The Challenges of Public Administration, Good Governance and Service Delivery in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary studies on public administration in Nigeria have revealed two dramatic findings. First, despite the moderate achievements in democratic governance and being rich in natural and human resources, there remain many politico-administrative challenges to be addressed in Nigeria. Second, ailing public administration has resulted in disturbing socio-economic indicators which are among the worst in the world. This paper examines the challenges of public administration for effective service delivery and good governance in Nigeria. The paper employs descriptive method of research and content analysis which is anchored on 'efficiency theory' to examine the subject matter. Findings reveal that, notwithstanding the dramatic administrative reforms, citizen's confidence in government service is near an historic low because of poor service delivery and exclusionary policies. The paper submits that the label of poor performance and absence of excellence in the public service has the tendency to undermine development and good governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Development, Excellence, Exclusionary Policies, Good Governance, Management Challenges, Nigeria, Public Administration, Public Sector, Service Delivery

INTRODUCTION

Despite the disturbing socio-economic indicators facing Africa today, there is an increasingly broadly-held conviction that efforts toward modernizing African States cannot succeed unless they are equipped with public administrations that are geared toward meeting the new challenges of economic and social development (Ajayi, 2008). This is why administrative actions and modalities of government operation continue to be the object of criticism both by users and by civil society. It lends credence to the fact that the organization, role and missions of public administrations must in fact be reviewed and adapted to the political, economic and social context of African States, which has changed considerably over the last decade (Anazodo, 2009). In that regard, public administrations in many countries in Africa such as Nigeria are today faced with

the question of determining what their contribution should be toward resolving social problems in areas such as employment, health, power supply, education, housing and leisure (Ibori, 2014).

In all of these areas, they are expected to be innovative, to improve the quality of the services they provide and to upgrade their managerial skills in order to better respond to the aspirations of the population. Although public administration has been on the public stage for many decades now, the recent attention, interest and criticism it is receiving is not unconnected with the link between governance and its effect on performance, success as well as service delivery (Anazodo, 2009). However in Nigeria, public administration has had a chequered history resulting into scandals including fraud, abuse of power, governance failure and evasion of accountability among others. This has resulted into public sector reforms, as part of a broader initiative to improve service delivery, decision making, planning, accountability and monitoring which has also received substantial attention, interest and criticism in the past (Achimugu, 2010).

Nonetheless, while the idea of good governance is an encumbered concept requiring due consideration (Ajayi, 2008), it is intertwined with the challenges of public administration toward improving governance. Perhaps for good governance and public sector transformation to be achieved, public administration and public sector entities need to have an applied strategy to achieve results and outcomes (Ayeni, 2002). Nevertheless, the Nigerian public administration system has experienced a significant transformation to secure its position of importance in the general discourse on governance. This effort has occurred amidst streams of political developments that has brought the system into sharp focus and relevance. This however, has been very challenging to the public service as well as providing a platform for new policy direction and scholarship. For instance, growing literature on the collapse of probity and good governance in Nigeria has revealed that public service is severely scored down on its failure to provide the required institutional grounding for good governance (Aderonmu, 2011).

This paper therefore examines the challenges encountered by the Nigerian public administration toward efficient service delivery and good governance using descriptive methodology and content analysis. It evaluates the dilemma of public administration, effective service delivery and good governance in Nigeria and demonstrates that the critical point in achieving meaningful developments in the country intrinsically lay with improved public service which translates into efficient service delivery in the public sector. This is an attempt toward employing a new pathway to advances in the public administration of the Nigeria. It will also demonstrate that the critical point in achieving meaningful developments in the country in the 21st century intrinsically lay with improved service delivery in the public sector. The paper proffers meaningful suggestions toward possible future considerations for improved publics administration, service delivery and good governance in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

1. **Public Administration:** Public administration has no generally accepted definition. This is because the scope of the subject is so great and so debatable that it is easier to explain than define. Public administration is therefore a field of study, that is, a discipline and an occupation. Public administration, by extension has been defined as the putting together of human and material resources in order to achieve the objectives of public policy (Eme & Ede, 2007). Administrative activities can take place in a variety of settings, provided the crucial elements are present such as the cooperation of human beings to perform tasks that have been mutually accepted as worthy of the joint effort (Eme & Ede, 2007). The institutional framework in which administration occurs may be as diverse as business firms, labour unions, churches, educational institutions or governmental units. Public administra-

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