

Review

Bureaucratic politics and policy development: Issues and challenges

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The paper examined the institutional interface of politics and administration in the public service in Nigeria; it also assessed the effects of the interface on service efficiency in Nigeria with a view to identifying the benefits or otherwise the interface of politics and administration, and assessed the role of bureaucracy and national development in Nigeria. Secondary data were collected mainly from relevant textbooks, official documents of various ministries, reports and proceedings papers. The findings revealed that the public bureaucracy in Nigeria is expected to play a leading role in the socio-economic transformation through innovation and social engineering. The need to take appropriate action is for designing, building and sustaining an effective and efficient administrative machinery in national development. The paper concluded that public bureaucracy is a catalogue of failed policies and development projects. The inability of government bureaucracy to deliver the much needed services to the citizens and the resultant decline in the standard of living of the people may be held by the same as a conclusive evidence of a failed Nigerian state.

Key words: Bureaucracy, politics, policy and development.

INTRODUCTION

The civil service is not a creation of modern times. It dates back to the ancient civilizations of Greece, the Chinese empire (462 BC) and the Han dynasty (202 BC), as well as to philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes (Omoleke, 2013). One of the important discourses in public administration is the politics-administration dichotomy. Yet, across the world, the debate remains that of the most unsettled issues of political authorities and administrative institutions to a great extent in democracies. In other words, the

dichotomy between politics and administration has been one of the most central topics in public administration, especially since the writings of Woodrow Wilson in 1887. The question in the minds of most scholars of public administration is how the dichotomy fits into the governance process of any country (Afegbua, 2013).

Adamolekun (2004) opined that the debate on the relationship between politicians and administrators who operate the governmental machinery in Nigeria has lasted for decades and the controversy appears to have

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increased in intensity as the country changed from one type of regime to another, that is, from parliamentary government to military rule, to presidential government.

The viewpoint was articulated by Abdulsalam (2006) that public administration is an important conditioning factor of the success or otherwise of any developmental policy or strategy of a government. An examination of the relationship between development administration and administrative development is thus an attempt to explore the concepts of public administration and management in the context of national development, leadership role and leadership culture in Nigeria.

Bureaucrats play vital roles in the formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of government policies and programmes, but the frequent incursion of politics into the domain of the public service in Nigeria has undermined these roles to an unimaginable extent. Politicians usually embark on retrenchment of public servants for political expediency, and ostensible reorganizational and economic reforms which to an average public servant is frivolous, indefensible and atrocious.

During Obasanjo's administration, there were series of reforms such as privatisation, downsizing, monetisation, which had serious consequences on the livelihood of some affected civil servants (Oladoyin, 2011). The politics and administration interface does not always produce negative outcomes and consequences. If the interactions between politicians and administrators are better managed, they would likely lead to efficient and effective policy development in government in Nigeria (Afegbua, 2013).

The objective of this paper is to examine the politics and administration interface in the Nigerian public service. It also examines the beneficial effects, or otherwise, of the interface on service efficiency in Nigeria. The paper is divided into six sections. Section one reviews relevant literature. Section two examines the policy-administration dichotomy. Section three examines bureaucrats and the policy-making process under military rule. Section four analyses the policy makers: politician or civil servants. Section five examines the role of the bureaucracy in national development. The final section is for the concluding remarks.

Conceptual clarifications

In ordinary usage, bureaucracy' refers to a complex, specialized organization (especially a governmental organization) composed of non-elected, highly trained professional administrators and clerks hired on a full-time basis to perform administrative services and tasks.

Bureaucratic organizations are broken up into specialized departments or ministries, each of which is assigned the responsibility for pursuing a limited number of the government's many official goals and policies

which fall within a single, relatively narrow functional domain. The departments or ministries are sub-divided into divisions that are assigned even more specialized responsibilities for accomplishing various portions or aspects of the department's overall tasks; these divisions are in turn composed of multiple agencies or bureaus with even more minutely specialized functions (and their own subdivisions). Bureaucratic organizations always rely heavily on the principle of hierarchy and rank, which requires a clear, unambiguous chain of command through which "higher" officials supervise the "lower" officials, who of course supervise their own subordinate administrators within the various divisions and sub-subdivisions of the organization (Johnson, 2005).

Politics is essentially characterized by struggle for power and influence, disagreement, bargaining or negotiation, reconciliation, resolution and consensus, among others, which albeit in varying degrees. Politics is based on disagreement, that is, where there is controversy, where there are issues, there is politics. Differences between individuals and groups provide reasons for disagreement; such diversities relate to different perceptions of human nature and of his role, and to differences in interests (Omolayo and Arowolaju, 1987).

Decision-making is another important ingredient of politics. At every instance of conflict, decision must be taken in order to arrive at reconciliation, if not a consensus, of interests. Obviously, in such specific instances, political goals may conflict with values in practice. David Easton was articulating this assertion when he suggested that politics is the authoritative allocation of values within a society, backed by the ultimate use of a monopoly of physical force (Easton, 1957).

Policy refers to those plans, positions and guidelines of government which influence decisions by government (e.g., policies in support of sustainable economic development or policies to enhance access to government services by persons with disabilities). There are various types and forms of policy. Types of policy include: broad policy which enunciates government-wide direction; more specific policy, which may be developed for a particular sector (the economy) or issue-area (welfare); operational policy, which may guide decisions on programmes and project selection. With respect to the forms that government policy takes, it is reflected most typically in legislation, regulations, and programmes. These are often referred to as policy instruments (Adeola, 2003).

Policy development is the activity of formulating policy generally, which involves research, analysis, consultation and synthesis of information to produce recommendations. It also involves an evaluation of options against a set of criteria used to assess each option (Akhakpe, 2005). Leadership and management positions include any of the following who may have policy responsibilities: Ministers, deputy ministers, directors, executive directors,

coordinators or team leaders. Consultation refers to seeking input (advice, reactions, clarifications etc) during the policy development process from individuals within and outside government. Bureaucrats are the bedrock upon which the government is seated and balanced. It is the hub for the implementation of the programmes, policies, plans and action of government. More importantly, the bureaucrats are the vehicle for service delivery and good governance. The quality of the bureaucrats largely determines the pace of development of any nation (Adelegan, 2009).

There are numerous definitions of public policy. The following are some examples:

“Whatever governments choose to do or not to do” (Dye, 1988); “A proposed course of action of a person, group or government within a given environment providing obstacles and opportunities which the policy was proposed to utilize and overcome in an effort to reach a goal or realize an objective or purpose” (Frederich, 1963).

Bureaucracy refers to administration which takes place in a large, complex organisation. Such organisations are typically characterised by great attention to the precise and stable delineation of authority or jurisdiction among the various subdivisions and among the officials who comprise them, with the requirement that employees operate strictly according to fixed procedures and detailed rules designed to routinize nearly all decision makings. Some of the most important of these rules and procedures may be specified in laws or decrees enacted by the higher “political” authorities that are empowered to set the official goals and general policies for the organization, but upper-level (and even medium-level) bureaucrats typically are delegated considerable discretionary powers for elaborating their own detailed rules and procedures. Because the incentive structures of bureaucratic organizations largely involve rewarding strict adherence to formal rules and punishing unauthorized departures from standard operating procedures (rather than focusing on measurable individual contributions toward actually attaining the organization’s politically assigned goals), such organizations tend to rely very heavily upon extensive written records and standardized forms, which serve primarily to document the fact that all decisions about individual “cases” are taken in accordance with approved guidelines and procedures rather than merely reflecting the personal preferences or subjective judgment of the individual bureaucrats involved (Johnson, 2005).

FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BUREAUCRACY

According to Adebayo (2004), it is a true fact to state that, with the emergence of modern states and the development of the presidential and parliamentary systems, the civil service evolved as the bed-rock of the executive arm

of government. Its main task is simply the implementation and execution of the policies decided by the legislature or those appointed to carry out the executive work of government. In accomplishing this task, the civil service has found itself involved in the formulation of policy and advising generally on policy matters. The civil service is also responsible for the management of the machinery of government and carrying out the day-to-day duties that public administration demands. It should be noted, however, that the ultimate decision and policy rests with the political head of the department or ministry, be he christened minister or commissioner.

The task of civil/public servant or administrator is to assist in the formulation and execution of policy as directed by the minister or commissioner. It is, therefore, his duty to supply his political boss with all the information necessary to arrive at a right decision. The civil servant must place before his minister the arguments on all sides of the case fully, rationally and fairly. Whatever his own sympathies, may be, he must set aside all his personal prejudices, sentiments, affinities and affections and faithfully present all the facts and information at the disposal of the department to enable the political head to take his own decision (Omoleke, 2013).

Olagunju (2001) said once the decision has been taken, a civil servant must loyally carry out the policy chosen, even though he has his own reasons to prefer a different course. He also has the duty to put his past experience at the service of the ministry and to offer constructive suggestions as developed out of his experience. Civil servants must therefore be constantly engaged in gathering facts and preparing findings that may enhance changes in policy or lead to policy decisions. In this way, civil servants or administrators help to define policy before the legislative stage is reached; they assist in drafting the law which provides the legal framework to carry out the desired programme.

Furthermore, the civil service executes policies and the substance of programmers, irrespective of the regime in power, be it a military or civil administration, a parliamentary or presidential system. This arises out of the fact that the concern of the civil service is the good of nation as a whole, irrespective of the political party in power. Its task is to lay the national point of view before each minister that comes. In this way the civil service ordinarily must strictly observe political neutrality, while ensuring the continuity of policy based on overall national interest (Olagunju, 2001).

Political neutrality

According to Olaleye (2001), the political neutrality of the civil service implies that the civil servant must put his politics in his pocket. This tradition is particularly British and Nigeria has patterned its civil service system and practice on this model. In France, political and

administrative roles are more mixed and blurred than in Britain. This is marginal politicisation of the civil service by the political system. For instance, French top civil servants often play political roles as mayors or councillors. Moreover, these are entitled to stand for election to Parliament and, if elected, they keep their civil services rights in cold storage and later return to their post in the civil service.

This is only true in theory; in actual practice, few civil servants who turn politicians ever return to the civil service. In most cases, they embark on full-time political careers. In the United States of America, the trend has been a steady movement away from patronage towards merits system, that is, a civil service based mainly on recruitment by merit for career officials. Even then, it is estimated that there are over 1,200 political appointments at the top of the American civil service and governmental agencies. Such appointments are excluded from the normal civil service recruitment and promotion procedure. They are, therefore, not strictly bound by the civil service convention of political neutrality. Their tenure of office is invariably limited to the period that government that appoints them stays in power. We will now turn to the dichotomy between administration and politics.

POLICY-ADMINISTRATION DICHOTOMY

Early in the emergence of public administration as an autonomous discipline, one of the central doctrines was that policy and administration were separate. The distinction was borne out of a concern to divest administration of politics. The founding fathers of public administration regarded governmental process as consisting essentially of two parts, viz: policy/decision making and policy execution. In their view, policy making is the prerogative of the politician, while execution is the business of administration, and if politics is distinct from administration, they should not be allowed to interfere with each other. Today, this position has almost been entirely abandoned. It is now generally accepted that both administration and policy are inter-related, inter-dependent and indispensable to each other as two sides of the same process. The view that policy and administration are separate is, therefore, seen as an inaccurate description of the governmental process. An inevitable attribute of modern governments is that administrators have a lot to say and do in policy making, a function which is widely diffused and deeply permeated by politics (Omolayo and Arowolaju, 1987).

Administrators are deeply involved in the making of legislative and executive policies in a number of ways. In the first place, they are responsible for the preparation and presentation of policy alternatives to the policy makers. More often than not, the policy maker is presented with the real choice, the administrator having narrowed down the alternatives to an obvious, irresistible and most plausible option through powerfully reasoned

arguments. Second, policy makers (ministers, commissioners etc.) rely on the advice of administrators. Several factors have made this a compelling obligation on the part of the policy makers. They lack the expert knowledge of the administrators and they have no time to devote to analyzing the merits and demerits of most policy alternatives proposed to them. They are often saddled with party activity, official engagements and other matters which can deny them enough time and energy to spend on policy questions. Reinforcing the preponderant influence of the administrators on policy decision-making is their vantage position in which they monopolize official advice and information and can hide facts if they wish and enjoy stability of tenure unavailable to the policy makers. Finally in the process of applying and adapting vague executive orders and legislative acts to administrative situations, administrators tend to develop their own body of rules known as administrative legislation.

The picture of the policy maker-administrator relationship painted above is not to indicate that the administrator is superior to the policy maker, but only to show how both aspects of the governmental process permeate each other. The policy-maker has as much arsenal of influence in the process as the administrator has. A policy maker, who has access to outside information and superior advice or who is of a strong personality, may, for instance, reject the administrator's proposals. And all said and done, the policy maker has political strength which has an ultimately accountable to the people and must be relied upon to see departmental matters through legislation (Omolayo and Arowolaju, 1987).

Dichotomy of administration and politics

According to Wilson (1971), the earliest writers on public administration in modern times, notably American writers, drew a sharp dividing line between administration and politics. Woodrow Wilson stressed that administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. He argued that, although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices. John Pfeiffer took the same line and urged that politics must be controlled and confined to its proper sphere, which is the determination of stabilization and declaration of the will of the community; whereas administration is time into effect of this will of the community, once it has been made clear by political processes. He went on to conclude that politics should stick to its policy-determining sphere and leave administration to apply its own technical processes free from the blight of political meddling.

Another contemporary of Woodrow Wilson who was greatly concerned about the "meddling" of politics in administration was Frank Goodnow. He made a clear distinction between politics and administration by defining the former as "the expression of the will of the state" and

the latter as the execution of the will (Self, 1972). Willoughby went to the extreme of not merely separating administration from politics but setting it up as the fourth arm of government along with the legislature, executive, and the judiciary. Albert Stickney argued that “public servants must have duties of only one class”, that the men in the executive administration should have nothing to do with general legislation, that is, the deliberating and deciding as to the policy of all departments of government should not meddle in the details of administration.

The advocates of separation, Wilson and his school postulated their theory against the background of the political circumstances of their age. For instance, American politics was dominated by spoils politics and the patronage system until about the second decade of this century. The operation of spoils politics was incompatible with the achievement of efficiency in public administration; it was in fact an obstacle (Omoleke, 2013).

Bureaucracy and politics in the public policy-making process

According to Adarnolekun (2004), the plea of a dichotomy between politics and administration is without question one of the key paradigms in the study of public administration. In its classic formulation, the paradigm is characterized by two contradictory propositions. The first proposition, which is commonly traced to Woodrow Wilson’s seminal article of 1887, stated that politics and administration are two distinct spheres and that each has its own group of functionaries. The Wilsonian dichotomy was strongly supported by another American scholar, F.J. Goodnow, shortly after the initial statement:

There are then, in all governmental systems, two primary or functions of government, viz the expression of the will of the state and the execution of that will. There are also in all states separate organs each of which is mainly busy to discharge of these functions. These functions are respectively politics and administration

The second proposition states that a rigid distinction cannot be maintained between public administration and policy making or politics. As Appleby has put it, “public administration is policy making while public administration is one of a number of basic political processes by which people achieve and control governance (Adamolekun, 2004). According to Obiyan (2006), there has been an age-long debate as to what constitutes or should constitute the role of the bureaucracy. On the one hand are those who continue the responsibility of the bureaucracy to that of merely executing settled policies by the politicians. On the other side of the divide are those who hold that administration and politics cannot be put into watertight compartments. Consequently, they contended that the role of the bureaucracy cannot be restricted to policy implementation, as the bureaucracy is

part and parcel of policy making (Obiyan, *ibid*:7)

Adamolekun (2004) stated that the first doctrine posits that there are two distinct groups of people operating the executive branch of government in a democratic polity. One category consists of largely elected temporary political officials who serve for as long as they succeed in obtaining a particular mandate at elections conducted at intervals. The second category is made up of officials who are appointed into a permanent (career) service which is expected to serve successive sets of political officials. This doctrine is sometimes summoned in the dictum governments come and go but the administration remains.

The second doctrine is the conception of administration as an instrument in the hands of political officials who are supposed to be the dominant group in the executive branch of government. The instrumental conception of administration is derived from a theory of democracy according to which sovereignty resides in the people. This theory is translated into practice through an arrangement in which the sovereignty of the people is exercised on their behalf by their representative in parliament, with or without a political chief executive who is a direct emanation of the popular mandate. In this arrangement, career administrators (who are also called civil servants) are expected to serve as instruments for carrying out the mandate obtained from the sovereign people by successive teams of political officials (Adamolekun, 2004).

INSEPARABILITY OF ADMINISTRATION AND POLITICS

According to Adamolekun (2004), by the closing years of the third decades of the 20th century, the issue of the dichotomy between politics and administration had been finally laid to rest. Thus, in 1937, Marshal Dimock, after examining a fresh concept of government in relation to politics and administration, observed that the two processes of administration and politics are coordinate rather than exclusive and by 1940, Carl Friedrich finally concluded that the idea of a dichotomy between politics and administration is a “misleading distinction” which had become a fetish, a stereotype in the minds of theorists and practitioners alike.

However, it is one thing for practitioners and academics alike to recognize that politics and administration are co-ordinate rather than exclusive; it is another for the functionaries in government and governmental agencies to be able to relate this recognition to the actual day-to-day operation of administration and policy. Up to the present time, there is evidence in various public organisations of constant bickering and friction between officials on the one hand and elected members or politicians on the other. The whole issue hinges on what should be the legitimate sphere of action between the two sides.

For example, in 1967 the Naude Committee on the Management of Local Government in British noted in its

reports that it believed that the lack of a clear recognition of what can and should be done by officers, and of what should be reserved as decisions for members lies at the root of the difficulties in the internal organisation of local authorities. In Nigeria one of the main problems confronting the Local Government Reform, which was launched in 1976, is the constant friction between the chairman of the local government council and the secretary as to what is the legitimate province of each function.

Often, conflict ensues between state commissioners and their permanent secretaries on the question of what matters a commissioner may properly seek information on or be briefed about. State commissioners sometimes want to know about the basis and rationale of the posting of career officers. In this situation and similar instances, some state commissioners, acting in their capacity as the political bosses of their ministry have sought to obtain information from permanent secretaries and have attempted to influence decisions. The officials, on their own part, have resolutely refused to brief or take direction from their political bosses on matters considered to be outside the jurisdiction of the commissioners. Consequently friction is generated (Omoleke, 2013).

Bureaucrats and the policy making process under military rule

Traditionally, political office holders or the executives (ministers) are meant to formulate policies which will be implemented by the public administrators. The military, however, discontinued with this practice because they had very little time to formulate policies and therefore relied on public administrators to propose policies and submit to them for approval. And because military rule was arbitrary, whatever was acceptable to the leader became the operating policies. This was the case during Gen. Gowon's administration, which was better known for the emergence of super permanent secretaries who were not just policy implementers but also policy formulators. Military rule introduced another dimension into public administration, namely, the abandonment of the rational decision process and adopted decision making at the whims and caprices of the military leader (Babawale, 2003).

THE POLICY MAKERS: POLITICIANS OR CIVIL SERVANTS

Obiyan (2006) posits that policy making as a function is primarily that of the politicians while the public bureaucracy/administration/civil service is to implement policies. Though he recognizes that the civil service plays a role in policy making, he asserts that the final decision on policy-making does not rest with the bureaucrat. Thus, it can be argued that the extent to which career officers

participate in policy-making is dependent on the latitude granted by the politicians.

To Adamolekun (2004), the dominance of the policy advice function by higher civil servants aroused little or no attention, except for condemnations from time to time by both government leaders and public opinion leaders during democratic dispensations. As correctly observed in the British setting, the so-called joint endeavour between a minister and a permanent secretary in formulating policies for a ministry is most often likely to result in dominance by the permanent secretary because the balance of ability is heavily tilted in his favour in terms of "the knowledge, experience and expertise available within the ministry". This is particularly true in Nigeria for most of the post-independence era, as several political heads of ministries have been men and women of limited ability. The ministers who served at the state and federal levels from 1979 to 2013 were selected largely for partisan or subjective reasons, and only a few of them had the ability and other leadership qualities to enable them to take effective charge of their ministries (Adamolekun, 2004). Thus, the higher civil servants have continued to wield considerable influence in the making of policy decisions, for example, the Revenue Allocation Act of 1981. Career higher civil servants joined with presidential special advisers in preparing a draft bill which the council of ministers under time chairmanship of the president considered and adopted (Adamolekun, 2004).

Spheres of policy and administration

According to Self (1972), administrators at all levels of responsibility are being constantly thrown into the area of decision making, and their decisions add up to major policies in the subsequent course of events.

As Hopkins rightly observed,

Day-to-day decisions are made -which, add up to a determination of policy. Instead of policy being made first, decisions are made first instead of policy governing decisions, decision govern policy; instead of people at the top making policy while people at the lower levels make decisions, top executives make both policies and decisions on some matters while subordinates make both policies and decisions on the other hand.

This implies that the administrator cannot avoid some policy-making responsibility in the application of the administrative process. The administrator has to weigh and consider conflicting demands and reconcile them. In the process, he makes consultations and tries to balance and synthesize the conflicting demands.

Appleby observed that:

The administrative hierarchy is an organ receiving message of popular demands, many of them contra dictory. It is an organ responding to such demands, reconciling them and in the course of response injecting

Table 1. Policy issues and administrative matters.

Policy issues	Administrative matters
1. Key decisions on the objectives of the department of agency and on the plans to attain them	1. Provision and control of the necessary staff required for the work of the department or the agency.
2. The task of reviewing periodically the progress performance and direction of the programme and goals of the department or the agency	2. Tendering advice and placing all available information, knowledge, and experience at the disposal of the policy makers to enable them set the goals and objectives and the means of attaining them.
3. Ultimate direction and control of the programmes and goals of the department or agency	3. Day-to-day administration of set-vices.
4. Issues involving significant political or social reaction.	4. Taking decisions and action on settled policy.
5. The determination of a general decision or policy and bringing such cases to the attention of the policy makers.	5. Identifying peculiar problems arising out of settled decision or policy and bringing such cases to the attention of the policy makers.
	6. Day-to-day routine inspection and control of the programmes and services of the department or the agency.

Source: Omoleke, 2013.

consideration of prudence, perspective, and principle including regard for other popular demands and aspiration than those expressed in the chorus of the moment. All this is a political process, much of it completed within the area of administration.

It is pertinent to discuss how an administrator should define and carry out the corollary to this. Of course, relation ought to subsist between the political chief and the administrator in their joint role of policy-making in the department, ministry or agency. In all democracies, the accepted practice is that the responsibility of policy rests with the political chief executive in the ministry or department. He sets the broad lines of policy to be pursued or, as Peter Self puts it, his role is that of climate-setting in deciding the way certain issues are to be approached. The administrator, on the other hand, is the instrument through which the policy is carried out. This is why Herbert Morrison stressed that the administrator should be instrument and not the master of policy and Charles Christies concluded that administration is the handmaiden of policy.

The foregoing shows that it is the role of the politicians to control the administrative system. This control can be exercised in several ways such as ensuring that administrators carry out policies faithfully through settled and laid-down policies and making sure that the politician is in a position of control to overrule the decisions of administrators whenever necessary. Furthermore, the politician gives continual political guidelines for the administrators and department. The question may then be asked: How does the politician know the matters on which to give political guidelines and control the administrator? The following table may assist, but it must

be emphasized that a sharp dichotomy between the two is impracticable and unrealistic. As already explained above, the reason for the division of roles between the policy-makers and the administrators is to ensure that one does not encroach upon the jurisdiction of the other in a meddlesome manner. So, it should be emphasized that in a considerable number of instances, questions of policy will be closely intermingled with administrative action (Omoleke, 2013).

The politics-administration relationship is not watertight as both can be likened to Siamese twins. For instance, a function which hitherto was considered to be within the administrative jurisdiction can snowball into the political realm. Take for instance, the booking of government resting houses falls within administrative assignments which a housekeeper under the directive of assistant director of protocol can easily handle. But for security reasons clearance will have to be obtained from the deputy governor or governor if circumstances call for it; hence, an administrative assignment has been hijacked by a political functionary (Table 1).

THE RELATIONSHIP OF MINISTER/COMMISSIONER WITH THE CIVIL SERVANTS

One interesting fact which must have been elicited in this paper is that, most of the time, the role and behaviour of civil servants have been defined in terms of their relationship with the minister. It is a trite fact that, in the day-to-day workings of a department, the two functionaries have such an interdependent relationship that it is difficult to see one or the other all on its own. Indeed, the nature and scope of public administration in term of the management of human and material resources

for the achieving a set goals and objectives of a state depending on the working relationship between the two (Omoleke, 2013).

The role of bureaucracy in national development

According to Abdulsalam (2006), it has long been recognized that we live in an “executive centred era”, in which the effectiveness of government depends substantially upon executive leadership in policy formulation and execution. The conventional wisdom as articulated in classical writings in the field of public administration tells us that the civil service, as the nucleus of government executive organs, plays or is expected to play the following roles:

Recommending policy: Public policy issues in governmental settings in the modern era involve matters of technical complexity, requiring specialized knowledge and attention. The civil servant, because of his or her training and experience, possesses this knowledge and insight. Thus, at this stage of policy initiation and preparation with the executive branch, and during consideration by the legislature, the two organs of government find the civil servant indispensable, as the provider of policy alternatives and source of guidance and advice. It should be noted also that the civil service helps to aggregate and articulate public interest, as a basis for making policy choices, by helping to weigh and balance competing interests in society and by adopting the public interests rationale to back one policy option against another.

Implementing policy and programmes: Policy and programme execution is the traditionally recognised responsibility of bureaucracy. In doing that, bureaucracy is expected to exercise considerable discretionary powers, thus wielding a remarkable influence on the pattern and quality of policy outcomes.

Carrying out the routine tasks of government: On a day-to-day basis, the civil service is pre-occupied with the regulatory and other routine duties of government and impinges on the state of law and order and stability of the state.

Custody official records: The generation of policy issues (or ideas) is often made from records/information already in government custody. Contained in official files are records and other information which form the basis of potential policy choices. The quality of any policy proposals is as high as that of the information gathered and maintained by the civil service. Thus, the civil service will probably become better known for its role as the

information/intelligence or information management agent of government (Abdulsalam, 2006).

In general, public bureaucracy in Nigeria is expected to play a leading role in the socio-economic transformation through innovation and social engineering. This underscores the need to take appropriate action to design, build and sustain effective and efficient administrative machinery (public bureaucracy capable and ready to play its expected role in national development (Abdulsalam, 2006).

Conclusion

In the past fifty years, the performance records of the public bureaucracy is a catalogue of failed policies and failed development projects. The inability of government bureaucracy to deliver the much-needed services to the citizens and the resultant decline the standard of living of the people may be held as a conclusive evidence of a failed Nigerian state. The peculiarities of the Nigerian socio-cultural and political set-up have influenced both the content and operation of the new constitution. Uncritical adoption of constitutional practices and conventions developed elsewhere should, therefore, be discouraged. Also bearing in mind that we are operating a new system of government, the operators of the system should meet periodically at workshops. It is expected that this practice will facilitate the emergence of traditions and conventions that will govern the relationship between the political class and the career officers.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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