



MERIT BUREAUCRATS, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND INNOVATION

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This paper basically analyses bureaucrats and innovation within the context of good governance in Nigeria. The relevance of bureaucrats and innovation in improving governance is considerably desired by governmental institutions with a view to improving the socio-economic and political development in the country. The findings of the paper reveals that, the major weaknesses with the nation’s bureau(Putnam, 2001)ats among others were poor training, politics of ethnicity, lack of political will, massive corruption and lack of merit system. Thus, concludes that, bureaucrats as engine of nation’s development should demonstrate a high level of pragmatism and professionalism in their dealings. This will go a long way in positioning the country’s democratic culture on the basis of the National interest in achieving effective governance in Nigeria.

Key word: Bureaucracy, good governance, Innovation

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous scholars such as [Aazami et al. \(2010\)](#) and [Putnam \(2001\)](#) in their separate works on bureaucratic institution argue that bureaucrats have greater roles in achieving the overall societal objectives. For instance, countries such as United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA) among others have recorded a high level of achievements through a number of professional expositions in the conduct of their public policy. In such advanced democracies, bureaucrats were able to transform a number of institutions due to the availability of experts and professionals that were sourced from sound processes of engagement in the areas of recruitment, academic excellence, training and re-training among others aimed at improving the betterment of the entire society.

Max Weber ([Meier, 1997](#)) enunciated various components of bureaucrats which include the traditional, charismatic and legal. Traditional component focuses on the appointment which is not based on merit rather, on favouratism and regionalism. Hence, institutions of governance are regarded as part and parcel of the properties of king who has a final say in virtually any governmental decisions. Thus, this type of bureaucrat is not ideal for building a world class institution. Charismatic bureaucrat on the hand is based on the personal attribute or characteristics of a leader which distinguish him/her from other bureaucrats in governance. While the legal bureaucrat is the one that foster innovation by way of identifying the most qualified person for the task. This component requires the best talents where recruitments are purely based on merit and professionalism. Hence, [Moyo \(2011\)](#) in her reputable work: “how the west was lost” identified the roles of professionals in the development of developed economies. The seeming development of these countries therefore, reached its peak and is losing its height as

most of their best talents which are largely immigrants leaving where they could be better utilized and achieving greater bureaucratic opportunities in the emerging economies. The responsibilities of bureaucratic institution in the context of governance are to provide among others accountability, transparency and efficiency which are central to the execution of public policy in a given nation. The assumption here is that bureaucracy as a component of executive arm of government under the Nigeria’s presidential arrangement facilitates prudent manner through which scarce resources are utilized for overall development ([Salu and Lipede, 2008](#)). Hence, the provision of these basics in governing process hinged on the existence of functional institutions such as the executive, legislature and judiciary ([Ojo, 2006](#)). These institutions are indeed crucial in consolidating the Nigeria’s democratic governance and involved in various segments of relationship that impact on the lives of the citizenry. One of the segments through which government involved in this relationship is the issue of public budget ([Akindede et al., 2012](#)). This is particularly where the executive and legislative institutions closely interact from the level of budget formulation to the implementation which is vital in influencing the budget process. Hence, [Posner and Park \(2008\)](#) remark that budget is necessary in providing the best financial estimation for effective implementation of public policy.

In the Nigerian democratic experiment, the roles of the executive institution in budget process which involves budget formulation, assent, implementation, releases and utilization are clearly and unambiguously provided in the constitution and other extant laws of the federation ([Mowoe, 2003](#)). For instance, Section 81(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN) stipulates the roles of the executive arm under the President in the annual budgetary

process i.e. to prepare the proposed estimate of revenue and expenditure and place same before the legislature for scrutiny and approval. The legislature as an approving body having approved the annual budgetary proposal transmits to the executive arm for assent and subsequently, implementation of same as clearly specified in the framework which is governed mainly by sections 59, 80 and 81 of the constitution as well as other financial regulations.

Sadly, bureaucracy as a component of executive institution which is a strategic body responsible for good governance has not been able to play its statutory roles effectively due to the problems that have to do with personal interests, favouritism, nepotism and incompetence among others. This largely informed the basis for the Nigeria's democratic governance, the development that leads to state of stagnation, inaction, and instability, bickering and power struggle between and among institutions of governance. Although, many studies were conducted on bureaucrats and its significance in promoting governance but very little were conducted on its merits and innovation in the context of governance. This therefore, provides a good-case-problem for the paper.

Overview on the concept of bureaucracy: Bureaucracy according to Alonge (2005) is a branch of executive arm of government which is responsible for the implementation of public policy for the overall benefit and wellbeing of people. Bureaucracy is conceptualized by Heywood (2007) as a segment of government responsible for execution of laws made by the legislature. Hence, it is a government structure usually consisted of people appointed and vested with the responsibilities of formulating and in particular, implementing rules (Ayeni-Akeke, 2008). Put simply, bureaucratic segment of government is primarily concerned with the implementation of public policy (McLean and McMillan, 2009). This is done by executing laws of the land by way of constitutions, acts, statutes among others (Anifowose, 2005). In this case, these laws could be in form of policy passed by the legislature for executive arm to implement through the instrumentality of bureaucratic institution. In this case, bureaucracy as an institution involves highly trained professionals that statutorily perform the tasks of achieving government objectives (Agboola, 2016).

Bureaucratic institution occupies fundamental roles in providing with expertise, creativity and innovation in the management of public policy (Puke, 2007). This is done by exceptionally implementing a number of government policies and programmes for the benefit of the entire citizenry. Hence, government in whatever form cannot progress without skilled bureaucrats that formulate policies and ensure that these policies are effectively implemented (Heywood, 2007). Thus, bureaucracy as the exceptional component of executive institution is statutorily involved in the formulation and implementation of numerous government policies and programmes including administrative, financial and security among others for the benefit of the entire society.

The foregoing demonstrates that the statutory responsibility

of the executive arm of government is to initiate government policies and programmes as well as to ensure their full implementation within the approved plans by the legislative actions. However, this could only be possible with the involvement of bureaucrats as instrument of achieving an effective and efficient policy results. Thus, it is expected that, bureaucrats ought to involve capable and talented hands that coordinate the overall governmental activities in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policy budget in particular with a view to providing the desired policies and programmes to the people at all times.

Consequently, the roles of bureaucrats in the governance of a state cannot be overemphasized considering that; no public policy can be adequately formed and implemented without the significant input of the bureaucrats. In fact, they are the engine room and key players that determine the success or otherwise of a policy. Hence, their action or inaction shapes the overall socio-economic and political development of a given society. However, despite the crucial role being played by this important institution of governance, the perceived government policies and programmes in the country are marred by poor policy implementation due to outdated bureaucratic procedures and bottleneck which hinders the effective and efficient delivery of service to the people. Thus, the aim within which the institution is established has not been defeated. Consequently, bureaucracy as a critical institution of governance is compounded by a number of compositions which include: training and re-training, politics of ethnicity, political will, corruption and merit system as presented in figure 1.

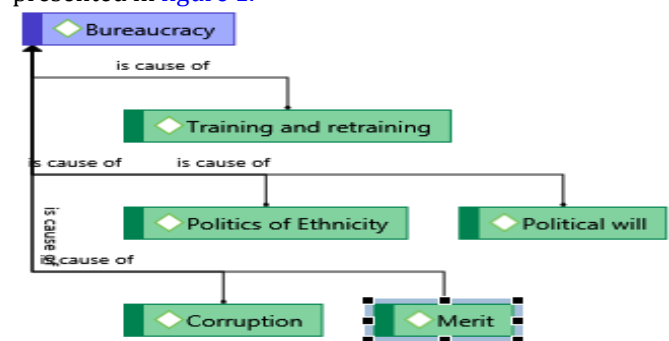


Figure 1: training and retraining

Training and re-training: Bureaucracy (both civil and public service) in the Nigerian context has not been professionally and skillfully exercising their statutory functions. The inherent challenges of inefficiencies associated with the nation's bureaucratic institutions are glaring in the formulation and implementation of failed government policies and programmes. Similarly, recruitment of personnel into various institutions of governance is not done on the basis of individual competency. This often leads to spread of quacks into the system with nothing tangible to offer for overall socio-economic and political development of the nation. Hence, lack the required technical skills and innovation to suit a particular position. This therefore calls for training and

retraining of this important institution of governance (both in high and low cadre) with a view to putting them in a right track of achieving the desired outcomes. As Davids (2015) points out that to effectively curtail the challenges of inadequate skills and manpower shortages, government ought to provide advanced tools required for information and communication technology as well as professional and innovative bureaucrats that make faster and efficient deliberation of policies for implementation. By so doing, public policies such as budget could be efficiently and effectively implemented without hitches. Consequently, Ben Akabueze notes that: "this administration adopted a zero based budgeting system (ZBBS) methodology to help ensure optimal utilization of government resources on projects. To improve the quality of our budgeting process, we are committed to making the most use of technology and automation tool that helped eradicate challenges encountered in the previous years".

Politics of ethnicity: Politics of ethnicity is not a new thing as far as the Nigerian history and its socio-economic and political development is concerned. Hence; Nigeria by its nature, as a multi-ethnic society, there are struggles among the major tribes in the allocation of scarce resources where each public official view his/her position as a way of getting the share of National cake without taking into consideration of the National interest. This could be glaring in Ojabor and Oluwasegun (2017) that in allocating government resources among the diverse population, ethnicity is highly pronounced and the nation's bureaucratic culture believe so much in favouritism as a result of ethnic diversities. Therefore, ethnic politics creates a sharp division among the bureaucrats in the allocation and distribution of scarce resources as the various ethnic nationalities struggle over the sharing formula of political power and economic resources. This is where the large chunk of the nation's resources misappropriated. Since Nigerian polity is structured in a manner that the various ethnic groupings and nationalities are represented in the public policy on the framework of federalism anchored on socio-economic, political, cultural and constitutional developments, a smooth, interactive and collaborative relation is necessary in achieving the desired objectives of moving the nation forward.

Political will: Political will in the context of governance is the government disposition to initiate policies and programmes aimed at bringing the desired development to the people. Ironically, the Nigerian bureaucrats demonstrate a high level of parochial interests devoid of Nationalism and patriotism as a function of political will in the conduct of their official responsibilities. Hence, Okonja Iweala laments that lack of political will by leaders often leads to outcomes of a number of policy failures. As a result, the commitment government needed to promote its policies and programmes becomes low due to lack of political will on the part of the nation's leaders as perhaps, the reason for the Nigeria's frequent failures in almost all aspect of its public policy.

Sola Akinrinade further argues that the truth is that, a lot of government policies and programmes right from the point of formulation to the implementation largely depend on political will to succeed. This is quite glaring in all the indicators of development among our peers in the world where comparatively, Nigeria was doing well in the 70's but in recent times, due to the action or inaction of the leaders, the nation's economy in particular nose-dived and remained far from achieving the desired growth and development. Therefore, the anticipated outcomes in the country are retarded leading to numerous socio-economic and political challenges.

Corruption: Corruption is one of the fundamental factors responsible for the nation's infrastructural decay. This is largely due to the misappropriation of funds by the public officials. This is evident in the lack of transparency, accountability and of course, inflation of figures in most of the government financial dealings. Hence, in many cases, money is due for releases to different Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government but, officials at the helm of affairs misappropriate. Corruption is the bane of the Nigerian development. Because, both political and administrative leaders don't really see their positions as a position to truly serve people but struggle to get position in order to make money largely through corrupt means. Corruption as a serious phenomenon in the nation's development has cut across the fabrics of our personal and official responsibilities. This is evidently shown in the Global Corruption Perception Index (GCPI) where Nigeria is branded among the most corrupt nation. More worrisome, is the manifestation of corruption in the National Assembly as reflected in the budget padding which is instructively one of the most clear indications of sharp and historical decline in the quality of Nigeria's ruling elites since country's return to civil rule in 1999. This is also glaring in the argument by the Socio-Economic Right Accountability Project (SERAP) that corruption takes away and erodes much needed resources for both public and developmental purposes. Thus, lack of transparency and accountability surrounding the Nigerian bureaucracy has invariably created a breeding place for alleged corruption.

Merit system: Another important segment of bureaucracy is recruitment based on individual merits, skills and professionalism. Nigerian bureaucrats like its peers in the developing world operate more or less a traditional bureaucracy which apparently operates like an estate or domain of those at the helm of affairs in the country. Consequently, Merit system in the country is replaced by excessive favouritism and nepotism which are manifested on the basis of family, tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious and geographical backgrounds while forsaking the most qualified and worthy people in futility and hopelessness hence, preventing them from rising to important and meritorious positions in the country. Thus, bureaucracy is bedeviled with a number of perpetual challenges ranging from sectionalism, nepotism to tribalism which could be traced from the policy of rationalization, indigenization and nationalization associated

with the popular purges that gave birth to competitions among various ethnicities in the Nigerian bureaucratic system.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Generally, Nigeria's bureaucratic institution when compared with other advanced nations in the world. The outcome could be obviously devastating. This is due to prevalent challenges associated with bureaucracy itself ranging from lack of training and retraining on the part of the bureaucrats, politics of ethnicity in the recruitment that involves appointment and promotion into any bureaucratic institutions, lack of political will which is demonstrated in the lack of National interest and patriotism on the part of the leaders, corruption as evidently manifested in the lack of transparency, accountability and inflation of figures in the nation's financial dealings as well as recruitment against the conventional procedures-merit system. Consequently, while training and retraining is characterized by inefficiencies and incompetence on the part of the nation's bureaucrats, politics of ethnicity as a parochial tendency creates a sharp division between and among the bureaucratic institution especially in the process of allocating scarce resources. Lack of political will by the leaders leads to frequent failures of most of the nation's public policy. Corruption as a menace has clearly erodes the much needed resources for execution of various developmental projects hence, compounded the nation's socio-economic and political challenges. Finally, merit system accounts for high level favouritism, nepotism and discrimination among others in the nation's bureaucracy as manifested in the diverse ethnic nationalities. Consequently, numerous innovations and initiatives formulated and implemented by government in form of policies and programmes such as Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Zero Based Budgeting System (ZBBS), Treasury Single Account (TSA), e-government, public expenditure management and procurement reforms among others. These have the potential of transforming the systems, processes and procedures of bureaucracy to make it more effective and efficient. These recent innovations have clearly shifted bureaucracy from the traditional model of government been the sole provider to a more pragmatic approach. The attendant effects of all these is that it provides a number of innovative ideas by way of outsourcing and performance measurement, improves service delivery, increases creativity and productivity, ensures transparency and accountably, minimizes cost of governance and ensures prudent management of resources among others for achieving better results. Thus, innovations have critical roles of utilizing the nation's resources with a view to achieving the desired socio-economic and political development.

CONCLUSION

The paper centered on bureaucrats and innovation within the framework of good governance in the Nigeria's bureaucratic arrangement. The fact that, the roles of bureaucratic institution among other institutions of governance cannot be overemphasized, considering the strategic and professional

role it continues to play not only in the formulation of a sound public policy but also in its effective implementation all with a view to catering for the needs and aspirations of the generality of people. The paper, noted with concern the high level of poor and inadequate training on the part of bureaucrats, parochial nature in the political culture, lack of dedicated political will by the leaders, prevalent and pervasive corruption in all the fabrics of the nation's life as well as recruitment and/or appointment and promotion devoid of conventional procedures. Thus, concludes that, bureaucracy as an instrument of nation development ought to be pragmatically and professionally driven in its entire dealings on the premise of National interest and patriotism as well as promote modern techniques and innovations that would shape the bureaucratic institution in particular and the entire governance in general. By so doing, government objective would be effectively and efficiently realized.

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