

Politics and Ethical Standard in the Management of Public Programmes in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper addresses the adverse effects of politics on management of public programmes in Nigeria by pinpointing the place of ethical standard in the successful management of public programmes. Thus, the paper argued that in Nigeria, political office holders first of all, seek to satisfy basic group interest in order to consolidate power to satisfy their personal interests by placing their personal and political friends at the helms of affairs where policies on public programmes are made and executed; and as a result, public programmes are administered in cognisance of the vested interest with little attention paid to accountability; transparency, efficiency and prudent management of public programmes which ethical standards herald.*

Keywords: *Politics, Ethics, Public Programmes, Accountability, Corruption, Development.*

I. Introduction

The need for accountability and transparency in the management of the Nigerian public programmes has led to various administrations emphasis on due process in the day-to-day planning and implementation of public programmes in Nigeria. These calls were hinged on the ethical standards that must be observed in conducting government businesses as supported by the emergence of opinion consensus that good governance achieved through effective and efficient administration of various public programmes in the polity as the sure path to sustainable socio-economic development. This is in lieu of the failures ab-initio recorded in the public programmes administration which authors and commentators have linked to ineptitudes in the administration of public programmes embedded in “politics” whose effect has been phenomenal.

Even with positive connotations, politics has been highlighted as the main culprit of this national economic decadence because it has been played to the gallery without recourse to the adverse effects of non-adherence to the rule of eth game and rule of engagement, hence unethically criminal practices exalts itself on corruption, gross misconduct, embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds and the likes, hence in Nigeria, there is generally a condition of poor service delivery in the public sector organizations or institutions caused by poor management of public programmes or projects, lack of adequate funding of public programmes or projects, poor utilization of available funds by politicians and others who manage the provision of such services (Ayodele, 2001).

Thus, this paper essentially examines the place of politics and ethics in managing public programmes in Nigeria; resulting to examination of the intricacies of politics and ethics in managing public programmes in Nigeria; identification of the factors responsible for breakdown of ethical principles and practices in Nigeria public service and consequences on managing public programmes; to enable a recommendations on the possible measures of checkmating and strengthening ethics in public service and management of public programmes in Nigeria.

II. Concept Clarification:

The concepts listed below require clarifications to give fair background to the issue, which this paper addresses.

Politics: there is no general accepted definition of politics hence, the many definitions by various authors. Politics according to Lasski (1958) is “who gets what, when and how?” This definition sees politics as an act of manipulation to get something through any possible means. Also Easton (1980) defined politics as the authoritative allocation of values in the society. Authoritative here lies with those who control the state power; perhaps why Nnoli (1987) defined politics as all the activities directly or indirectly related to the seizure, consolidation and use of state power. This encompasses the activities involved in getting and using power in public life, and being able to influence decisions that affect a country or a society. It includes matters concerned with getting or using power within a particular group or organization. Therefore, politics here is a form of activity that leads to the determination of one’s place in the allocation of values in a definite polity. It is a kind of game play that involves activities which people enter into to pursue groups, personal or selfish interest(s).

Ethics:

According to Lacey (1976) "ethics is synonymous with "moral", connoting customs, habits and accepted ways of behaviour of an individual or a community hence, ethics is defined as an inquiry into how men ought to act in general, not as a means to a given end, but as an end itself. To Macham (1977) ethics is "the study of whether there is a set of virtues as a code of principles of conduct for everyone and what these are, if they do exist". In other words, ethics is a system of moral principles that govern or influence a person's behaviour in the public sphere".

III. Programme Management:-

Programme management is a process of achieving certain developmental goals in a society by the government through the utilization of resources such as personnel, energy, land, finance, technology, and other material resources. However, according to Nagarajan (2008), programme management is an organized venture for managing activities which involves scientific application of modern tools and techniques in planning, financing, monitoring, controlling and coordinating unique activities or tasks to produce desirable outputs, in accordance with pre-determined objectives, time and cost. Koder (1998) conceived programme management as the subordination of group activities where in, the manager plans, organizes staff directs and controls them to achieve an objective within constraints of time, cost and performance of end products. It is clear from the above conceptual clarification that programme management is a very complex administrative process requiring managing scope of activities to be embarked upon involving, time, human and material resources, finance, with effective planning, supervision, execution, control and evaluation in order to attain desired goal at minimal cost.

IV. Politics as an Issue in Public Programme Management in Nigeria

A lot of things are taken for granted in Nigeria. In fact, very many of them, however negative and abnormal are seen as a way of life passed through unto the future generations. In academic parlance, these attitudes are said to have been institutionalised. A core issue is politicisation of public policies. Such politicisation has been availed on the altar of ethnicism, nepotism and corruption. These issues inherent in politics negate the rule of engagement- ethics as a viable foundation for sustainable development. Below are few issues emanating from our system; a scheme which does not encourage playing by the rule because of the obvious scramble for the national cake at the detriment of its baking and the fate of future generation. However, seen from a positive stance, politics essentially presupposes the existence of conflict of interests and attempts at reconciling such conflicts for the purposes of attaining a peaceful and orderly society in order that the full potentialities of man could be realized. Hence, given the fact that most men are ever pursuing power to satisfy their greed, there will always be conflicts in society. Thus, the state exists to moderate such conflicts through the process of superintending over the allocation of socially owned goods and services to the various interests in society. In line with this view, Wildavsky (1964:4) has noted that:

Human nature is never more evident than when men are struggling to gain a large share of funds or to apportion what they have among myriad claimants, hence budgeting deals with the purposes of men; how they can be moved to cooperate, and how can their recalcitrant problems be solved. In servicing diverse purposes, a budget can be many things; a political act, a plan of work, a prediction, a source of enlightenment, a means to action, a brake on progress, even a prayer that the powers that be will deal gently with the best aspirations of fallible men.

There is no better way of showcasing politics in the management of public programmes than in the budget. According to Abdullahi (2011), in many ways budget documents are the most important manifestation of public they record the outcome of the political process: winners and losers of the political competition. They delineate government total service effort. As political documents budget allocate scarce resources among competing social and economic needs. As managerial documents they specify the ways and means for providing for government services. By establishing the costs for various programs they set up the criteria by which government programs are to be reviewed and evaluated. Budget has become the main instrument by which government attempts to manage economic growth and development. Budgets become accounting instruments by which officials are held accountable for what government does and does not manage to accomplish. In Nigeria the basic requirement for the budgetary process in the public sector are provided for in the current constitution of the federal republic, financial regulations and financial memorandum (Abdullahi 2008).

This is why the very notion of the politics of the budgetary process implies the influence, which men bring to bear on the preparation, approval as well as the execution of governmental budgets interpreted in public programmes. It emphasizes the desires and preferences of men in the budgetary process. This is because budget is the viable instrument that answers the question posed by Harold Laswell in his definition of politics as "who

gets what, how, when and why” of the collectively owned financial resources; which also confirms Easton’s definition of politics as “the authoritative allocation of values” among the contending interests and preferences in society. Perhaps, why Nwankwo (1998) posited, “if politics is regarded in part as conflict over whose preferences shall prevail in the determination of national policy, then the budget records the outcomes of this struggle”. Thus, it is because “the various interests in society” vie with one another to have their preferences recorded in the budget that leads to the issue of conflict. The victories and defeats, the compromises and the bargains, the realms of agreements and the sphere of conflict in regard to the national government in our society all appear in the budget. In the most integral sense, the budget lies at the heart of the political process. But the question that comes to mind is ‘what is the position of ethics in the budgetary processes and does it mean that the budget is politicised? The essence of these questions is made manifest in the assertion “the budgetary process is the route through which allocation of resources is made possible for the approval of public programme”. Therefore, public programmes are usually conceived under the context of politics.

V. Factors Responsible for the Politics of Public Programme in Nigeria

Some national issues are of interest in the determination of developmental projects, their planning, development and allocation in Nigeria such as the character of the Nigerian state, national leadership, ethnicity and group interest:

✘ The Character of the Nigerian State

Nigerian state by creation is a British handwork (Ezeani, 2004), hence it has formally not existed as an entity before the British colonial rule, but during the colonial rule, diverse social groups were joined together as one (Nnadozie 2004). However, these groups have always engaged in politics reflective of group interest to achieve their needs, where the strongest group dominates and decides what goes to rest groups. Since amalgamation, the major ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) have always dominated the processes of project planning and development. Such domination has led to various and varying degrees of clamour of marginalisation by the dominant groups. Amongst these dominated groups is the Niger-Deltans from whose land the Oil that maintains today’s Nigeria economy and whose land oil spillage has devastated to the point that they lack portable drinking water. Currently, any national developmental project is situated in the Hausa land, Yoruba land or Igbo land; a point that instigated the Niger Delta Militancy. The same bias is also observed in the emergence of prominent political and public office holder. This character is so obvious that it seems a way of life of Nigerians. Today, due to the avid shout for marginalization, the President Goodluck Jonathan is representing the South-South Minority zone for the first time since inception of the country even before the birth of the state during amalgamation exercise a century ago.

✘ National Leadership/Crisis of Political Interest

Leadership is process of governing, giving directions and commands to others especially within the boundary of one legitimate authority (Onah, 2005). The national leadership is seen as foundation through which the common wealth is shared. The group, which controls the leadership, also controls the power to allocate values to other groups. In Nigeria, the northerners have controlled national power more than any other group in Nigeria and have taken the jumbo share in developmental projects. Such controls have aggravated much politics in the administration of public programmes in Nigeria. This understanding has been linked to the definition of politics as “who gets what, when and how?” “an act of manipulation to get something through any possible means”, “the authoritative allocation of values in the society. Authoritative here, lying with those who control the state power”; and “all the activities directly or indirectly related to the seizure, consolidation and use of state power to ones advantage” (Lasski (1958); Easton (1980); Nnoli (1987)).

✘ Ethnicity and Group Interests

Ethnicity pressure is another factor, which has always played key role in determining the allocation of values in the Nigerian society. Ethnicity goes with tribal identity as well as carrying tribal interest into national affairs and not national interest. National leaders, Public officers, politicians and bureaucrats have often showed more loyalty to their social groups/ethnicity groups rather than the national loyalty (Ake 1987). Hence planning and execution of development of projects are always conceived along-side ethnic interest and the ethnic group that produced the national leaders tends to be allocated more projects than others groups. These factors have led to more politicisation of public programmes in Nigeria. Furthermore, these groups whose interests were not enormously represented in a given political administration will keep struggling to be involved or represented and when any position of authority is given to them, they first and foremost, see it as a compensation to their group and thus made sure that such position reflects hundred percent them. Unfortunately, this trend has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society to a point that on presidential cabinet, every state must be

represented. On any national issues needing a committee to be set up, the national identity must reflect instead of interest.

VI. Challenges of the Application of Ethics in Public Programme Administration in Nigeria

Due to the daunting challenges that the politicisation of public programmes, management and enforcement of ethical principles in Nigeria have been hindered by factors that include:

- i) Immunity clause imbedded in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in Section 308, which protects sitting/serving President and Vice-President at the Federal level, and Governors and Deputy Governors at the State level from facing civil or criminal proceedings. Undeniably, this constitutes a daunting hurdle in driving the anti-corruption crusade. Because, the ICPC, for instance has powers to investigate but lacks the powers to prosecute the beneficiaries of these immunity clauses; which is why the dishevel these programmes.
- ii) Self-interest, Self-protection, Self-deception, Self-righteousness, and self-indulgence in dishonesty, corruption, nepotism, indiscipline, and prejudices etc
- iii) Lack of remuneration that is commensurate with the public servants' responsibilities and performance, and the need to equalise it to enables them to live in dignity undeniably do stimulate and sustain ethical misconduct in the public service; and
- iv) Conflict of interest, arising mainly from pressure to make ends meet. For instance, as a result of poor remuneration, a sizeable number of Civil Servants engage in secondary income generating activities which often times clash with their official time. But importantly is the wide gap that exist between the incomes of politicians or public office holders and the civil services hence all efforts are geared towards equilibrating the income.
- v) Threat to life of those in position to enforce the public organisations ethical standards by those in position of benefiting from the gains of politics in public programmes allocation, citation, execution and the likes.

VII. Strengthening Public Programme Management in Spite of the Gross Misconduct

Efforts at strengthening ethical standards in the administration of public programmes in Nigeria have been on the rise notwithstanding the witch-hunt by the politicization factor. For the purpose of this study, the following ways have been identified as basic mechanisms for strengthening public programmes by various authors:

- (1) Ensuring effective continuous public enlightenment on standard ethical values to be undertaken with a view to halting the decline of the time-honoured ethical principles and rules in the public service; broadening and deepening the general public's understanding of ethics in the public service; and promoting the culture of sound ethical fitness embedded in the general public enlightenment campaign which spanned the "ethical revolution of (1981); the War Against Indiscipline of (1986); Mass Mobilization for Self-reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) of 1987 and the National Orientation Agency (NOA).
- (2) The continuing Promotion of Administrative Accountability normally by enshrining standard ethical values in the Codes of conduct which encourages public servants to adhere to the mandatory and permissible conduct in the public service. Relevant indicators include, the 1999 "Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria", which provides for "National Ethics, Code of Conduct for Public Officers", abolishment of corrupt practices and abuse of power, and "Oath of Office" for Principal Officers of the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary Arms of Government at both the Federal and State Levels (vide Chapter II, Section 23; 5th Schedule, Part I; Chapter II, Section 15 (5), and 7th Schedule, respectively, of the said constitution); "Nigeria's National Anthem; Nigeria's National Pledge; Civil Service Handbook (FGN, 1997)", which spells out the "Code of Ethics in Government Business in its Chapter 4", underscoring the value of discipline and adherence to service rules and regulations; "Ministerial Code of Conduct and Ethics (FGN, 1999b)", to which all serving Ministers and Special Advisers to the President publicly subscribe and express commitment to uphold towards preserving and enhancing public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of public functionaries; Laws and rules, which prohibit misconduct and corruption, as well as prescribe appropriate punishments for violators, for example regular penal codes criminalising corruption; Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (2000); Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act (2002); Public Procurement Act (2007); Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007); Nigeria EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) Act 2007; 2008 Public Service Rules (PSR), which prohibit misconduct, and serious misconduct, as defined in PSR 030301 and PSR 030401 respectively, as well as seeking influence of prominent persons (FR 030427), receipt of presents in recognition of service rendered or anticipation of service to be rendered

(FR 030433), bribery and corruption (FR 030434), including conduct prejudicial to state security (FR 030501); and the 2009 Financial Regulations (FR), which provide appropriate guidance to all public officers in carrying out government financial transactions (FR 101); and Public service reforms, a series of which was Gundu 149 inaugurated with the constitution of the “Gorsuch Committee” in 1954, have been undertaken to reposition the federal public service for better performance. In the same vein, the Federal Government of Nigeria launched the on-going public service reform programme (PSRP) in 2003. Its implementation is being guided by the National Strategy for Public Service Reform (NSPSR) (FGN, 2008b).

- (3) Making the Established Watchdog Bodies efficient to ensure integrity including the Internal bodies, such as the Code of Conduct Bureau, which has been enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria by the provisions of its Section 153, and 3rd Schedule, Part 1, Section 1; Public Complaints Commission (PCC) (Nigeria’s Ombudsman), established by Decree No. 31 of 1975 (as further amended by Decree No. 21 of 1979) with the mandate to provide impartial investigation of complaints received from aggrieved citizens against government agencies (that is Federal, State, and Local Governments), corporate organisations and their officials; Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP), established by the provisions of the Public Procurement Act 2007, with the mandate to prevent fraudulent and unfair procurement, and where necessary apply administrative sanctions; Auditor- General for the Federation (AuGF), mandated to undertake financial audit, appropriation audit, financial control audit, and value-for-money audit with a view to ensuring due compliance with the applicable accounting practices and standards (vide FR 108 and FR 109 of the 2009 Financial Regulations); and Independent external bodies, including the “media”, organised Non-Governmental Actors (for example Nigerian Chapters of Transparency International, and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Integrity Club (formed in 1998) etc.), recent upsurge of a plethora of Integrity Forums, and professional bodies (for example Institute of Management Consultants Nigeria (IMC-Nigeria), Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), etc.). These bodies have been actively involved in the crusade for promoting compliance with professional ethical principles in the country.
- (4) Ensuring that punitive measure are administered as part of the management of misconduct and enforcement of Ethical Principles and Laws to make sure prospective deviants are deterred hence Nigerians generally believe that the emplacement of a framework of mechanism for preventing misconduct in the public service is necessary but not sufficient “per se”. Therefore, this measure needs to be supported with structured mechanisms for managing misconduct and enforcing compliance with acceptable ethical principles. To this end, Nigeria has established a system for: Disclosure of misconduct and corruption, which, “inter alia”, encourages and protects whistle-blowers under the principle of confidentiality of official information, whilst providing adequate avenues and procedures for facilitating disclosure and investigation of misconduct or corruption cases. This measure, which necessitated the placement of “public suggestion boxes” at the entrances and exits of “government agencies”, has been reflected in several administrative instruments, with varying degrees of emphasis, notably, the 2008 Public Service Rules (PSR), which provide procedures to be followed in reporting misconduct (PSR 030304), in disciplining misconduct and serious misconduct (PSR 030305), and in processing petitions and appeals (Chapter 9); and the Code of Conduct Bureau, Public Complaints Commission, SERVICOM, and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission etc. have established hindrance-free procedures for receiving complaints and appeals from aggrieved citizens and for protecting the petitioners. Furthermore, the Auditor-General for the Federation (AuGF) is empowered by Section 88 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to investigate and expose inefficiency or waste of public funds to the National Assembly, whilst Section 128 of the same “constitution” replicates the same provisions for the 36 States of the Federation; and Disciplinary control is being exercised via occasional Ad-Hoc Commissions of Inquiry, and the established investigating, disciplinary, and prosecuting bodies, notably, the Disciplinary Committees enshrined in the 2008 Public Service Rules, especially its Chapter 3 which is dedicated to discipline; Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), are mandated to prohibit and prescribe punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences as well as economic and financial crimes, whilst the Attorney- General of the Federation and Minister of Justice is empowered to prosecute perpetrators of corruption in his/her capacity as the Chief Law Officer of the Federation (vide Section 150 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Furthermore, the ICPC has the power to investigate petitions levelled against public functionaries hitherto granted constitutional immunity that is the President, Vice-President, State Governors and Deputy-Governors. Again, the Constitutional Oversight Bodies (that is the Senate Committees on Ethics and Petitions, Public Accounts, and Finance and Appropriations; and House of Representatives’ Committees on

Ethics and Privileges, Public Service Matters, Public Petitions, Appropriation, Finance, and National Ethics, Values and Anti- Corruption) have powers to investigate alleged cases of corruption and visit the necessary disciplinary penalties on violators.

- (5) The influence of Positive Politicking on the polity hence whether politics settles conflict of interests or not, it should be guided by ethics so that while the healthy politics is played to the gallery, politicisation of public programmes should be eschewed as it is evident that it leads to stifling of development. This is where the concept of individual willpowers and political will come to play.

VIII. Conclusion

The politics has its relevance in any given polity so do ethics. In fact, ethics evolves because of the effects of politics in the management of public programmes. In Nigeria, the problem with public programmes management has been traced to the misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the definition of politics that heralded the allocation of developmental projects on ethnic lines, which has also introduced corruption of public political and administrative officers, politicization of due process and public service procurement directives and weak leadership capacity. In general, politics which is the focal means by which social groups allocate values in a society like Nigeria with a diverse socio-cultural interest, has been played to the gallery such that it has had adverse effects on the economy necessitating the introduction of ethics that usually guide the management of public programmes. The effect of this is poor goal achievement and failure which have characterized the management of public programmes in Nigeria.

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