

The Bureaucratic Failure: A Critical Analysis of the Nigerian Government Bureaucracy

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INTRODUCTION

The main concern of this paper is to evaluate the performance of the Nigerian bureaucratic public organisations in the light of the various adverse comments and criticisms levelled against the Nigerian bureaucrats and the bureaucratic public organisations. Apart from the queried shortcomings identified in Max Weber's models of bureaucratic organisation, scholars, intellectuals and public commentators have also expressed some reservations as to the effectiveness and efficiency of the Nigerian bureaucratic organisations. Some of these criticisms are essentially in the areas of socio-economic development of Nigeria. It has been alleged that the bureaucrats who have the opportunity to help shape the economic policy tend to attend first to their own personal interests and those of their class allies at the expense of public interest. This issue will be discussed in four segments. The first segment will address theoretical expositions, the second segment will be devoted to look at the roles of the Nigerian bureaucratic organisation in the socio-economic development during colonial administration and post colonial era respectively. The third segment will address the queried shortcomings of the Nigerian bureaucracy and last segment will discuss a way out.

THEORETICAL EXPOSITION

Man's capacity for innovation and order is clearly demonstrated by his continuing attempt to conquer his environment and make it a more comfortable and less hazardous place to live in. In the absence of such qualities, probably human life would have been equivalent to Hobbes' (1959) description of human life as being "nasty, brutish, solitary and very short". With the rapid increase in size and complexity of groups, associations and institutions, the need for a more efficient administrative machinery arises in so far as the attainment of organisational goals is concerned. Therefore, the attempt to cope with

the problem of large scale organisations and their objectives made way for the development of administrative machinery termed "BUREAUCRACY" by a German Sociologist, Max Weber (1954).

It is however, necessary to stress the fact that administrative structures have always existed in different parts of the world. Bureaucratic organizations and structures develop perhaps, in response to specific problems in historically specific circumstances. According to Weber, the decisive reason for the emergence of bureaucratic organizations has always been its purely technical superiority over any form of organization. Its advantages according to him, include precision, speed, unambiguity, unity, discipline, strict subordination and knowledge of files.

It is not efficiency alone that fosters the growth of bureaucracy but willingness to give up traditional modes of organisation which increases the size and scale of organisation, the growth of nation state and large scale economic ventures have contributed to its emergence. Weber argued that rational control, the attainment of rational goal and the development of money economy also contributed to the development of bureaucratic structures. In Weber's view, bureaucracy refers to the rational imperative co-ordination in the administrative structure of an organisation. He asserted further that it is rational because it is based on science.

The implication of Weber's model is that rational - legal authority is characterised by continuous organisation of official functions bound by rules, a specified sphere of competence involving obligations related to functions in the division of labour, a hierarchy of positions based on technical rules, separation of home and work and presence of formal written rules.

In essence, rational-legal authority therefore means the exercise of power which is socially justified or legitimated because the provision and enactment of orders and policies follow rules and regulations which are consensually defined and to which all members subscribe.

Weber thus attributes the superiority of this type of bureaucracy to the rules of technology and science. It follows that one who controls the existing bureaucratic machinery is one with the necessary technical know-how.

THE CRITIQUE

It should be noted that since Weber's Writing of his Construct/analysis of Bureaucracy, his idea has been a subject of harrangue from the social analysts and scholars. We will consider a few of them as their criticisms are relevant to day-to-day happenings in most of the bureau-cratic set-up in developing countries of Africa and in Nigeria in particular.

Gouldner (1955) pinpoints a contradiction in Weber's work when he identifies the contradictions between the idea of administration based on expertise and those based on discipline. He goes further to develop three types of bureau-cracy in his book "Pattern of Industrial Bureaucracy". Gouldner also takes up Weber when he asserts that Weberian Bureaucracy has failed to consider the intervention of interested and differently powerful groups. For instance trade unions, he asserts, exist to foster the aims of workers while in every organisations, the goals of the organisation are modified, abandoned, deflected or elaborated. He therefore concludes that Weber should have seen organisation as not only a rational system but also a natural system. In his own contribution Selznick (1943) argues that every organisation creates an informal structure which may have negative effect on formal structure if its aims run counter to the objectives of the organisation and it may be positively supplementary to the aims of the organisation. Thus side by side with impersonality are highly personal relationships in the formal structure which are modified anyway. He brings in the presence of informal structure which Weber neglected in his work.

Merton (1952) argues in line with Gouldner that the formal specification of organisational structure which Weber outlined is insufficient as a description of how bureaucrats will in fact behave. The official has characteristics as a social being beyond those which the administrative code specifies. Like any other man, he has interests, prejudices, and fears. He forms friendships and cliques. In this respects, both Merton and Selznick are applying to adminis-

tration the major insights derived from industrial sociology of the 1930's when substantial empirical research was demonstrating the importance of informal group processes for morale and productivity in industry.

Friedrich (1955) criticises Weber that he appears to permit his bureaucrat to elude all responsibility for his actions. He holds that his emphasis on authority vibrates with something of the Prussian enthusiasm for the military type of organisation. Blau (1955) opines that a fresh look has to be taken at the concept of rational administration. He asserts that in a changing environment "the stable attainment of organisational objectives depends on perpetual change in the bureaucratic structure". Efficiency therefore, cannot be guaranteed by tethering the officials to a set of rigid rules. One can therefore argue that it is where the bureaucrat is allowed to identify with the purposes of the organisation as a whole and to adapt his behaviour to his perception of changing circumstance will efficient administration result.

The Human Relations School of Thought argues that the emphasis on the idea of impersonality depersonalises human relations, relations between the professionals and clients and in this way, individual peculiarities are ignored. In reality, any attempt to go contrary or violate the rules of the game is met with emotional disapproval and punitive measures. Officials are thus placed in a conflicting situation where personal primary groups' attitudes are opposed to the institutionally demanded secondary group attitudes. As a result, such words as arrogance, snappy and snobbish have been used to describe the bureaucrats (redtapsism, jack of office, gentlemanly, malingering are commonly used). In almost the same trend Blau and Scott (1963) say that Weber's construct of the ideal type is an admixture of a conceptual schema and a set of hypothesis while other theorists see Weber's construct as one that has a prescriptive rather than a descriptive emphasis.

Among the intellectual circle, it is believed that bureaucracy engenders occupational psychosis or professional deformation all of which imply that the individual's rigid adherence to his training and skill may result to inappropriate responses in changed conditions or may lead to adoption of wrong procedures. Undeniably, bureaucratic failures are said to frustrate the professionals who, as a result of

rigid rules that conduct his activities compromise professional ethics. Bureaucratic rules deny the professionals of capacity for self-expression and self actualisation.

Furthermore, intensification of pressures over discipline and devotion to duty for optimum organisational performance results to the displacement of goals whereby workers see instrumental values (means) as a terminal end (goal).

Marx (1959) also criticises Weber's writing on the ground that the persistent bureaucratic tendency towards secrecy has been described as self defence against eventual hostile criticism by outsiders. It can also be understood in terms of the natural tendency of office holders to consolidate and expand their power positions. As bureaucratic organisations serve the community, nothing should be made secret or "classified document" about the system most especially with respect to its clients.

It is also believed that the term bureaucracy is used at times pejoratively which implies abuse of power. Thus many scholars see element of oligarchic tendencies in bureaucracy. Oligarchy in this sense is not so much a type of organisation but it is seen in terms of power domination by the elite group and the use of their administrative power some of the time to the disadvantage of the members of society that encounter them. This brings us to Mitchels (1962) who stated that modern large scale organisation by their structure are necessarily oligarchic. He contends in his "Iron Law of Oligarchy" that pure democracy in an organisation is a mere facade and exists only in official regulations and rules. Thus Mitchel generalised that "who says organisations says oligarchy". We will now consider the nature of bureaucratic organisations in Nigeria.

The Nigerian Situation

Certainly, we find in virtually every government of Africa, Asia and Latin America today formal agencies of administration (bureaucracy) which resemble those of Europe, and the United States of America. Yet a close inspection of these institutions convinces one that they do not work in the same way or that they perform unusual social and political functions. We will attempt here to find a possible explanation as to why they malfunction in Nigeria.

It is on this score that the discussion on bureaucracy is particularly important in relation to Nigerian situation. Though the idea behind bureaucracy is efficiency, stability, perfection, sustenance and uniformity to mention a few. In the Nigerian context, the bureaucratic machinery is often accused of so many inadequacies. The inefficiency in her bureaucratic organisations is such that the people have started to wonder whether it is the Nigerian cultural values or attitudes and orientation that are responsible for the failure in the use of the machinery to the best advantage.

Perhaps this informed Obasanjo (1979) when he asserts:

Having recorded my appreciation for the result so far achieved, not always under propitious circumstances. I consider it equally proper to mention that on several occasions, I have had to advise or give admonition to public servants to live up to their leadership role and responsibility in the society. While many officers especially at high level have shown loyalty, the attitude to work of many leaves room for concern.

I do not believe that any Nigerian is born an indolent, a perpetual late comer, a malingerer, a grumbler at work or a time watcher.

Neither is he born to thrive in dirt and dirty surrounding.

The above view has reconfirmed our earlier description of the Nigerian bureaucrats as being corrupt and inefficient. One may not expect a heuristic framework to be efficient on its own. It is the operators that make an organisation efficient (human resources). It should be noted that no matter how structurally perfect an organisation is, if the human factor is lacking as exemplified by the Nigerian case, it will remain inefficient and ineffective. The lack of dispatch, sluggish response to official calls characterized Nigerian bureaucracy. It is in Nigerian bureaucratic structures that we find junior officers refusing to honour directives from a superior officer. Bribery and Corruption have now eaten deep into the fabrics of Nigerian bureaucracy. The junior officers bribe the senior ones for promotion while some officers receive bribes or tips from clients before they do the jobs for which they are being paid, every month.

As far as recruitment into the Nigerian bureaucratic organisations is concerned, tribalism, nepotism, favouritism and federal character syndrome have displaced the idea of

merit and qualification which Weber prescribed. The introduction of civil service procedures and practices into the public enterprises also has a salutary effect on the performance of the organisations. Perhaps all the above scenario informed Olowu (1996) to describe the Nigerian public administration as having no root or direct linkage with the people it is supposed to serve. He argues further:-

The bane of Nigerian state and its bureaucratic institutions is more than systemic corruption. Ineptitude, inefficiency, low morale, ineffectiveness and a pariah state status attracting international condemnation for drug dealing, anti-democratic status, international fraud and poor quality of our infrastructure have also added to our injury as a nation.

Unfortunately, these inadequacies manifest themselves in our moribund educational system, inability to supply portable water and electricity, while in the words of Akinkugbe (1996), the hospitals have become mere consulting clinics with no drugs and dressings, the castrated judicial system as a result of obnoxious decrees and edicts and flagrant violation of Human Rights.

All the above make the organisation goals to suffer and heaped serious problems in the society as a whole. This invariably stifles creativity and leads to brain drain. Of course there is ever increasing crime rate and low level development. The derivatives of the above is that it appears Nigerian bureaucracy is corrupt and failing. However, all is not totally lost as we examine the contributions of government bureaucracy in Nigeria since colonial era to date.

Achievement and Constraints

It has become an indisputable fact that the government bureaucracy represents continuity of administrative apparatus, no matter under which type of regimes - fascism, dictatorship, autocracy, militarism or representative government, it operates. In other words, government bureaucracy is an indispensable administrative machinery and/or a *sine qua non* for any political regime to implement its programmes. It is settled that the effectiveness of a government, to a large extent is a function of the efficiency and competence of its civil service system.

The higher civil servants indeed have been playing a crucial role in that they participate

fully in the formulation of government policies and their full implementation. The civil service bureaucracy in Nigeria is increasingly required to prepare development plans, appraise and select industrial and agricultural project, decide when new roads, railways, harbours, bridges and telecommunication facilities should be constructed. The bureaucrats can and do ensure the optimum size of investment in these projects at any given time in the light of carefully analysed projections of demand and on the basis of cost benefit analysis.

Pre and Colonial Bureaucracy

It is not only erroneous but it is quite misleading to believe that Nigerians were unable to administer themselves before the advent of the British bureaucrats. Contrary to the opinion held, Nigerian society had monarchies comparable with the French and British political systems which existed before the advent of the Europeans-Fortes and Pritchard (1977). Undeniably however, modern administration ushered in with the advent of colonialism in Nigeria.

The origin of the Nigerian civil service can be traced to the administration of Lord Lugard, the Governor General of the amalgamated administration of the Northern and Southern Nigeria. The objective of the colonial bureaucracy was to basically maintain law and order, (minimal administration). The rudimentary administration was guided by the indirect political system like that of French assimilation and Portuguese *assimilados*. The scope of the bureaucracy was limited owing to paucity of financial and human resources. For instance in 1913, the Nigerian government total revenue stood at 3.4 Million Pounds and total expenditure stood at 2.9 Million Pounds. Please see table I for the achievement of the minimal bureaucracy.

In spite of its political shortcomings, the bureaucracy was able to be financially self sustaining for its maintenance of law and order. Its little performance was far reaching. For instance, the following performances are noted.

- (a) Construction of Western Railway Line between Iddo (South) and Nguru (North) 847 miles (1365.2km).
- (b) The first motor road in Nigeria was constructed in 1905 which connected Ibadan with Oyo.

- (c) 3,700 miles of roads were constructed in Nigeria as far back as 1930.
- (d) Public Works Department replaced the traditional hammock and timber bridges with steel and concrete structures and
- (e) Medical facilities were spread to the rural areas inspite of the conservative beliefs of the people in traditional medicine. In 1931, 83 dispensaries were opened (Balogun, 1983).

Table 1: Revenue and expenditure of the Nigerian government

<i>Year</i>	<i>Revenue M Pound</i>	<i>Expenditure M Pound</i>
1912	2.2	2.1
1913	3.4	2.9
1914	3.0	3.5
1915	2.7	3.4
1917	3.4	3.2
1918	4.0	3.4
1919	4.9	4.5
1920	6.8	6.4
1921	4.8	7.1
1922/23	5.5	6.5

Source: Balogun, M.J.: Public Administration in Nigeria.

Bureaucracy Under Representative Government

With the advent of politics and representative government, bureaucracy underwent some changes which had both negative and positive effect on the performance of the Nigerian bureaucracy. The first change is that of new cabinet government and its attendant problems. Then it was a problem to situate administration *vis-a-vis* politics. Because of differences in orientation, the political class viewed the entire administrative processes from political perspectives only whereas the career officials by their training looked at issues from administrative angle. In line with the conventional Westminster model, the political leaders were expected to initiate policies while the civil servants were expected to carry out the decision and remain impartial, politically neutral and anonymous. The relevance of this change lies in the fact that political class viewed administrative processes from the political and ethnic perspective. This greatly affected the contribution of the civil service bureaucracy during the period under review.

Another problem handicapping the bureaucracy's performance was the sharp conflict between generalist administrators

and the professionals. The professionals were of the view that the generalists lacked the knowledge and professional competence in the process of policy formulation. At the end of the day it was resolved that professional competence alone should not be the only overriding criterion for leadership of ministries. Instead, the holder of the highest career post of Permanent Secretary ought to have proven administrative experience. The implication of this decision of generalist administrators being appointed as the Chief Executive of Ministries is that of perennial frictions within the system. The conflict generated lack of mutual trust, inferiority complex, power tussle and suspicions among the bureaucrats. At the end of the day, this led to administrative stalemates, jeopardy and delay in policy implementation.

The gradual decay of political values and institutions in Nigeria and in particular in Western region led to a wave of violence in the legislative house which spread to the rest of the society. Consequently, a state of emergency was declared and a sole administrator appointed. The persistence of the anarchic situation dented the image of the politicians and generated a general disillusion with politics and politicians. The political turmoil in the West became chronic.

Coupled with the controversial census of 1963 as well as charges of corruption eventually prepared ground for the military cabal to intervene. And of course, by January, 1966, the soldiers observed some political dislocations and the system collapsed.

What is important to us here is the impact of the political functionaries on the performance of civil bureaucracy. The implication of the above scenario lies in the fact that the political pandemonium pushed the career bureaucrats into performing the roles of political leaders. Eventually, the administrative process was coloured with bias, sentiments and corruption "infected" the bureaucracy both at political and administrative levels of the organisation. This situation gave way to administrocracy which enables us to assess the strength of the bureaucracy to cope with extra-ordinary situation.

Bureaucracy Under the Military Administration

The military politicians came in to replace

the political class having discredited the civilian politicians. In the first few months of the military administration, the bureaucrats (career officials) literally took over policy functions formerly carried out by the politicians. Perhaps, this was so because of the innocence of the military politicians whose administrative experience of a larger society almost drew close to nil. This is so because they were schooled to fight external aggression and suppress internal insurrection only. It is worthy of note that even when the civilian commissioners were eventually appointed as political heads of ministries, the effective leadership role was still being discharged by some civil bureaucrats. At the Federal bureaucracy these civil servants did not only execute policies but also formulated them (this was tagged era of super permanent secretary). Perhaps this contribution informed Obasanjo (1979) when he declared:

"Let me once again underpin the role of the Public Servants in the context of Nigeria. It is true that no country can develop without an efficient, dynamic, dedicated and loyal public service. Over the last two decades, the Nigerian Public Service had witnessed significant transformation from the colonial role of maintaining law and order to a development oriented service. It is not only the citizens of this country that look up to its public service for positive contributions and leadership, other black and African countries in their search for identity, economic and political recovery do the same. I am happy to note that so far, inspite of some falterings, the public service in general has contributed in no small way to the achievements already made in the development of the nations economy."

From the foregoing, the civil bureaucracy became more pronounced, powerful and went beyond its traditional policy implementation. It became a creative organisation rather than being an ordinary administrative machinery for policy implementation.

Shortcomings

In spite of its tract records the following explanations seem to account for bureaucratic constraints and failures in Nigeria.

1. Effect of Military Regimes: The military regime which created a good atmosphere for bureaucrats, increased the power of government

and recognises the roles of bureaucracy, paradoxically purged the system in 1975. About 10,000 public servants were compulsorily removed with its demoralising effect on the performance of the system.

Paradoxically again about similar number were unprocedurally removed from the system recently in the South Western zone of Nigeria. Instead of equipping the civil servants with necessary skills, the military oligarchy and democratic governments irrationally embarked on national purge which has ruined the system. The Decree No. 43 of 1988 promulgated by General Babangida military regime did more evil than good. The decree politicised the leadership of government bureaucracy which spelt doom on the system. The leader (Director General) held his office at the mercy, whims and caprices of the regime that appointed him. The whole exercise was a ruse and the draconian law frustrated the bureaucrats. The military regimes denied the bureaucrats the right leadership as it abrogated the post of head of service and replaced it with the Secretary to the Government who could be picked from outside the Civil Service Organisation.

2. Poor Remuneration: Frustrated by the military administration the bureaucrats who hardly make the two ends meet could not raise his productivity as his morale is dwindling and dampened every day with no hope at sight. His poor monthly stipend has been engulfed by the hyper-inflation without any other perquisite to assist him. When you officially approach him for assistance, he looks morose. He is fed up of the job except that he is yet to get a better alternative. The future career looks bleak to him. He only retires to fate. This description of the Nigerian bureaucrat lends credence to Olowu (1991) who observes that public service is being denied of those very things that would enable it fulfil its mission.

3. Federal Character Syndrome: In practical terms, the federal bureaucracy has been marred by a high level of primordial sentiments, serious ethnic and religious chauvinism. These social ills have manifested themselves in the behavioural pattern of the officials. The officials rarely see themselves as Nigerian bureaucrats, instead they behave as Hausa or Yoruba or Ibo officials reflecting their ethnic loyalty. The most unfortunate aspect of it is that the virtues of civil service like impartiality, anonymity,

meritocracy etc. have surrendered to federal character syndrome.

4. *Obedient Servant (Anonymity)*: Unfortunately, the anonymity virtue does not allow the bureaucrat to defend himself as he is supposed to be heard and not seen. He serves every regime without corresponding benefits matching his inputs. He is blamed for failures and hardly praised for successes. He is an errand boy. Perhaps this informed Olowu (1991) when he describes the civil servants as:

“The whipping boy of every administration and held responsible for failures in the public sector.”

Worse still, he faces another dilemma from democratic setting when his rising expectation was shattered and became rising frustration while he serves under a hostile environment. He is not sure of his monthly salary either, while his tenure of office is no more secured as he could be removed at any time.

Solution

In order to avert bureaucratic failures and corruption the following suggestions are proffered:

1. It is recommended that the civil bureaucracy be insulated as humanly possible from all political influences which tend to compromise standards.
2. This work is of the view that there should be a better public relations with the clientele of the bureaucracy since this may reduce the communication gap between the public servants and the clientele. The gap often leads to unnecessary and flimsy criticism based on ignorance of what the bureaucracy stands for and how it operates.
3. The bureaucrats should be highly motivated like their counterparts in the private enterprises if higher level of productivity is to be achieved, guaranteed and sustained. Even though man does not live by bread alone yet it is an important element that must be taken good care of if any meaningful output is to be achieved.
4. There is urgent need for a complete overhauling of the whole system or parts that are anachronistic and which do not lend themselves to modernisation. It is not advisable to run colonial bureaucracy in the 21st Century. This may be too conservative, perhaps, if the system is open to the trends of

modern development like computer system, the criticism of delay or redtapism and its allies may stop.

5. Of great concern is the issue of corruption. It is our feeling that appeal should be made to emphasise public accountability. Also, ethics and morals should be taught during training and retraining programme of the bureaucrats. Furthermore, anti-corruption law should be enforced to serve as deterrant and minimise corrupt practices in the system.
6. Normal administrative procedures are hereby recommended for disciplining the erred officials rather than regimented, spasmodic, unorthodox, barbaric, unprocedural and irrational discipline as experienced during the regimented military administration in Nigeria.
7. Although, man is described as a political animal, yet efforts should be made to disallow political sentiments to becloud the judgement of the entire non-political appointees. Atomisation of the career officers into political camps will affect the performance of the officers in a manner contrary to the spirit of the service given Nigeria contemporary circumstances.
8. Effective performance is a function of the civil service being professionalised. To this end, it is suggested that a staff development programme oriented towards professionalisation, training and retraining be instituted.
9. The crude, naive and parochial military or civil politicians should be educated thoroughly that the bureaucrats are professionals by their own training and must be regarded so. We are of the view that organic law should be legislated and enforced to protect the service from being embarrassed by the civil or military politicians.
10. Effort should be made to tropicalise the system in order to respond to the needs, nature and culture of the people the system is billed to serve.
11. As much as possible, unsettled political order should be avoided by providing an enduring national philosophy as there is little the bureaucracy can offer within a political framework that lacks national philosophy and good leadership. The leaders need to know how not to govern as governance involves patience, knowledge

- to interpret issues, reconcile, respect the right of all, allow freedom of expression, abide by the law, have courage to accept faults and rectify mistakes and ask for and listen to advice.
12. Finally and to the critics, it should be understood that, unlike the private enterprises where efficiency is calculated on the amount of profit made at the end of the year, the government enterprises are set up to serve the public and should be assessed on this ground.

CONCLUSION

In a way, the paper has looked at developmental profile of the Nigerian Government Bureaucracy from its pre-colonial and colonial era, through the civilian regimes and finally during the military era. We could observe the limited contributions the bureaucracy could offer during colonial days due to colonial master's design. We also examined the bureaucracy during democratic and military governments where bureaucratic failure was nascent. We finally proffered solutions to curb this tendency.

KEYWORDS Developmental approach; socio-economic development; colonial era; political administration

ABSTRACT This paper is set out to evaluate the Nigerian public bureaucracy using a developmental approach. This has become necessary in view of sharp criticisms levelled against the Nigerian bureaucracy as a corrupt public enterprise. Most of these criticisms are in the areas of socio-economic development of its environment. The paper therefore, looks at the performance of the bureaucratic organisations in Nigeria since pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era. We found out that the bureaucracy contributed minimally to socio-economic development of Nigeria in accordance with the goals set by the colonial masters. The post-independence bureaucracy could have performed better but it was confronted with internal and external environmental factors militating against its performance. Such factors, include military incursion into the political administration in 1966, unsettled political order between 1960 to 1966, unprocedural civil servants purge of 1975, inadequate motivation and the absence of national philosophy. It is also noticed that the tendency of bureaucratic failure and corruption was much more pronounced during the military administrations. The paper concluded by identifying possible solutions to the bureaucratic corruption and failures. Among the solutions proffered include provision of adequate motivation, professionalisation of the government bureaucracy, and depoliticisation of the system and eradication of corruption within the system.

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