



## PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

*The role of public administration in any country's development cannot be overemphasized. This is because the nature of a country's development is dependent on its public administration. In other words, public administration is a tool for national development. This explains why virtually all countries of the world particularly those interested in development have been consistently reforming their public administration systems to position them to contribute meaningfully to their development. Public administration in Nigeria has witnessed many vicissitudes right from the pre-colonial, the colonial and the post-colonial eras. The history of the country, the environment and some events around the world has greatly influenced public administration in Nigeria. The paper found out that the challenges facing public administration in Nigeria such as multi-ethnicity, corruption, poor remuneration of public servants, epileptic power supply, among others have negatively affected public administration in Nigeria, hence its seeming weakness in helping to a large extent the country to achieve the much needed development. The data for the paper were collected through secondary means and analyzed using the historical and descriptive methods. The paper adopted the systems theory as theoretical framework. In order for public administration in Nigeria to be in the stead to contribute meaningfully to national development, the paper recommended among other things that merit should be the determining factor in recruitment and promotion of public servants, there should be adequate remuneration for public servants to motivate them to do their work satisfactorily and the power sector should be fixed to boost public service activities.*

**Keywords:** Public Administration; National Development; Public Service; Remuneration; Recruitment.

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## **1. Introduction**

The place of public administration in national development cannot be overemphasized. Achievement of national development to a large extent depends on a country's public administration. The nature of a country's public administration determines the level of development the country is to achieve. The social contract theory by Thomas Hobbes, J.J. Rousseau and John Locke made us to understand that the state was created by the people in order for it to protect their lives and properties and provide them essential services. To Miliband, the state is not a thing and can therefore not exist as such, what gives the state its true meaning is what is known as the state system which embodies the executive, legislative and judiciary, the military and para-military institutions, all these are embedded in public administration. This explains why public administration is referred to as the machinery of the state that helps the state to execute its will. In this vein, Onah (2021, p. 47) citing Waldo opines that "the goals of public administration are the ultimate objects of the state itself- the attainment of the good life".

It is important to state that public administration as an activity is dynamic and not static. As the world is changing as well changing circumstances in a country, public administration also change. The essence of this is for public administration to be able to achieve the goals of the state. Nigeria as a country has passed through different epochs and these epochs have their specific public administration system. It means therefore that the environment and the country's history among others influence the public administration of a country just as public administration one way or the other affect the country. The epochs in Nigeria's history include the pre-colonial period, the colonial period and the post-colonial period. Each of these periods had its own public administration system. And the nature of the current administration in Nigeria is as a result of the country's environment and history. Public administration as an activity can only achieve the goals of the state and national development if it is effective and efficient. The reverse would be the case with ineffective and inefficient public administration system.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification**

It is very important and germane at this juncture to attempt a clarification of the major concepts in this paper. The major concepts to be so clarified are "Public Administration" and "National Development". Clarification of these concepts would go a long way in helping to understand the subject matter of the paper. What

is public administration? Before attempt is made to clarify the term “public administration”, it is better the concept of administration is clarified first and foremost. This is because knowing what administration is will give an insight into understanding public administration. Administration has been defined by various scholars across the globe. It can be seen to be a coordinated group effort directed towards achieving the goals of the organization be it public or private. According to Onah (2021:46), “administration can be defined as the activities of groups cooperating to accomplish common goals”. He went further to assert that “since administration is conceived within patterns of cooperative behaviour, any person engaged in any activity in cooperation with other persons is engaged in administration. From the foregoing, it means administration is not a one affair and it is not directionless or aimless. Administration is characterized by coordination and cooperative group efforts and goals. There must be goals the coordinated group efforts intend to achieve. In this vein, Naidu (2006:3) opines that ‘administration is a goal-oriented, a purposive and co-operative activity undertaken by a group of people in order to realize some common goal or goals’.

Having examined the concept of administration, at this point the term public administration is to be examined. Public administration can be viewed from two perspectives. First as a field of study or a discipline and secondly as the machinery of the state which it uses to execute its will. Public administration both as a field of study and as the machinery of the state is interested in how the citizens are provided with essential services. The state has the responsibility to protect lives and properties of the citizens and also provides them their welfare needs. Public administration does this on behalf of the state. That is why public administration as a discipline is saddled with the responsibility of ensuring that public administration as the machinery of the state is empowered and positioned in such a way as to engender efficient and effective service delivery. This is because according to Waldo cited in Onah (2021:47), “in a broader context, the goals of public administration are the ultimate objects of the state itself – the attainment of the good life”. Public administration has been defined by various scholars. According to Naidu (2006, p. 4), public administration simply means governmental administration. It is the study of the management of the public agencies that carryout public policies in order to fulfill the state purposes in the public interests. To Corson and Harris cited in Naidu (2006, p. 4), public administration is the action part of government, the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realized. The concepts of administration and public administration have been clarified. At this stage, attempt is to be made to clarify the concept of national development, but before that is done, the concept of development needs to be clarified. The concept of development does

not have a specific definition; it has been defined in various ways by various scholars across the globe. This is partly because development is a multi-dimensional concept. In this vein, Egugbo (2020, p. 20) averred that “development as a concept has defied definite definition particularly because of its multi-faceted and multi-dimensional nature.

The dimensions of development include but not limited to economic development, political development, technological development, social development and cultural development. Development has to do with progress and transformation which invariably will provide positive impact on the live of the citizens as well as the society. According to Rodney, development is categorized into different levels which include individual, social and economic. He sees development from the perspective of the individual as increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. Development, from the perspective of social groups, entails increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships. Economic development perspective, a society is said to develop economically when its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. National development is not significantly different from development. This is because all aspects of development entails development of the country. Therefore, national development entails progress and improvement in virtually all aspects of the country which translate to improved standard of living of the people and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. In order words, national development simply means the development of the country.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The paper adopted the systems theory as the theoretical framework. David Easton pioneered the application of the systems approach to the analysis of the political process. The systems theory can also help in understanding the operations of the organization as well as public administration. According to Sharma et al (2013:262), “systems analysis of organizations developed largely since 1950s, it has its own peculiar point of view. It considers all elements, the whole organization as well as its component parts. It views an organization as an adaptive system. If it is to survive, it must adjust to changes in the environment. The systems theory views the organization and its environment as interdependent – each other depend on the other for resources”.

The systems theory is of the view that there is an interaction between the environment and the organization as well as public administration; this is because public administration cannot operate without consideration and cognizance of the environment. This is because the inputs which public administration is meant to work on is gotten from the environment and the political system or the state which public administration represents also needs the support input from the environment to be able to have conducive atmosphere to operate. This explains why it is said that without peace there cannot be development. Environment and public administration affect each other and as such public administration must consider the environment in the discharge of its responsibility.

The systems theory is also of the view that system, organization or state is sub-system dominated. That is to say that the system, organization or the state is dependent upon the effective functioning of its parts called the sub-systems. Each sub-system performs a series of needed activities (Sharma et al, 2013:262). This means the effective functioning of the system, organization or the state is dependent on the effective functions of the sub-systems. In government for example, we have different organs of government which include the executive, legislature and the judiciary and in Nigeria there are three levels of government; the federal, state and the local government. From the perspective of the systems theory, Nigerian public administration can only be said to perform well if all the organs of government and levels of government are performing their functions as they ought to. This does not exclude the citizens who also have duties and responsibilities to the state which include payment of taxes, obeying the laws of the land, assisting in the defense of the state, performing civic responsibilities, respect for constituted authority, respect the national symbol (flag) and national anthem.

#### **4. Ecology of Public Administration in Nigeria**

The place of ecology in public administration in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This is because ecology to a very largely extent affects public administration as public administration also affects ecology. This means that a symbiotic relationship exists between ecology and public administration. In understanding public administration of countries, the environment of those countries has to be put into consideration because the environment affects greatly administrative behaviour. This explains why the ecological theory of comparative public administration emphasized that public bureaucracies throughout the world show great diversity because the environmental settings which they function obviously differ. According

to Gaus cited in Naidu (2006:136), "the ecology of public administration includes physical, social and cultural factors". This view was corroborated by Okunade (2002:19) when he asserted that "any attempt at studying Nigeria's public administration cannot be divorced from the country's political, historical, economic, social, cultural fortunes and misfortunes and many other factors that had or are capable of conditioning the geographical entity called Nigeria.

From the foregoing, it shows clearly that many factors affect public administration in Nigeria. Nigeria as a country is a product of the British colonial masters, before the advent of the British colonial masters, there was no country known as Nigeria. What existed were different empires and kingdoms with different political and administrative systems. It was the British colonial masters that brought the disparate empires and kingdoms under a country known as Nigeria. According to Okunade (2002:23), "with colonialism came the eventual fusion or amalgamation of the various collectivities that now constitute the present day Nigeria. Thus, three main and distinct ethnic groups Yorubas, Ibos and Hausas in the South Western, South Eastern and Northern part of Nigeria respectively were brought together, since the period of colonial rule, these ethnic groups which subsist till today have shaped the country's public administration.

The British colonial master introduced the indirect rule system in the administration of colonial Nigeria. The indirect system of administration made the British to administer the vast country through the traditional rulers of the various kingdoms and empires of the pre-colonial era. The traditional rulers were made to serve as intermediary between the British colonial masters and the indigenous people.

The multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition of Nigeria, no doubt have had and still having influence on Nigeria's public administration. For example it led to the adoption of federalism in Nigeria in 1954 as a system of government, the federal character principle which ensures that appointment into government positions at all levels reflect the federal character, it has also influenced revenue allocation, siting of government institutions and projects, the multi-religious nature of the country has also made it possible for Nigeria to be a secular state without state religion.

Issue of tribalism also affects public administration in Nigeria where appointment into positions of authority is sometimes based on tribal sentiment rather than merit. It also influences voting pattern in Nigeria where people vote candidates during elections based on tribal and religious sentiments. These tendencies negatively affect public administration in Nigeria. Inability to hold government officials accountable

for optimum performance also is traceable to tribal and religious sentiments in Nigeria.

## 5. Challenges of Public Administration in Nigeria

Public administration as the machinery of the state that executes the will and goals of the state cannot be in the stead to provide efficient and effective delivery and engender growth and development of a country if it is enmeshed in serious challenges and bottlenecks. It is also important to understand the challenges of public administration because it will help in the provision of solutions for improvement.

The challenges facing public administration in Nigeria include but not limited to the following:

**Corruption:** Corruption has permeated virtually all sectors of Nigeria and it has affected negatively effective and efficient service delivery. According to Agagu (2024:3), "corruption takes various forms including bribery, over-invoicing, ghost workers, international and domestic scamming, opaque deals, etc. Many government officials over the years have been accused of embezzling billions of naira. It has been very difficult to fight corruption in Nigeria because of the capacity of corruption to fight back. This explains why Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala cited in Agagu (2004:3) opined that fighting corruption in the country is dangerous.

**Electoral Malpractices:** This has to do with the manipulation of the electoral process and results in such a way that the will and choices of the majority are subverted. To have an effective and efficient public administration system, the electoral process and elections must be transparent and free from all forms of manipulations in such a way as to allow the will and choices of every voter to reflect in election results. Those to carry put public service one way or the other are products of elections. The relationship between election and public service is such that when those that would occupy position of authority recognizes that they are there based on majority votes in elections, there is the tendency that they are more likely to work to the satisfaction of the people that voted them into office, without this they may not have the support of the people at the next opportunity. There is no gainsaying the fact that electoral malpractices are very rampant and pervasive in Nigeria and this has reflected in massive corruption in various forms and poor service delivery, poverty, unemployment and lack of growth and development in the country. Without free

and fair elections, transparent and rancor-free electoral process, public administration cannot and will not be able to live up to expectation.

**Inadequate Training:** The dynamic nature of the world and effects of globalization presuppose that there should be regular training of public administrators to update their skills and competencies that would make them be in the right stead to provide efficient and effective services to the citizens, in Nigeria, training and re-training of public servants is not as regular as it should be.

**Poor Remuneration of Public Servants:** This is another major challenge of public administration in Nigeria. Public servants in Nigeria are among the least paid in the world. This no doubt decreases the morale of workers and affects their commitment to put in their best to provide effective and efficient services. Currently, the federal government of Nigeria is negotiating with organized labour on what minimum wage for a Nigerian worker should be.

**Epileptic Power Supply:** The place of power supply in service delivery cannot be over-emphasized. When there is regular power supply, it will lead to improved service delivery. There is no gainsaying the fact that Nigeria has acute electricity shortage and this has affected the country adversely for many years. It was reported that in 2022, the country's power grid collapsed twice in one week. The situation with electricity in Nigeria is still nothing to write home about. Service delivery cannot be efficient and effective where there is epileptic power supply.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The nature of development of any country is largely dependent on the country's public administration. In other words, public administration goes a long way in determining the level of development of any country. This means that for a country to get developed the public administration system needs to be reformed and put in the pedestal that can enable it promote national development. The level of development in Nigeria today is as a result of the nature of the country's public administration. For public administration to be able to promote national development in Nigeria, effort should be made by citizens to take active part in not only politics but also governance. This will make them to hold government officials accountable and make them satisfy their wishes and aspirations. According to Ola ad Eboh (2009:109), "citizens participation entails the involvement of citizens in making decisions about things that affect them". When this is the order of the day, there is high tendency for the citizens to be better served by public office holders.



There should be improvement in the electoral system in such a way as to engender transparent electoral process that would offer free and fair elections. When elections are free and fair and votes of the citizens count, public officers would be more amenable to be satisfying the wishes of the citizens.

Efforts should be made by the Nigerian government to improve electricity supply. This is because effective and efficient service delivery partly depends on it. There should be judicial reform that would see to the improvement of the judicial system in Nigeria where all can get justice whether rich or poor. Efforts should be made to put machinery in place to prevent corruption because it is easier to prevent corruption than allowing it to take place and thereafter fighting it. Public servants should be well remunerated to boost their morale for proper service delivery. Public servants also need to be trained regular

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