'empirical, nomothetic and ecological'. He has gone further to use this idea to explain the differential problems confronting bureaucracies in the western and developing societies. Riggs (1961) defined developing societies as 'prismatic' or transitional societies characterized by rapid change, uncertainty, overlapping and ineffective differentiated structures. These marked characteristics constitutes inherent problems in Nigeria's public administration which inevitable leads to these questions.

1. How has government fulfilled their own part of the ancient contract to the citizens?
2. Do governments and public officials really work hard for the public money delivered to them continuously and in increasing amounts?
3. How much has the myriad environmental problems in the Nigeria Nation really impinged on the performance of government vice-versa the value with which the citizens regard the government?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholars and practitioners in the fields of administrative studies are agreed on the point that the opinions of services receivers needs to be taken seriously by government so as to understand what public needs are all about, how to distribute services to meet up the needs and how to communicate with people, thus assessing their satisfaction. Public administration cannot contain itself with abstract knowledge. This is because Laleye (1991) asserts that "its production is supposed to have practical effects or to have practical applicability in Nigeria"

The need to recognize and fully understand the interdependence which exists between an organization and its environment is emphasized by the systems theory. Basically, the systems theory emphasizes the whole rather than parts. Parts, whether of organisms, organization or societies are not looked at separately but together in the faith that the functioning of the whole is causally and inescapably tied to the functioning of the parts. Haynes (1980) believes that a system is always very complex, a mixture of sub-systems which interact with each other in various planes and dimension. He went on to point out that all systems are related to other systems in an almost infinite and multidimensional hierarchy.

The organization and its parts interact and depend on each other to achieve the purpose for

which the organization was set up. This implies that administrative organization exist within an environment which has external and internal dimensions. Both the internal environment (formal structures and procedures, mechanism of control) and external environment (social, economic, political, historical) factors influences the functioning of the administrative system. Put aptly, Henry (2002) said;

Systems are comprised of components that work together for the objectives of the whole, and the system approach is merely a way of thinking about these components and their relationship.

The Nigeria situation falls within this framework considering her diverse nature, style of governance and the quest for development.

A REVIEW

This paper attempts an appraisal of how the critical factors within the Nigerian Public administration environment influences the structure and operations of the public service. These critical factors comprises the size and structure of the nation's population, the ethnic heterogeneity of the society, the multiplicity of religions values and beliefs, work ethics and attitudes, cultures and history. Other more pronounced factors are the political environment, the economic and the social environmental factors. These would be discussed under the following arrangements;

POLITICAL FACTORS

The Nigeria state which is a cluster of diverse ethnic Nationalities lack that cohesive force that may form for a national ideology. Leaders struggle to take control of the centre so as to dispense privileges to their kinsmen or ethnic affiliations. A political leader from the western part of the country had to cry out in his famous book. Said Awolowo (1947) that Nigeria was 'a mere geographical expression'. That is, in terms of social relationships and national identification, one could not speak of Nigeria in the same sense as one could speak of such of its components like the Benin Kingdom, Egba Kingdom, Kano Emirate etc.

After independence in 1960, there was the unequal distribution of political power on a regional and ethnic basis. This resulted into inequality of socio economic development as

every leader concentrated on developing his region. In the realm of administration, the politics of regional affiliation has denied Nigeria of a national character and hence also of evolving concrete notions of national interest. Therefore, there now arose in the encyclopedia of Nigeria's administration, such policies as Zoning, Federal character, quota system etc.

The struggle to control the centre by ethnic leaders has resulted into the inability to have a successful and acceptable population census. This affected the drive for viable planning and policy making by both the politicians and administrators. This largely accounts for the failure of many national development programmes. By advantage of hindsight that history provides, Amuwo (1996) contends that it does appears that after all, public policy objectives are enunciated for elected civilian politicians, mainly as vote-catching contrivances, and part of an elaborate game plan to secure legitimacy and win political acceptance. The consequence is that there now arise a ruling class that lacks Utopia, that has no vision and that dreams no great dreams. This attribute, impact negatively on the citizenry, the nation and on administration.

In Nigerian politics and administration, the rise to fame, wealth, power of virtually all senior government officials and public officers is through the agency of the state. While in all political system of all ideological persuasions put together, certain special privileges and largesse are attached to political appointment, such brazen venality need not be cultivated in order to ensure comfort. The Nigerian topology appears different; it has almost become a rule. This debilitating arrogance exhibited by both the political and administrative leadership is copied by the civil society as they see the state as a prebend. Appointment to public offices is conceived as God sent, a life time opportunity to once and for all break the bondage of poverty. Amuwo went on to state that it matters little whether or not the appointee performs. Indeed, criteria of performance have nothing to do with how well or badly the job is done. Performance is evaluated on the basis of material self-actualization of the appointee, accentuated comfort of his family and how well the appointee relates to his friends. The danger here is that the state and administration will become centralized.

The political class has largely failed to keep the sovereign obligation that they owe to the people. This class-whether military or civilian has

formed a cabal. They are very few in number and they continue to rotate themselves in government. Since their primary objective is to hold on to power and accumulate wealth illegally, they inevitably lack vision. The resultant impact of their policies generates rancour, lack of patriotism and the tendency to want to get back at the uncaring system (state) by the civilian population. People's temperaments becomes always on edge, there is frustration, anger and agitation which results into violence, strife and crime. That relationship that should go with leadership and followership manifest only at the negative.

All these evil tendencies on the part of leadership has always resorted into military coup and counter coup. This has further politicized the military institution itself together with the fact that military incursion into politics is an aberration. The advent of the military into politics according to Jemibewon (1982) who was a one time military governor of Lagos state lamented as 'regrettable', because it has done more harm than good to both the military institution and that of the civilian including the public service.

From the international arena, one can say that globalization and improvements on information technology constitute demands that are placed on both the political and the administrative class. Also, the influence of the super-power nations and other advanced societies, impact on what is to be done in terms of policy and in terms of implementation. There is the room to make comparison so that checks can be drawn. The impact of education and knowledge acquired from other climes changes the orientation of people. What is however left for conjecture is whether their impact is on the positive or on the negative side.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

This is made up of the financial institutions, the organized private sector, natural and mineral resources, technology and agriculture, which all have varying impact on the public service organizations.

The nation's development plans which results from the consultation carried out with the different interest group in the society reflects on the economic environment of government.

Although, Nigeria was largely an Agricultural economy in the 1960's, with the discovery of oil, there was a complete disem-phasis on agriculture

and shift of concentration to oil. Presently, according to Olalokun (1979) petroleum contributes to over 90% foreign exchange earnings for the nation. While the scramble for oil was on, the leadership which always comes from the majority ethnic group never paid heed to the plight of the minority oil producing communities of the Niger Delta. All the benefits that accrue from oil sales is appropriated by the central (federal) government. While the pollution and environmental degradation that results from oil exploration is suffered by the oil producing communities, the rest of the population keeps quiet and even device more means to continue the subjugation of the minority ethnic people of the Niger Delta. The situation is so bad that there is now extreme poverty amongst the people. The resultant effect of this is anybody's guess; lawlessness, crime, strife, communal warfare etc. The progressive centralization of the instruments of power and administration has been responsible for this, because stakeholders are not involved in governance, policy making and implementation.

The attitude of the Nigeria state to the discovery of oil has resulted into the neglect of Agriculture and the rural areas in the development process. The urban areas have become over urbanized and according to Mabogunje (1960), they have become parasites on the rural areas.

With all these wealth from oil, Nigeria has not been able to manipulate her environment to advantage technologically. This means that huge programs of economic and social development can be aborted by the absence and inappropriateness of technology. Administrators play a pre-eminent role in the process of policy making and implementation. Therefore they contribute a great deal at influencing the economic system through the control and operation of governmental administrative machinery. The bureaucracy affects the lives of the citizen. Therefore the quality of personnel employed into it matters a lot. This is where government attempt to regulate the economy through national economic planning, needs a well trained and competent civil service. Even at that, most of the national development plans have ended up failing because of the internal contradictions arising from the plan environment. These contradictions are the type of centralized federalism being practiced which excludes major stakeholders and encourage wasteful competition and conflict. The ideological pursuit of mixed economy where govern-

ment gets involved in the management of certain sectors of the economy that should have been left with the private sector encourages this wasteful spending. Considering the lack of an ideological unity and presence of mutual suspicion amongst politicians and administrators, virtually all the development plans have ended up being unworkable.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS

Studies by Riggs (1964) argued for the fact that most developing nations exist in an environment where the traditional and the modern ways of doing things co-exist. This results into the problems of communication, political mobilisation, ethical/ethnic confusion etc. In Nigeria for example, there is the presence of several indigenous mother tongues, but the English language serves as the medium of communication. And with the high level of illiteracy, the substance of message being disseminated is lost to reason and only the few literate population benefits.

The fanatical religious group in almost all the religious sects creates problems and there is always conflagration over minute things that should not raise much dust. Tribal and clan allegiance still holds strong in the Nigerian polity. This is even more made to fester by the ruling elite. The end product is confusion in policy making and in its implementation. The effect of all these on public administration has been unsettling. The civil service is torn by the presence of ethnic and selfish allegiance and the pursuit of positive results becomes a far cry from objective expectations.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Nigeria is such that the administrative state allows a clique of public officials, the military and politicians to accumulate wealth, get away with it and leave the entire system to suffer for it. The effect of this and other constellating factors earlier mentioned render public administration ineffective, ineffectual and corrupt. Administrators support whatever government is in power and end up becoming part of the rot. The environmental implication of these drawbacks in the relationship between government, administrators, and the public are that the myriad problems discussed above become mutually reinforcing to one another, thus manifesting negative results.

A way out is to allow political integration to prevail. By this, there will be ideological unity that would fashion out a path for the entire citizenry and the nation to follow. Also, government programmes should be able to bring the good life for all, by ensuring that services provided are satisfactory, facilities and infrastructures work perfectly, there is accountability and prudence in the dispensing and management of public wealth and the rule of law is made to take pre-eminence over mundane demands.

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