

# NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Akpanim N. Ekpe

## **Abstract**

*Nigeria's Public Service as a service institution is a catalyst for National Development and occupies a pivotal position in the onerous task of translating government's programme and activities into action. The Public service in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular lacks the ability to formulate, implement and monitor policies, programmes, strategies focused on economic growth and sustainable development. Lack of motivation, coupled with low salaries and poor working conditions combined to demoralise the public service and make it incapable to engage competent personnel to perform duties in professional manner. Its inclination to the orthodox public administration practice, as against administrative requirements of plans, programs and projects continues to compound its problems. A feature which has resulted to lack of innovation and its inability to advance the course of sustainable development. This paper adopts a combination of exploratory, descriptive and contextual methodology and generates data solely from books, journal articles, magazines, newspapers and the internet. A good number of countries namely, Tanzania, Australia and Malaysia cited in this paper have attained the goals of sustainable development through the practice of New Public Management by their public services. The paper recommends that Nigeria's public service should evolve a capacity to contribute to the enunciation of realistic development objectives and programmes through a careful analysis of issues, identification of constraint on programmes / projects options regarding available national and state resources.*

**Keywords:** *New Public Management System, Sustainable Development, Nigeria's Public Service, Private Sector.*

## **Introduction**

One of the enduring legacies the colonial masters beleaguered to Nigeria's polity is the Public Service Institution which has remained a permanent feature, regardless of occasional changes in political and military Leaderships in Nigeria. Nigeria's public service, as a service institution is expected to play dual and complementary roles of policy formulation and execution. It occupies a pivotal position in the onerous task of translating or putting into action governmental programmes and activities. This is why Philips (1988:13) in his justification for Nigeria's public service reasoned "Civil / Public service in Nigeria is the major instrument with which the government implements its policies and as the primary and primate instrument of government, its nature, effectiveness and response cannot escape the constant attention of government which intent is fulfilling its pledges to the people". To be sure, therefore, like any other instrument or agency, to make it functional and operational, the Nigeria's Public Service has to be constantly overhauled, reformed, reshaped and reoriented.

Regrettably, Nigeria's Public Service has not lived up to envisaged expectation to justify its chequered history and establishment as a service provider. Specifically, the Economic Commission for Africa (2003) noted "that public servants are expected to manage the institutions of governance and also advise ministers on a wide range of issues, such as health, education, transport, economic growth and poverty reduction, etc. However, most public servants in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, lack the ability to formulate, implement and monitor policies, programmes and strategies focused on economic growth and sustainable development. They also do not have adequate physical infrastructure, office equipment and other facilities to perform their duties in a professional

manner". By extension, the public service lacks innovation, and in most of the time demoralised, due to low salaries, poor working conditions, and appointment based on criteria, other than merit. Therefore, building critical institutional capacities for good governance, economic growth and sustainable development is not only a necessity, but *adeseratum*. Before the advent of the 1988 Public Service reform, the service as an institution had remained structurally and operationally defective. Despite the litany of changes in roles and functions, its structure and operational modalities have remained virtually unchanged over the past decades. Imagha (2002:142) laments that 'Nigeria's public service lacks the capacity to acquire the discipline required to implement new techniques and internalise itself for the benefit of the entire public service in Nigeria'. In the same vein, Jega (2003:15) is of opinion that Nigeria's "public service is handicapped and lacked rudimentary ingredients required of an effective public service due primarily to lack of professionalism, excessive partisanship, endemic corruption, slowness in policy implementation, inefficiency, selfishness and greed". Ekpe (2008) posits that "personnel management practices and functions in the Nigeria's public service were haphazardly handled with corresponding inconsistency, improper coordination and duplication of functions and responsibilities among departments and agencies". He noted that these were the commonest features which characterised Nigeria's Public Service before the advent of the 1988 Public Service Reform.

The paper examines the diagnostic overview of the antecedent of Nigerian Public Service and the concept of sustainable development. Inferences are drawn from the success stories of Tanzania, Malaysia and Australia that have excelled in the usage practice of New Public Management System in achieving the goal of sustainable development.

### **Conceptual overview of antecedent of Nigeria's Public Service and Sustainable Development**

Nigeria's Political system like other developing countries in Africa in general and sub-Sahara Africa in particular, operates a homocentric political model or culture as against polycentric political model. The model has by extension affected the entire fabric of the public service. Literally, Polycentric means "having more than one centre (as of development or control)". According to Ademolekun (1985), Polycentric Political model or culture recognizes the existence of alternative centres of power and cultivates them, providing them with competence to make binding decisions and to compete and collaborate with other centres of power and development in the polity. Here, emphasis is placed on decentralization as against centralization. Polycentric political culture is essentially a type of political administration model that enhances the New Public Management precept as well as nurtures the growth and development of public service to the path of sustainable development. Regrettably, the myriads of public service reforms and reorganizations launched in the country since independence of 1960, which included among others – Public Service Review Commission Report of 1974 (Udoji Report), the SAP inspired civil service reforms of 1988 (Dotun Philips Report) and the Allison Ayida Panel Report of 1994, have not succeeded in reinvigorating Nigeria's Public Service, nor make it a credible tool to attract motivated and well paid core of skilled manpower needed to provide platform for providing leverage for the public to demand and assert accountable performance of public sector organizations and public service. These institutions in the main Should include vibrant medium and small scale private sector organizations, effective local government systems that are accountable to the people, rather than to the central government, and independent and competent legislature, judiciary and civil service. For all these institutions to function properly, it is our belief that they should be based on exhibiting community structures, with responsibilities and resources shared equitably through the principle of subsidiarity, and each level of government responsible to the public in general. It is in the actualization of these characteristics, that Nigeria's Public Service will not only embrace the precept of the New Public Management, but shall belong to the league of existing promising institutions in the country, deeply rooted in the public realm to advance the course of sustainable development and growth. The characterization of Nigeria Political System as monocentric, coupled with the trappings of Nigerian economy is the central problem of underdevelopment, which is characterized by narrow disarticulate production base, mono-cultural production, commercial activities, widespread corruption, and financial mismanagement. Nigeria's

Public Service lacks the capacity to drive or champion the socio-economic development and by extension the sustainable development. Thus, the advent of economic reforms of 1980s prompted the Public Service or sector to partner with private sector organizations in order to exert a dominant role in the economy and in National development as a promotional apparatus which technical expertise and knowhow shall provide an enabling environment for private entrepreneurship and competition in a free market system. To achieve this noble responsibility, the Public Service is, therefore, expected to be staffed by professionals with analytical skills that will assist government in its day to day decision making process, and in its determined effort to achieve sustainable development. In meeting the challenge of sustainable development with bias in the New Public Management precept, the public service is, therefore, expected among other things to:

1. Contribute to the enunciation of realistic development objectives and programmes through a careful analysis of issues identification of constraints and suggestions on programmes / projects options regarding available national or state resources.
2. Assist in the implementation of policies and programmes through monitoring and evaluation.
3. Operate an administrative system that is development-conscious, performance – oriented, efficient and effective.
4. Finally, to promote and assist the growth, dynamism and social responsibility of private enterprises within the framework of National or State economic objectives (Oshionebo 2004:35-37).

To further strengthen capacity of the Nigeria's Public Service to function effectively and meet the challenge of sustainable development and boost its professional ethics, the internal consultancy units or mechanism in the office of the Head of Service in both Federal and state Public Services, such as Management Service Unit (MSU) and departments of Planning, Research and statistics should be reinvigorated. These units are supposed to be instrumental in effecting incremental changes to the structure, processes, ethics and ethos of the public service and by extension ensure that the expected incremental is restructured to guarantee efficiency and effectiveness in the inter public service, so as to manage the imperatives of sustainable development.

### **The Concept of Sustainable Development**

The concept of sustainable development is rooted in the historic treaties of the 1987 Brundtland Report under the caption "Our Common Future". As a holistic process, it emphasizes the creation of sustainable improvement in all spheres of life of all people through increases, not only in real income per capita, but sectorial disciplines as education, health and public administration. For instance, life sustaining basic human needs, such as food, shelter, health and protection are sacrosanct and if they are not there or in short supply, a condition of "absolute underdevelopment" exists. Therefore, without sustained and continuous economic and social progress at the individual, as well as the societal level, the realization of the human potential would not be possible (Todaro & Smith 2009). Even though it has symbiotic relationship with economic development, sustainable development is development that is perpetual and everlasting and contributes to the equity of life of people in a country, and in their supply to individual's inputs to the economic development process and services that support it generally. Countries like Malaysia, Australia and Tanzania are worthy examples which have excelled both in the practice of reformed public service, through the New Public Management, and the goals or objectives sustainable development. These countries have utilized the benefits derivable from the Public Service Reforms through the New Public Management, joint with the goals of sustainable development, not only to increase economic growth and meet the basic needs of the people, but have lifted the fortunes and living standards of the people's robust health and education sectors and give everyone the chance to participate in Public life and decision making and promote intergenerational equity (Jhingan 1997). It is, therefore, obvious to imply that meeting the needs of the people in the present generation is essential in order to sustain the needs of

the future generations. This is essentially the underlying philosophy behind the concept of sustainable development.

### **Theoretical explication of public service and sustainable development**

The theoretical underpinning of this paper is based on two theoretical frameworks proposed by Scheuler (2000), Institutional theory and evolutionary theory of development by Herbert (1960). According to Institutional theory, public service as a service delivering institution has norms, values, attitudes and myths as the resources of organization, which apart from being properly guided are the by-products, that can determine failure or success of such organization. It is equally linked with organizational learning theory, which posits that overall success of organization depends on ability to learn best practices borrowed from sister organizations within and outside the shores of Nigeria. On the other hand, evolutionary theory of development by Herbert Spencer (1960) regards development and sustainable development as its subset as a “process of evolution, which like organic evolution is a process of growth, increasing complexity, increasing differentiation of structure and functions and increasing differentiated parts. The main argument of this theory is that all societies developed on a line with primitive (in the opinion of Prof Riggs “agrarian stage) and simple society (Riggs also described as “*industria*”). A primitive society according to this theory is homogenous and monolithic, but as it develops, it becomes complex as specialization or division of labour sets in (Riggs 1961)

### **Methodology**

The central focus of this paper is an attempt to explain the ramifications and diagnostic analysis of Nigerian Public Service and the need for it to achieve the goals of sustainable development through the concept of New Public Management System (NPMS). In order to accomplish this task, the paper adopts a qualitative research paradigm, focusing on the combination of exploratory, descriptive and contextual approaches. Exploratory research is based on an inductive approach towards arriving at a dense description of the phenomena under investigation. Descriptive research aims at unfolding situations or events and implies that the representations of reality of participants should be clearly related. The contextual approach clearly highlighted in this paper is based on attempt to understand events, actions, processes and practices in participants’ context, instead of generalizing results (Babbie & Monton 2001)

### **New Public Management Practice in Selected Countries and the Objectives/Goals of Sustainable Development**

Interestingly, most industrialised countries, such as, New Zealand, Australia, Brazil and Japan, and many others have established antecedents and success stories in the implementation of New Public Management System policy reform, including some developing countries. These countries have consciously initiated various public sector programmes under the auspices of the New Public Management System to reinvigorate the quality of their public services to achieve ultimate goals of sustainable development.

The thematic illustrations given in this paper, using Tanzania, Malaysia and Australia will suffice in amplifying the application of NPMS agenda as a tool in transforming public services of most countries of the world.

### **Tanzania**

Like Nigeria, Tanzanian public service system is patterned in line with the British tradition. However, in 1961, she gained her independence from the British. This resulted in a subsequent ‘Africanisation’ of her public service. In 1989, through the sponsorship of the World Bank, Tanzania adopted the New Public Management System to remedy a service that was riddled by structural and operational dysfunctions, such as personnel overstaffing, decline in real wages, extreme wages compression and limited human capacity in administrative and technical skill (Kiragu 2000:335).

Tanzania's conscious departure from cost containment programme to the embrace of NPMS was a deliberate step toward improving the quality of public service of that country. According to Kiragu (2002:335,356) the adoption of the NPMS in Tanzania has led to the enthronement of performance improvement strategy aimed at institutionalizing strategic management, performance budgeting, performance assessment at programme, institutional and individual levels. A comparative survey of the practice of NPMS among the sub Saharan states in particular and Africa in general has singled Tanzania out as a model, worthy of emulation by other developing countries of the world. The breaking down of large public departments and agencies into small organizational units for more efficient and effective service delivery that cut across all sectors, speaks volume of the success of the practice of NPMS in Tanzania.

The development of management as against administration culture in the public service enhances the application of market and management oriented tools or techniques such as Management by Objective (MBO) Result Oriented, Cost Benefit Analysis and Project Management. The introduction of all these management tools in Tanzania's public service is aimed at strengthening the performance capacity of the public service as well as engendered the promotion of administrative system, that is diligent-conscious, performance oriented, efficient and effective.

### **Malaysia**

Like Australia, the New Public Management System in Malaysia is implemented through the Malaysian Administrative Modernization and Management Planning Unit (MPPU). This agency cultivates and generates administrative innovations in the country's public service. According to Dadoo and Robert (1996:5), the wide spread financial and economic crisis which engulfed this country in the 1980s, influenced the introduction of the market oriented reform in the public service, quality of service delivery, efficiency and cost effectiveness, etc. Other attendant aspects the reform agenda remedied were privatization, reduction in the size of government's expenditure, value reorientation, accountability, transparency and the entire overhauling of the public service. With ardent desire to launch her lofty economic blueprint of vision 20:20:20, just as what took place in Nigeria in 2007, Malaysia intends to use this economic strategy to launch the country into a viable status as one of the advanced and industrialised nations in the world, and to join others as one among the Asian tigers. Certainly, such lofty and ambitious administrative and economic programmes depend to a greater extent upon thoroughly reformed and structured public service superstructure capable to meet the global challenges of the enduring centuries.

### **Australia**

Australia adopted some innovative and useful performance information mechanisms which are embedded in the Policy Management Review (PMR) that emphasises continuous assessment and evaluation of governmental activities, regarding advice on policy and service delivery. As an adjunct to the above, there is also Australian National Audit Office (NAO), that plays complementary role to the Policy Management Review (PMR). The Australian Management Audit Office conducts routine and on-the-spot self-evaluation of public sector agencies and departments to ascertain level of their performing capacities.

The most remarkable feature of the Australian Performance Management System is an inbuilt mechanism of 'Carrot and stick' intended for the purpose of compensating satisfactory performance in the public service by way of reward and appreciation. On the other hand, any noticeable negligence or failure to perform assigned task, the officer responsible will face sanctions and reprimands. Ideally, the Australian New Public Management System (NPMS) is result-oriented, tailored toward the goals and objectives of the public service of as well as sustainable development.

## **Discussions on lessons from Tanzania and Malaysia, and Experience for Nigeria to emulate the Practice of New Public Management System to achieve the logic and spirit of sustainable development**

Countries the world over, have adopted various approaches and strategies to re-orientate and reform their public services to suit their desires in relation to their environmental and cultural orientations. Even though Tanzania's NPMS was driven and sponsored by the World Bank, she embarked on holistic and robust public service reforms through the introduction of NPMS that cuts across all sectors and segments of socio-economic reform agenda. By placing emphasis on 'performance improvement', Tanzania has actually broadened the scope of the application of the concept of NPMS to include the practice of performance budgeting, performance assessment and strategic management practices that include institutional and individual levels. For instance, Tanzania is one of the few countries in Africa that have adopted the practice of Annual Appraisal and Evaluation in both private and public establishments (Ekpe 2008:4). The essence of this practice is to evaluate the performances of public and private workers with a view to rewarding them through motivation and other welfare packages in the service. A practice which is yet to be established firmly in Nigeria and other developing countries.

On the other hand, Malaysia places emphasis on effective delivery of quality services and the sustenance of innovation and creativity in the public service. The adoption of NPMS by Malaysia has equally impinged on value orientation, accountability, transparency and robust overhauling of the entire public sector organizations. Surely, the sustainability and success recorded through the application of NPMS in the public service of Malaysia is a function of good governance, leadership quality and commitment to the cause of the reform by the government. Malaysian governmental leadership relies on growth with equity to sustain stability and appropriate regime of policymaking.

The features of good governance and leadership qualities which Malaysian government exhibits are:

1. Predictability in government behaviour.
  2. Openness in government transactions and reliable flow of information necessary for socio-economic activities and development.
  3. Observance of the rule of law and adherence by government and its citizens (Olaopa 2012:16).
- (Above characteristics are not common in most African countries.)

The anticipation of Malaysia to launch her blueprint of vision 20:20-20 is a deliberate action to diversify and launch the country into a viable position as an advanced and industrialised economy. Following her deep-rooted development endeavours virtually in all spheres, Malaysia is rated as one among the eight economic giants referred to as "Asian Miracle States" (Eminue 2005:6).

From the forgoing analysis and discussions, it is worthwhile to note that the governments of Tanzania and Malaysia have demonstrated good sense of governance and commitment which have aided them in the success story in the implementation of the New Public Management System (NPMS).

From the analysis so far, it is obvious to admit that the implementation of NPMS in both Tanzania and Malaysia was carried out through the instrumentality of former agencies and commissions, and with active governmental support through political will and patronage. However, a situation in Nigeria is different.

Nigeria is rated as one of the poorest nations in the world, in spite of her abundance in human and natural resources. The poverty level in Nigeria for decades has been on the increase. For instance, the poverty level which was 28.1% in 1980 rose to 44% in 1990 and 88% in 2002 (Ijaiya 2006). Presently, the situation has not changed as many Nigerians still live below poverty level. It is this lack of accountability, unethical behaviours and corrupt practices which characterised Nigeria's Public service that Rasheed (1996:12) described as crisis of ethics in African Public Service. In terms of Corruption, Nigeria's ethical and moral rating in the past ten years (1996) till date, is placed as 81<sup>st</sup> out of 85 countries surveyed in 1996, 90<sup>th</sup> out of 91 in the year 2001, 132<sup>nd</sup> out of 133 in 2003 and 96<sup>th</sup> out of 102 countries ranked in 2008 respectively (Ekpe 2012:8,9). However, in 2005, Nigeria's moral rating improved. According to Transparency International (ITS) annual report, Nigeria moved

from its third position as the most corrupt nation in 2004 to the 6<sup>th</sup> position. It tied with other African countries namely: Cote d'voire and Equatorial Guinea, ranking 152 out of 159 nations surveyed.

The characteristic nature or ramification of corrupt practices in Nigeria's public service includes outright bribery and corruption, patronage, nepotism, embezzlement, influence peddling, use of one's position for self-enrichment, bestowing of favours on relatives and in-laws, friends, partiality in service delivery, absenteeism, late coming to work, abuse of public office and property, favouritism, leaking or disclosure of government information. On its dimensional perspective, Section 2 of the Independent and Corrupt Practice Commission Act CAP 31 laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004 states that "Corruption includes bribery, fraud and other related offences and in its Newsletter Vol. 1, April 2006 it amplifies that "corruption is a universal vice that knows no geographical boundaries both in its ramifications and its destructive consequences".

In 2000, the United States of America, Department of States in its Country Report on Human Rights and Practices said this of Nigeria "Much of the nation's wealth continued to be concentrated in the hands of tiny elites mostly through corruption and non-transparent government contracting policies". Echoing in the same vein, the British Government department for international development in its Strategic Papers (CSP) stated that "Poverty persists in Nigeria because of the mismanagement of resources and corruption found particularly, but not exclusively in the public sector".

Other negative effects of corruption in the Nigeria's Public Service include ineffective state institutions or organizations, income inequality, high level of poverty and economic depression (World Bank 2000; Mauro 1997; & Knack & Keefer, 1995; Tanzi&Davoodi, 1998). Corruption undermines the reputation, credibility and the legitimacy of the state and depletes social capital (Della 1999; Heindenheimer& Johnson, 2002).

## **Conclusion**

In the course of comparing the practices of NPMS among Tanzania, Malaysia, and Australia, we have noticed that these countries have employed or utilized the platforms of former agencies and mechanisms to fast-track and implement the NPMS reform agenda in their respective public services. For instance, Malaysia has Administrative, Modernization and Planning Units (MAPU) and supported by Policy Management Review Mechanism (PMRM). In Australia, there is the National Audit Office, (NAO). As a matter of fact, no such former agency with a proven potency comparable to what we have in above countries exists in Nigeria for such task as the implementation of important socio-economic reform with boldness and sagacity. However, it must be admitted that Nigeria is yet to evolve a credible and enduring governance and leadership culture with ardent political will and patriotism comparable to what we have in Tanzania, Malaysia and Australia. This, however, may account for the country's laxity and inability to practice the concept of the NPMS, as well as other countries in the sub-Saharan African States (SSAs.)

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