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Bureaucracy and Public Service Efficiency in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the role of bureaucracy in public service efficiency in Nigeria. Specifically, the study focused on the effects of impersonal rules on public service efficiency and the influence of standard operating procedures on it in Nigeria. Qualitative methods, as well as Secondary data, were utilized as sources for data collection and for the discussion of findings. Findings revealed that bureaucracy in Nigeria has been bedeviled by monumental corruption, despite the supposed, contrary to impersonal rules that should guide the actions and inactions of bureaucrats, and that standard operating procedures have not been given their due as necessary components of bureaucracy. The study concluded that if corruption must be nipped in the bud, impersonal rules must be considered a precursor to efficient services in the public sector ecosystem in Nigeria. The study recommended, amongst other things, that corruption among public bureaucrats should be properly checkmated through impersonal rules and conditionalities; that actions and inactions of the public bureaucrats should be adequately checkmated through standard operating procedures.

Keywords: *Bureaucracy, public service, efficiency, Nigeria*

Introduction

Large and complex systems inevitably lead to bureaucracy, which is nonetheless a necessary component of public governance and an unstoppable force in modern administrative systems. Contrary to popular belief, bureaucracy has attracted harsh criticism from those whose lives have been affected by its decisions and actions. However, bureaucracy might be considered a necessary evil in certain ways, but nobody is prepared to do away with it. These perspectives that underpin the concept of bureaucracy have led to the recognition that the system contains positive aspects that managers and leaders of governments across Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa should recognize and utilize. Perhaps Weber's description of the ideal bureaucracy solved a conundrum of his time. Concerns were raised about how to address the issues posed by bureaucratic principles arising from the industrial revolution, as well as the challenges of the enlightened society. The subjectivity and ambiguity of the laws and regulations under which the current forms of authority operate make them insufficient to address the problem of this era. Weber developed a prescriptive definition of bureaucracy in an effort to address what he perceived as the illegitimacy of this type of authority structure. Weber's theory was not driven by any observed practice of the system at the time, but relied on views of what modern public management should look like in terms of structure, norms, and operations (Weber 1974). However, the way he presented his arguments was so compelling that anyone aiming for effective and efficient people management could relate to them.

According to Sharma (2012), bureaucracy is a byproduct of complexity. Bureaucracy is most visible in the executive arm of government, which is responsible for carrying out policies and programs and delivering to the populace the goods and services needed. Nations, organizations, and the like employ a unique system called bureaucracy to plan out their daily actions. The difficulty of leading human systems that grew larger and more complex by the day was eased for leaders with the development of Western bureaucracies over the many centuries that followed. One of the German sociologists who founded the field, Max Weber (1864–1920), claimed that the great virtue and perhaps defining feature of bureaucracy is that it is an institutional method for applying general rules to specific cases, thereby making the actions of government fair and more predictable (Akhakpe 2014:84). Weber made significant contributions to the theory of bureaucracy as a social construct. His ideal bureaucracy embodies the lawfully, effectively, and rationally structured populace and the efforts made by the elected officials in a democracy to accomplish goals. He pointed out that bureaucracy makes possible the function of the functionary, an intriguing term which is to act as a mediator between the people and the government or between the governor and the governed in a democratic system. The ten characteristics of the Weberian ideal-type bureaucracy are as follows:

Only when it comes to the impersonal tasks assigned to them by their positions can bureaucrats be individually free and subject to authority. There is a distinct office hierarchy among the bureaucrats. Fundamentally, office responsibilities are spelled out. Without coercion, the bureaucrats freely accept and hold their appointments. Technical qualifications, best supported by tests conducted by the appointing authority, a university degree, or both, form the basis for appointments. The differences in hierarchy are reflected in the money wages and pension rights that bureaucrats earn. Bureaucrats are allowed to leave the organization, but only under certain, previously specified circumstances can they be dismissed from their offices. For a bureaucrat, working in the office must be their primary source of income. A career structure is necessary; promotions must be based on the assessment of hierarchical supremacy, which either comes from seniority or merit. The bureaucrats possess neither personal nor property rights over the resources associated with their offices. The behaviors of bureaucrats are strictly regulated and controlled by impersonal rules and regulations (Akhakpe, 2014:23-28).

According to Weber (1974), an ideal formalized organization or bureaucracy would have the following collection of typical characteristics as its core: Division of labor: official functions are clearly defined, with power and responsibility outlined; Office jobs are arranged according to a hierarchy of authority, which creates a chain of command or what is referred to as "the scalar principle"; Formal selection: through formal examinations, education, or training, employees are chosen based on their technical qualifications (merits); Career managers are professionals who work for fixed incomes and seek "careers" within their particular areas, rather than being owners of the units they oversee; Formal rules: Strict formal rules and other conduct restrictions must be followed by administrators to operate. These guidelines and restrictions would be implemented consistently and impersonally.

Many management researchers saw Weber's writings on bureaucracy as imperative for organizing, coordinating, and managing people and materials because of its emphasis on efficiency, which emerged at the turn of the 20th century. Nonetheless, Weber's primary focus was on refining his ideal-type bureaucracy as a means of comparing organizational structures across civilizations. He was adamant that no organization would fit into the parameters of his bureaucratic paradigm. All he could think of was that a few organizations would resemble his perfect form of bureaucracy. All that Weber was doing was putting his theory on how society is modernizing and becoming more rationalized to the test. The population of modern cultures will get more intellectual, necessitating the creation of bureaucracy.

In contrast, Wilson (1992) defined efficiency as the relationship between valued resources consumed and valued outcomes generated. The production is more efficient the lower that ratio is. The most efficient technique is one that requires the fewest resources or the least time to generate a suitable road, such as in the case of a reconstructed road. But as Wilson points out, the valuable result can be more than just a fixed road! "A reputation for integrity, the confidence of the people, and the support of important interest groups" are just a few of the many valuable products that government produces. We talk as though roads were the only thing that mattered when we grumble about them not getting built on time. The conditions Weber outlined as ideal for bureaucrats to execute their public responsibilities are, however, far from being implemented, which is why there are constant deficiencies and/or inefficiencies in the public services provided to the people whom bureaucrats are employed to serve. Sub-Saharan Africa has far too many bureaucratic miscreants, and the enigmas surrounding their actions fall well short of the global norms and benchmarks for gauging public sector effectiveness. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate bureaucracy and public service efficiency in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Problem statement

Modern societies, particularly in the Sub-Saharan, and Nigeria in particular, over time have had to contend with enormous challenges of bureaucratic inefficiency resulting from unprofessional conduct and activities associated with the office of public bureaucracy. These unprofessional conducts are contingent upon the deep-rooted corruption in our public service, manifesting itself through poverty mentality, existential chauvinism and nepotism, and systemic impunity. For any society to have effective governance, it requires coordinated efforts of critical elements in the public and other segments. As the society expands to embrace bigger challenges and continually grapples with more complex activities and actions, it becomes increasingly imperative for the principal institutions of public management to be on top of the game of the state. Which include building human capital for more creative and innovative development, better delivery of services, urban management, environmental sustainability, disciplined fiscal operations, application of global best practices that would ensure better welfare and well-being of the people, among others, are in stiff contrast with the pursued realities of activities of the public bureaucrats in this part of the world. Cases abound, for example, in Nigeria, where public bureaucrats have brazenly diverted public resources for their selfish individual gains, in clear contrast to their defined roles and responsibilities. Against the backdrop, therefore, the study aims at investigating the bureaucracy and public service efficiency in Nigeria

Purpose of the study

1. Examine the effect of impersonal rules on public service efficiency in Nigeria
2. Ascertain the influence of standard operating procedures on public service delivery in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual clarification

Bureaucracy

The term *bureaucracy* is derived from the French word *bureau*, which was first used in Western Europe during the eighteenth century to refer to an office or government department where public officials carried out administrative duties. Originally, the French word *bureau* referred to the cloth covering office desks. The term *bureaucracy* emerged shortly before the French Revolution of 1789 and subsequently spread throughout Europe and other parts of the world. The Greek suffix *kratos* or *kratia* means power or rule; bureaucracy literally denotes rule by offices or officials (Sharma & Sadana, 2017; Weber, 1947). Bureaucracy refers to a system of administration characterized by formal authority structures, hierarchical relationships, division of labour, and the application of standardized rules and procedures to organizational activities (Weber, 1947; Henry, 2018). It is embodied in formal power structures, relationships, hierarchy, and rule-bound procedures that govern most organizational processes.

The following are some of the key attributes of bureaucracy that can be inferred from the definitions given above:

Group of public servants not subject to elections; a body that develops administrative policies; government with a structure of authority, specialized roles, and strict adherence to regulations; an administrative structure characterized by bureaucracy, red tape, and expansion; a clear distribution of administrative duties among individuals and offices; a personnel structure featuring stable linear careers and regular recruitment patterns; a system of offices organized in a hierarchy where players' status and power are assigned differently; also, Networks, both formal and informal, that link actors within an organization.

Public service efficiency

The concept of public service efficiency has to do with service delivery, which is concerned with what government can properly and successfully do, and how it can do these things with the utmost possible efficiency and at the lowest possible cost, either of money or energy. In this context, the government is the principal factor in ensuring that public services operate effectively (Wilson, 2017). Therefore, for public service to be efficient, it must be concerned with the capacity of government leadership to make public service fit, sound, competent, functional, and efficient to serve the interests and well-being of the people.

Bureaucracy in Sub-Saharan Africa

Public choice theory must be applied to comprehend the nature of the kleptocratic relationship between the African continent, particularly the Sub-Saharan Africa, and the public bureaucracy. According to public choice theory, rules that ultimately aim to regulate and condition the relationships among individuals and groups, as well as between entrepreneurs and the bureaucracy, should be an outgrowth of society (Mbaku, 2000). The theory emphasizes the importance of public input in the rules governing individuals and society. State actors are bent on manipulating the weak, localized, ineffective, and the poorly written constitution to secure their virtually limitless authority and unrestricted access to private transactions in a system where the rules reflect the interests of the dominant class in the society. Resource distribution in such economies is typically highly politicized (Arowolo, 2019). The regulations that govern people's actions in a society are important and play a significant role in shaping the behavior of both individuals and organizations. It is only under the law currently in place that the actions of bureaucrats and political actors who conspire to commit corruption can be properly checked. Therefore, it would be pointless to study or comprehend corruption within a society without a deeper understanding of that nation's laws and structures. Any anticorruption program would be ineffectual if it did not take into account how the laws now in place affect the behavior of various members of society, such as voters, bureaucrats, politicians, and entrepreneurs. Rules establish guidelines for social interactions, offer a channel for resolving disputes, and typically impose limitations on personal conduct. The ability of the state to enforce compliance frequently determines whether or not stakeholders are willing to play by the rules (Mbaku, 2000). Nigeria's current anti-corruption initiatives face several challenges. First of all, they are being carried out under unworkable, ineffective rules. Secondly, the anti-corruption campaign itself entails attempts to influence results while adhering to the law as it stands. Third, the laws do not adequately restrain the counteracting agencies and the bureaucrats employed by them, who are tasked with policing and enforcing the laws. Fourth, it is impossible to rely on bureaucrats to exhibit the leadership required to oversee this campaign, as many of them are themselves corrupt. Lastly, there is insincerity and a lack of commitment on the part of the political office holders who are acting on behalf of the state to ensure an effective and long-lasting anti-corruption campaign. Nigeria currently operates under a set of constitutional laws approved at independence and only slightly modified since then.

Nigeria has made numerous attempts to change its post-independence laws and institutions. Still, it has not been able to create adequate institutions or laws to achieve the outcomes that the country's citizens want. Rather, Nigeria's "constitution" is essentially a copy of European constitutional models. The majority of the institutions that Britain introduced to Nigeria were structures of exploitation and despotism. The outcome of this has been the privatization of the state by those tasked with maintaining its continuity and stability, as well as institutional instability. Consequently, sycophancy was prioritized over merit, and clientelism took over the place of moral rectitude (Arowolo, 2019). Therefore, the laws governing socioeconomic and political interactions do not result from discussions among representatives of the various segments of the country. Instead, these regulations are the products of the British intention to achieve their selfish interests, and the military's continued engineering of the post-colonial rule-making. The constitutional discourse was still confined to the views of a small urban elite, while a sizable portion of the country's political opinions were neglected. By taking advantage of venality, Nigeria and the bureaucracy manipulate the hordes of illiterate people and strengthen their economic base by playing on the frailties of the current regulations and the structure's weakness. If neither the state nor the bureaucracy had encouraged such initiatives, there would be no connection of corruption between them. Consequently, the unholy alliance between the political class and the bureaucrats is the result of the bureaucratic corruption, which has hindered their ability to function effectively and provide efficient services to the public. In support of the above claim, a researcher has suggested that the Nigerian civil service is a significant instrument through which foreign capital exploits the country's resources and economy. In this regard, it consistently takes a collaborative approach (Amuwo, 2019).

Role of bureaucracy in public service efficiency in Nigeria

Fundamentally, the way the general public views bureaucracy and public administration is a key determinant of how much they can achieve in a particular setting. The negative perception of public administrators and/or bureaucrats is not peculiar to Africa. It occurs all over the world. This implies that taking it with you is the only way to handle it. Taking it with you entails fighting them when they rear their ugly heads in political procedures. However, it appears that these illnesses, which have major ramifications for the expansion, development, and welfare of both the people and the government, have not been addressed by succeeding administrations. The transplantation of structures, institutions, and policies from developed countries, which began shortly after independence and continues to this day, has significant consequences for development centered on the needs of people in Nigeria. It is pertinent to observe that certain cultural values, predominantly Anglo-American in content, are the sources of institutional policies and programs from North

America and Europe. However, without the required adaptations, their ability to swallow hook, line, and sinker has reduced them to mere shadows of their original forms in their natural habitat. For instance, modernization, as a foundation for political and socioeconomic advancement in Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, did not accelerate African growth (Akhakpe 2014).

In a similar vein, structural adjustment programs, or SAPs, failed to revive the faltering African economy. Globalization is currently viewed as the remedy for humanity's overall evolution worldwide. However, there is no doubt that it affects Europe and Africa differently. The benefits of it may not yet have reached their full potential in Africa, at least not in tangible terms (Igbokwe-Ibeto 2018). However, public servants may adopt international best practices for administration; implementing them in their working environments may be quite different. Every organization's behavioral components determine whether it succeeds or fails. Even though some of the formal organizations that we use today were not founded on a moral code, their managers nevertheless manage them under a moral hazard framework that makes it challenging for them to achieve the common good (Akhakpe 2014). The challenges of corruption, waste, and maladministration in the public service are evidenced by the efforts made by the governments to reorient public employees. Still, these efforts have not yielded positive results. The conflict of interest between the beliefs of the government and the goals of public officials may be the major reason that accounts for the current situation in the public sector. In Africa in general, not many public administrators and/or bureaucrats have faith in the system (Akhahpe 2014). As a result, the state's cohesiveness is shaky, and service delivery is tokenistic. Individual interests take precedence over the welfare of the group. The ruling class is still at odds over what the problems are and how best to tackle them, in a frenzied, detached way that benefits the whole commonwealth.

Poverty, social disruption, and economic immiseration are the norms when distributive justice is lacking. For those fortunate enough to enter the corridor of power and the precinct, it is not so much a chance to serve humanity as it is to serve oneself, one's friends, and one's family. Perhaps, the militarist culture imposed on the African body polity during military administration would take a long time to be eradicated from the public service. Indeed, habit dies hard. Also, due process, constitutionalism, and the rule of law were abandoned; authoritarian ideals became the order of the day during military rule (Akhakpe 2014). Only a few years after the independence, the military took over governance in many African states, which made the situation worse. The majority of institutions lacked sufficient adherence to their established routines, moral standards, and ethos. As a result, democratic structures were destroyed, institutions were suspended, and new values were incorporated into the political, social, and economic vocabularies whenever the military launched an attack (Akhakpe 2014). Another phase of political socialization and teaching begins once they turn over political power to civilians. Politicians and bureaucrats currently have ample time to study and put the theory and practice of liberal democracy into practice.

Regrettably, the virtue of professionalism has not been inculcated into administrators despite years of administrative reforms. These reforms are only beneficial to public officials if they seek only to enhance their material circumstances, because they will not enhance their capacity to provide efficient services to the public. Many of these reforms have occurred without altering the character of the public sector or the way officials perform their duties. Although the majority of African nations have started these reform initiatives, there is still significant room for improvement in their execution. Some governments may not have been able to implement these reform measures fully for various reasons. These may include a lack of political will on the part of those implementing it, a lack of funding for state programs, non-payment of severance benefits to those affected by government policies, and so forth (Adamolekun & Kiragu, 2018). Several departments and agencies were formed to carry out tasks that were comparable or identical, leading to conflicts and assignment duplication. This makes carrying out government duties needlessly difficult and time-consuming. This makes carrying out government duties needlessly difficult and time-consuming. It is well known that bureaucracy expands its purview by creating new agencies to raise money and boost budgets. According to Akhakpe (2014), these dual functions have the potential to impede the efficacy and efficiency of government operations unless they are well balanced. The diminishing significance of training and retraining of public personnel is another worrying aspect of the administrative systems in developing nations. Public sector organizations in Africa took great pleasure in their training practices during the 1970s and 1980s. Public servants eagerly anticipated receiving training both domestically and abroad. Through this kind of training, public servants were better able to stay up to date on performance requirements and current trends in their particular fields of expertise. But the desire for and interest in training have drastically decreased during the 1990s (Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2016). Public sector employees are no longer passionate about training because it offers them no value. It is because they either cannot apply the knowledge they have learned or they do not have the opportunity to do so (Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto 2016).

Additionally, there are other reasons why public service morale is at an all-time low, such as a deficient reward system, a failure to advance employees when it is due, inadequate compensation, the early retirement of qualified employees, and the pervasiveness of nepotism, favoritism, and ethnic discrimination. All of these stifle public employees' fervor and enthusiasm for carrying out their duties. As a result, very few public officials are committed to their duties, nowadays. Many of them prefer part-time jobs to supplement their meager pay, while others start their own businesses even while still in service. Given that it has voluntarily taken on the skilled and seasoned personnel who have left the public sector in pursuit of better opportunities elsewhere, it appears that the private sector stands to gain the most from the dire circumstances facing the public sector. However, the benefits of these initiatives have not been sufficiently felt in the private sector, which would have encouraged economic stimulation and development, particularly in the areas of industrialization and employment creation. The majority of jobs are still found in the public sector. The majority of unskilled workers are still employed by the public sector, which is against the principles of new public management. All things being equal, there is a stark lack of positive leadership. The administrative system's operations have suffered due the poor leadership in the public sector, both among bureaucrats and administrators. In terms of public organizations' overall performance, leadership is crucial. The mere absence of men of integrity in the public sector is negatively affecting governments at all levels in their efforts to provide leadership (Akhakpe, 2014).

Currently, a captive type of leadership that prioritizes their own interests over the interests of the majority rules the public sector in Africa. On the surface, the obstacles this paper has highlighted for bureaucracy and public administration in Africa may seem overwhelming and intricate. They are not insurmountable, though. Every obstacle contains a chance. This implies that obstacles mentioned in the segment of this discourse that came before could become chances for African growth. It is possible to turn around what appears to be a dire situation for the benefit of all parties involved with coordinated efforts, meticulous planning, and a commitment to the development of Africa. This segment of the speech will examine possible initiatives to advance public administration and the civil bureaucracy in Africa.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative method and secondary data. Qualitative method, on the one hand, is particularly appropriate for analyzing textual materials such as scholarly publications, policy documents, reports, and digital content, as they enable the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and perspectives relevant to the research phenomenon. At the same time, secondary data allows the researcher to have a deeper understanding of the issue at hand by examining existing documents and records.

Discussion of findings

According to the Mo Ibrahim Foundation Report (2018), only three nations in Africa have at least one doctor per 1,000 people: Libya, Mauritius, and Tunisia. Government spending in sub-Saharan Africa varies; in South Sudan, it accounts for about 36% of GDP, while in Chad, it is less than 5%. The population of Cairo surpasses that of all 36 of the continent's least populated nations combined. Of all the regions, Sub-Saharan Africa spends the least on public health, well below the global average. The public health spending in sub-Saharan Africa as a percentage of GDP decreased by less than 15% between 2009 and 2014. Among the ten African nations with the highest public health spending as a percentage of overall government spending, five of them are also among the ten with the most. Just 19% of people in sub-Saharan Africa have access to social insurance, while 60% of employment in the region is considered vulnerable. More than 40% of people in Egypt, Liberia, Morocco, and Sudan struggle to get access to healthcare. Less than 12% of all jobs in Africa are held by public employees, compared with the average for Europe and Central Asia of about half. According to the electronic payroll system, 27% of the health workers registered as salary beneficiaries in the Kasaï Central and Kasaï Provinces (DRC) were found to be ghost workers. The Sub-Saharan region is plagued by widespread corruption. Inadequate sanitation and hygiene standards, together with deficient health systems, contributed to the fast spread of Ebola throughout West Africa.

In the past five years, educational advancement has all but stopped on a continent where over 40% of the population is under the age of fifteen. Among the 14 subcategories of the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, personal safety has declined the most over the last 10 years. In 36 countries, over 50% of respondents said it was difficult to get court assistance. On the continent, South Sudan and Libya have the lowest public health budget shares, but they also rank among the top ten highest military spending percentages relative to GDP. In Rwanda, Mozambique, and Madagascar, over 60% of primary school pupils left school in 2012. According to the 2017 World Development Report, the average youth unemployment rate in Africa (13.6%) is more than twice the adult rate.

Furthermore, the population of the 20 largest cities on the continent in 2018 exceeds that of numerous nations. In 25 African countries, the number of subnational administrative units has increased by at least 20% since 1990. The increases include South Africa, from 53 to 284, and Guinea, from 14 to 341. Private security, education, and health are growing at an exponential rate to fill the gap left by public services, potentially exacerbating inequality throughout the continent. A fifth of ODA in Africa is spent on health, with nearly half going toward population-related initiatives like HIV/AIDS prevention. The average private health spending in sub-Saharan Africa is 57.4%, more than twice that in Europe and Central Asia. Private health spending exceeds 70% in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sudan, and Uganda. Outside Latin America and the Caribbean, the average percentage of primary education students in sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in private institutions in 2014 was 11.4%. The percentage of government spending on public employee salaries ranges widely across the continent, from 7.4% to 56.2%. Only in Mauritius are civil officers appointed and assessed solely based on global integrity (Evans, 1995).

Conclusion and recommendations

The study investigated the role of bureaucracy in public service efficiency in Nigeria. On the whole, it was found that the lack of technology, cultural factors, government policies, and corruption have collectively made Sub-Saharan African nations, particularly Nigeria, impoverished and perpetually underdeveloped, where development remains elusive and unattainable, the spoiled system becomes the norm, and meritocracy is a forbidden fruit. There are few or no resources for investment, and the continent becomes a danger zone for foreign investors.

Discernible from the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Corruption among public bureaucrats should be properly checked through impersonal rules and conditionalities to engender effective and efficient service delivery in the public service.
2. The actions and inactions of the public bureaucrats should be properly guided through the standard operating procedures, which shall bring forth public good.

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