

ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS IN PROMOTING PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRATIC ERA (1999-2009)

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ABSTRACT

Public accountability and transparency have become veritable ring tones of good governance in democratic era. Therefore, the basic assumption in democratic system is that a government would perform prudently and judiciously in public financial management for the attainment of equity, transparency and public accountability for the betterment of the entire citizens. This study is designed to assess the role of public service reforms in promoting public accountability in a democratic dispensation. Secondary data or content analysis was adopted in this study. The study revealed that Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPI), public, financial and procurement law, e-payment, Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) and anti graft agencies (EFCC & ICPC) were the instruments adopted by the Nigerian Government to ensure public accountability within public service reforms. It is recommended that the tiers of government should provide the enabling legislations, policies, reforms as well as to strictly comply to the measures and policies for public accountability in the reforms for the attainment of public probity in governance.

Keywords: Public, reforms, accountability, service

Introduction

The essence of good governance is to establish a room for public probity, accountability and transparency so as to ensure the principles of justice, equity and fairness within the constitutional jurisdiction. However, it is the role of democratic government to accommodate the above principles for the betterment of its citizens as well as to foster national development. Okene(2005:5-6) pointed out that "good governance as the responsible use of political authority to manage a nation's affair. It is closely related to the provision of public goods, accountability and transparency". He further argued that good governance is descriptive of a professional, civil service, the supremacy of the law, effective protection of human rights, a diminution of corruption in government, a practicable and transparent administration, democratic decision making, a fair egalitarian economic order and appropriate devolution and decentralization of power.

Abubakar(2010) contends that "the twin concepts of transparency and accountability have in recent years become the veritable ringtones of good governance. In this regard, Carsons(2005: 1) pointed that "these two concepts are important pillars of democratic governance in modern societies". He further explains that "transparency and accountability are critical to the functioning of a modern economy and fostering social well-being". Indeed, they conclude that "without transparency and accountability trust will be lacking between a government and those whom it governs the result will be social (and political) instability and an environment that is less than conducive to economic growth and development.

Indeed, the public expectation is that a government would perform prudently and judiciously in public financial management towards attainment of equity, transparency and public accountability. Corruption In public service,

maladministration, morass economic downturn and crass leadership style attributed to the departure of public accountability in governance. In this regard, some scholars contend that "the public sector was not able to perform effectively because of accumulation of excessive power, lack of accountability and representation, indifference towards public needs and demands, official secrecy and inaccessibility, and the role in depoliticizing the public sphere" (Garnham, 1990; Haque, 1994 quoted in Aye, 2008).

Meanwhile, for the realization of public demands and ensuring public accountability in democratic governance, president Obasanjo immediately after his inauguration in 1999 directed the public officials, stakeholders and policy makers to look at the malcontent state of public service so as to reconstitute its structure through what they called "the Obasanjo's Reform: Public Service Reforms and National Transformation" towards attainment of professional ethics and to enhance public probity and accountability in governance.

This paper intends to assess the measures taken within the public sector reforms of Obasanjo and Yar'adua's administration (such as the Bureau of Public Procurement, public financial management, measures such as Integrated Personal and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), e-payment etc and Anti Graft Agencies Economic Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) aimed at enhancing public accountability and probity in governance, and ascertain whether they have achieved their objectives or not.

Conceptual clarification and theoretical framework

At this point, there is a need to conceptualize public sector itself before comprehending the reform on public sector or service. Public sector is those bodies, which are readily recognizable as obviously expressing government functions: ministries, departments, agencies, local governments units and similar public bodies. These are clearly governmental in the fullest sense, most with long histories (United Nations, 1975,

Fernandes, 1986; Powell, 1987 cited from Aye, 2008).

A genuine reform can be defined as a change that either produces a measurable improvement in services or a noticeable change in relationship between institutions of the state and the citizens; hence a reform that changes the way in which civil servants are paid that has no impact in services or on the way those civil servants relate to the citizens would not be counted as a genuine reform (Public Sector Reform: An Introduction Concept Paper No.1, 2009). In this regard, Bangura (1999) observed that "reform of the public sector entails dealing with issues of fiscal stability, managerial efficiency, capacity building and public accountability".

Public sector reform IS a systematic intervention directed at the structure, operations and procedures of the public service with the purpose of inducing its transformation as multi-faceted agent of change as well as an instrument of national cohesion and socio-economic development (Adegoroye, 2005; Mikail, 2013). In the same vein, Mhone (2003) maintained that "public sector reform is the total overhaul of government administrative machinery with the aim of injecting real effectiveness, efficiency, competence and financial prudence in the running of public sector".

Abubakar(2010) observed that 'accountability is the responsibility to account for stewardship an authority or the people'. From the context of public finance, the United Nations Manual for Government Accounting and Budget Execution (1952) defines accountability as "a legal liability involving the establishment of a pattern of control over receipts and expenditures that permits a determination either by the executive or by the legislative (or both), that public funds are spent for public purposes".

Meanwhile, this paper isinagreement with incrementalism/disjoined and transaction cost theories. The incrementalism theory was predicated by Charles Lindblom (1963) while transaction-cost theory advocated by Bale and Dale (1998), Felkin (2006) and Haque (2007). Accordingly, the incrementalism assumed that "new decisions are variations of past decision: that past decision makers accept the existing decisions as satisfying and legitimate, and only, make small, incremental,

marginal adjustments in their current behaviour". That the decision maker makes comparison between current state of affairs and the small adjustments to be made in the behaviour within manageable proportions.

Therefore, the public sector reform in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon rather than, a continues administrative policy within the framework of public sector management. Infact, most of the reforms launched by Nigerian leaders since military down to the democratic dispensation was merely the same, but used to come with certain changes, amendment and adjustment as contained in incrementalism process. There is inter-alia relations between 1988 civil service reform of Babangida's Military administration with Ayinda panel of Abacha's military oligarchy.

However, the transaction-cost theory in its approach compares planning, adapting and monitoring costs under alternative governance structures. This is because decision-makers would want to minimize their aggregate costs of production and transaction. The essence of Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS), e-payment, Bureau of public procurement and Anti Graft Agencies (EFCC & ICPC) were to reduce unprecedented cost of government from corrupt practices in order to enhance public accountability and probity.

An overview of public sector reforms in Nigeria

Historically, the public sector management in Nigeria was a product of British Colonial System since the era of colonial plunder down to independence days. The British Colonial Public Administration managed the colonial territory known as Nigeria, from about 1861 to 1954, when regional governments were created, influenced the growth and development of public service in Nigeria. Indeed, Nigerian public service from 1954 to 1960 was characterized on regional government based on colonial interpretation for its administrative structure; in terms of ethics, values, culture, tradition, training, procedures and e-spirit de-corps. At that juncture, there were five public services namely; the Federal Public Service, the Public Service of the Eastern region, the Northern Region, mid- western region and that of the Western Region (Maikudi, 2012).

Accordingly, the first public service reform in Nigeria began with Hunt's commission of 1934, at addressing the state of the service, incorporating both conditions of service, staff performance and service delivery (Adegoroye, 2006 and Salisu, 2001). The second reform of the civil service was undertaken in 1946 by the Harragin commission, which divided the service into junior and senior services. It was followed by Gorsuch commission of 1954, which restructured the service into five (5) sections, which are; the sub-clerical, clerical, sub professional technical, administrative/professional, and super scale. The Mbanefo Commission of 1959 was concerned mainly with the issue of salaries and this was followed the same year by the Hewn commission which integrated the existing departments under directors into ministries to be headed by permanent secretaries (Adebayo, 2004).

Furthermore, the Morgan commission in 1963 focused on the issues of salaries and remuneration followed by Elliot or Eldwood Grading Team of 1966 and the Adebo commission of 1970. Though, the central area of Adebo Commission is to look at salaries and wages as well as the establishment of a public service review commission to examine the role of the public service commission, structure of the civil service, conditions of service and training arrangement. In 1972, the Udoji Commission emerged with its major focus on "increasing efficiency and effectiveness within the context of meeting the challenges of a development- oriented society" (Adewunmi, 2012). Therefore, the Udoji Commission in 1974 recommended a result oriented and unified structure of public service for the whole country. This implies that recruitment/appointment, promotion remuneration, retirement, discipline and dismissal would be governed by the same conditions all over the country (PSRC 1974).

Meanwhile, the 1988 civil service reforms chaired by Dotun Phillips aimed at streamlining the public service along the lines of the presidential system of government with the aimed changing professional heads of the ministries to be called Director-Generals (DG) instead of permanent secretaries, and their appointment is purely political as well as specialization in the ministry where an officer found himself were among the

recommendations of the commission. Contrasting such commission, the Ayida Panel under Abacha's government in 1994 revisited the Phillips commission and made some amendment such as the post of Director General should revert back to the status of permanent-secretaries and should be the accounting officer of the ministry.

The Obasanjo's civilian administration culminated with the established of Bureau for Public Service Reform (BPSR) chaired by Adegoke Adegoye with the aimed of streamlining the public sector and set a minimum standard in terms of staff strength and remuneration for the public services as well as to tackle payroll fraud, remove ghost workers and large number of redundant post, facilitate a process of organizational restructuring, improve service delivery standards and facilitate a process of pay reform that will provide incentives

for quality staff to come into the service and stay there (HTSPE, 2007: 1). However, in his attempt to ensure probity and public accountability late President Yar'adua, introduced e-payment system to public officers with the federal Government and contractors while he enforce (8) years duration to the post of permanent secretaries, and directors in the federal government.

In the present administration of President Jonathan, a committee was inaugurated headed by former head of service of the federation Mr. Steven Oransanye to look at the possible way out for reducing the size of government against some ministries, Departments or Parastatals and Agencies which have duplication of mandate in order to go into merger with others to be phased out. Below is the table that contained the reform of civil service ranging from colonial era to the Obasanjo's reform.

Table 1: Civil service reforms in Nigeria 1934-2005

S/N	Names of Commission/Committee	Year
1.	Hunts Commission	1934
2.	Harragin Commission	1945
3.	Foot Commission	1948
4.	Gorsuch Commission	1951
5.	Phillipson-Adebo Commission	1954
6.	Mbanefo Commission	1959
7.	Hewn Committee	1959
8.	Morgan Commission	1963
9.	Eldwood Commission	1966
10.	Adebo Commission	1971
II.	Udoji Commission	1972
12.	Dotun Phillips Reforms	1985
13.	Decree No. 43	1988
14.	Ayida Review Panel	1994
15.	The Obasanjo Reforms: Public Service Reforms and National Transformation	2005

Source: Salisu 2001 and Adegoye, 2006 cited from Adewumi, 2012

Public service reforms and accountability

The essence of democratic government is to established a room for the citizens to choose or

select their leaders who authoritatively manage both human and material resources with equity, transparency and fairness. This would enable the

citizens to consolidate their legitimacy to their government and in turn the leaders would discharge their duties diligently and judiciously without any fear or favour (Mikail, 2013). Thereafter, the Obasanjo's reform take cognizance with some instruments that would promote public accountability as well as taken some proactive measures to deter the public or against ill gotten money, misappropriation and embezzlement aimed at enhancing public probity and accountability. Such instruments and measures among others were;

i. **Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS):** This is a world Bank-Assisted project under the Economic Reform and Government Project (ERGP) which was based to establish a reliable and comprehensive database for the public service; facilitate manpower planning and assist in providing information for decision making; eliminate double dipping and credentials falsification; facilitate easy storage, update and retrieval of personnel record for administrative and pension process, and to facilitate staff remuneration payment. The fact is that, the IPPIS would enable the government ministries and MDAs to fish out the ghost workers syndrome for the attainment of public probity in governance.

ii. **Public Financial Management and Procurement Reform:** Indeed, these reforms gave birth to the emergence of Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007). The Fiscal Responsibility Act was aimed at ensuring prudent management of nation's resources; ensuring long term macroeconomic stability and accountability and transparency in the conduct of fiscal operations. The essence of such reform is to bring changes in government's budgeting and financial management philosophy and operation which is now characterized by firm policies, economic growth and management orientation, time discipline and predictability in resource allocation and funding releases. The statutory allocations from the federation Accounts

to all tiers of Government are now published monthly (Public Service Reforms and National transformation, 2006). Such aspect would direct the public to know what the government earmarked to tiers of government so as to establish a basis for commending or challenging the said government. Indeed it was a transparent budget to all levels of government.

iii. **Public Procurement Reform:** The Public procurement Act (2007) came up with due process rules and regulations in public procurement to all ministries and parastatals specifically, the Act dwells on the following objectives:

- a. The harmonization of existing government policies and practices on public procurement; ensuring probity, accountability and transparency in the procurement process.
- b. The establishment of pricing standard and benchmarks;
- c. Ensuring the application of fair, competitive, transparent, value for money standards and practices for the procurement and disposal of public assets and services, and;
- d. The attainment of transparency, competitiveness, cost effectiveness and professionalism in the public sector procurement systems.

Therefore, the Act facilitated the federal government to establish the Bureau for Public Procurement as Agency (BPP) in compliance with the Act as well as the regulatory body towards directing ministries, parastatals and MDAs to adhere strictly with BPP guidelines (2007, Act). Indeed, MDAs were directed to establish their Procurement Unit interms of awarding contracts and all procurement related matters, for the attainment of transparency and public probity in governance.

iv. **Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI):** The

decision of the federal government to sign up to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in 2003 was thus informed by the need to enhance information, transparency and accountability on revenue flows in the sector. NEITI is the Nigerian arm of the global EITI established primarily to enthrone transparency and accountability in the management of payments made by extractive industries to government and revenues received by government and other statutory recipients. The NEITI Act (2007) provides legal backing to implement EITI principles and objectives in Nigeria Extractive sector (NEITI Handbook, 2011:11-12). Indeed, the basic mission of NEITI is centered "to cultivate a culture of transparency, accountability, due process and zero-tolerance for corruption in Nigeria's extractive industries for the benefit of the citizenry". Therefore, the NEITI was designed to attain certain objectives which would lead the said organizations to enhance a culture of transparency and public accountability in governance.

The objectives of NEITI was geared towards attainment of transparency and public probity and accountability to all extractive industry companies in Nigeria aimed at eliminating or reducing corruption and accelerating national development.

- v. **E-Payment:** The introduction of electronic payment system by late President Yar'adua was a starting point towards attaining e-governance in the era of globalization. The basis behind e-payment is to pay the existing staff who were in the payroll and contractors who follow the due process in order to reduce or eliminate paying ghost workers, invisible contractors and rent seekers in public service. Indeed, such attempt drastically reduced misappropriation of public funds in some agencies of government and is a step towards

accelerating public probity and accountability in governance.

- vi. **Anti Corruption Crusade:** Corruption is indeed the major explanation for the seemingly insolvable problem of poverty, diseases, hunger, and the general acute development tragedy in Nigeria (Ogundiya, 2012). Corruption tarnishes the image of a nation, perhaps, Nigeria suffers more than most societies from an appalling international image created by its inability to deal with bribery and corruption. For instance, the 1996 study of corruption by the Transparency International and Goettingen University ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation among 54 nations on the study, with Pakistan as the second highest (Moore, 1997 cited from Dike, 2002).

In this regard, the Obasanjo's reforms established two institutions (The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)) which were designed to remove corruption from governance and institutionalize a culture of transparency and accountability. Many top officials of government who have been caught in the anti-corruption dragnet, included ministers, governors, members of national assembly, officers within the security agencies, permanent secretaries, members of the judiciary have also been appropriately sanctioned as there are no longer any sacred cows.

Ribadu (2009) observed that between 1960 and 1999, Nigerian officials have stolen or wasted more than \$440 billion. This amount is said to have been six times the Marshal Plan, (the total sum needed to rebuild the devastation in Europe caused by the Second World War). In this regard, some top government officials such as ministers, permanent secretaries, Directors and members of legislature lost their position on the ground of corrupt practices or the other. Three senate presidents (Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo, and Adolphus Nwabara); and two speakers (i.e. Salisu Buhari and Patricia Etteh); Two ministers (Fabian Osuji of Education and

Adenike Grange of Health) as well as some governors like Alemaisegha of Bayelsa has been removed and many of others were indicted on corruption related offences after their tenure.

Challenges of public reforms in Nigeria

1. **Instability:** The Nigerian environment was unstable due to high rate of political instability, ethno-religious violence and communal clashes which deter the nation's security and adversely affects public service Reforms to achieved its basic objectives.
2. **Global financial crisis**
3. **Pressure from Citizens:** The citizens require adequate information on the action of government. Indeed, inadequate information on government policies, programmes and project led the citizens to protest against government.
4. **Sincerity of Purpose:** Government must not be selective in dispensation of justice and discharging its responsibility judiciously.
5. **Unintended Consequences of Reforms:** Downsizing to massive layoffs of public servants who lost their job. Such episodewould affect the labour market, standard of living of citizens and economic stability of the country.
6. **Failure of government to enhance transparency,** lack of periodic measurement andevaluation as well as absence of leadership by example made all reforms to became ineffective.
7. **Lack of involvement of civil society organizations and private sector to participate in policy formulation and implementation.**
8. **Delivering quality service to the citizens.**
9. **Periodic review of performance of the policy must be adhered to.**

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the paper concludes that public accountability was among the significant change that the public service reforms of Obasanjo'sYar'aduaadministration presented to the public officials in government. This

development has really helped towards reducing the level of corruption in public office and private sector management. Despite the fact that there was hiccup in probing some public officials, but the anti graft agencies (EFCC and ICPC) have tried and continue trying to fish out the corrupt people and punished them as appropriate. In the same vein, the public financial and procurement reforms, e-payment and Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) also enhanced prudence and probity on financial transactions, payment of entitlements and contractors as well as proper management of payments and revenue made by extractive industries and other statutory recipients to government.

Despite all measures taken for enhancing probity in public service but the anti graft agencies were remain laggard to become hunting dogs against opposition in order to achieved the egocentric interest of ruling elites.

Recommendations

Based on the above analysis so far, the paper recommends the following:

1. That the three tiers of government should provide the enabling legislations, policies, reforms and environment that put transparency and accountability at the centre-piece of governance.
2. That the anti graft agencies (EFCC and ICPC) should extend their project on anti-corruption crusade to all tiers of government in order to ensure public probity and accountability to the entire public.
3. State and local government should ensure strict compliance on fiscal responsibility and public procurement law order to attain public prudence in their states. Meanwhile, the monitoring and evaluation committee should also entrench at all level of government to adhere the stated law for public financial management.
4. The budgetary process should be strengthened and made more transparent with the involvement of civil society organization and other stakeholders in its preparation and execution as well as its monitoring and evaluation.
5. The people with probity, integrity and trust should be appointed to man Anti-corruption Agencies (EFCC&ICPC),

- Bureau of public procurement and NEITI to mandate them to overhaul the system aimed at attaining public probity and accountability in governance.
6. Severe punishment such as life imprisonment and execution against corrupt practices on certain offences should be put in place to combat the menace of corruption as well as to enhance public probity in government and private sector.
 7. Audit alarm mechanism should be introduced whereby members of the public and civil society organizations would have well defined institutional process for raising alarms on a number of issues both fiduciary and general.
 8. Leadership by example
 9. Periodic monitoring and evaluation and even review of policies that are not producing expected results.

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