

NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SERVICE AND NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REFORM

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ABSTRACT

The seeming failure of public service in Nigeria is demonstrated by a series of reforms introduced by successive governments to redefine and reinvigorate it. While some of these reforms are internal, some were externally induced. The climax of such reform initiatives in contemporary democratic Nigeria was the introduction of New Public Management commonly known as NPM. New Public Management reforms offer many alternatives towards efficient service delivery. However, because of its market-cum-democratic characteristics, it seems very difficult to operate in an unstable democratic system. Premised on the apparent desire to achieve efficient service delivery, Nigeria implemented New Public Management reform as a catalyst to redefining and retransforming its public service. This paper investigates the implementation of NPM in Nigeria and argues that minimal if any results are likely to be achieved. This is largely because of the inherent contradictions between the main requirement of NPM and the structure and the context of Nigeria's public service and its political system. Putting it in another way, the features of NPM are at variance with the main structure and the character of Nigeria's political environment. From the period of active colonialism up to today, the government has set up different public service review commissions to restructure, invigorate and reorganize the battered public service but her dream is yet to become a reality.

Keywords: New Public Management, Public Service, Public Sector Reform

INTRODUCTION

The institution of public service is one of the major legacies bequeathed to Nigeria by the colonial masters. The institution was described as one of the symbols of national independence primarily established to among other things facilitate the process of development. However, its performance over the years has left much to be desired and that partly explains why a series of reforms were carried out to reinvigorate the system towards efficient service delivery. Arguably, reforms were carried out, especially in the public service to promote organizational effectiveness, build the capacity of employees, promote fiscal stability and attain national development. It is against this background cum the desire to consolidate democracy in Nigeria that the series of reforms were carried out to restore the image of the public service. The reform became necessary considering the declining nature of the institution of public service as it relates to service delivery as well as its strategic role in consolidating democracy. More importantly, the reform was also considered to be the platform under which democracy can be sustained. Echoing the same view Diamond (1999) observed that democracy is the only form of government that could guarantee the survival and implementation of government programmes (Public service reform inclusive) because of its emphasis on citizen active participation in making decisions that affects them.

The paper therefore set out to investigate the capacity of New Public Management principles as a reform programme to reinvent the public service for efficient service delivery. To achieve this objective, the study is divided into four sections. Section one is the introduction, section two is devoted to a discourse on Public Sector reforms in Nigeria, section three examines the public service and New Public Management Reform in Nigeria. Section four concludes the paper.

Public Sector Reform in Nigeria: Issues, Trends and Perspective

Reform of the public sector is not new in Nigeria's public administration. In fact, one could argue without any fear of contradiction that public sector reform is as old as the country itself. Thus, the Nigerian public service reforms were aimed at strengthening the capacity of the institution to carry out its assigned functions. Arguably, Public sector reform could be seen as a total overhauling of the government administrative machinery with the aim of injecting real effectiveness, efficiency, hard core competence and financial prudence in the running of the public sector (Omoyefa, 2008). This definition pre-supposes that all is not well with the sector and therefore, there is the need to strengthen its institutional, operational and structural capacity for efficient performance. This explains why Schacter (2000) sees public sector reform as strengthening the way the public sector is managed in a way that goals and objectives for which it was established are achieved within the specified rules and resources. Essentially, public sector reform is often aimed at achieving better service delivery of especially, the basic public services such as water, health care, quality education, poverty reduction and adequate security among others. Similarly, it is carried out to reinvent the public sector so as to meet the demands of a rapidly improving and changing global socio-political environment. This point suggests that the dynamic nature of the world in general necessitates the need for public sector reforms in both developed and developing countries, especially with the development of information and communication technology (ICT) in the governance and administration of a state. The world has now been transformed into a global village in which state and citizens can relate and participate in what affects them through the institution of democratic governance.

In Nigeria a number of reforms were carried out to reinvigorate the battered public service. The reasons of the reforms are not far from the general reasons as stated earlier; however, the reasons for reforms in Nigeria as experienced over the years were to among other things improve the welfare of employees as the agent of national development. As agent of development, the public service remains the link between one regime and another and that perhaps, explains why successive regimes, especially military regimes had carried out a series public sector reforms. It is important to note that military regimes in the country had introduced reforms largely, to suit the interest of their regimes and to generate political support and legitimacy from especially, the carrier bureaucrat and politicians. This is because of their apparent lack of skills in the art of governance in the administration of the state. From the above, it can be discerned that public service reforms have been part of Nigeria's public administration. This can be attested to by the number of reforms that were carried out over the years some of which include the Tudor Commission 1945, Harragin Commission 1947, Morgan Commission 1964, Adebo Commission 1971, Udoji Commission 1974, Dotun Commission 1988 and Ayida Panel of 1994 among others. However, it is important to stress at this point that public sector reforms in Nigeria have different motives and patterns and this

explains why distinctions could be made between and among them. For instance, the reforms of 1960s and early 80s varied with the reforms of early 90s, especially with the emergence of structural adjustment programmes, globalization and the increasing call for democratic rule across the globe. Putting it in another way, pre-independence and independence reforms emphasized income upgrading, structural reforms among others within the traditional system of public administration. The post-SAP reforms seeks a paradigm shift from the old system of public administration characterized by centralized and inefficient bureaucracy to New Public Management with emphasis on decentralization, corporatization and partnership with the private sector in the delivery of services. The reforms of the 90s were primarily aimed at making the state or governmental institutions market-friendly, lean, managerial, decentralized and customer-friendly, in the hope that it would better meet its societal objectives of good governance (Mhone, 2003).

Additionally, public sector reforms in Nigeria and Africa in general, especially from the early 90s were aimed at not only reviving the main stream public service, but more importantly to address economic underdevelopment and stimulate active participation of the private sector in the management of the economy. Thus, the reform of 1990s could be regarded to be a radical departure from the former reform programmes in the country. Conversely, the changing nature of the reforms are not far from the fact that developed countries and their agents such as the World Bank and I.M.F want to protect and guard their investment, loans and credit facilities going into developing countries and that partly, explains why the reforms are even wider in terms of coverage than the previous ones.

Despite the promises of the reforms and their achievements in the developed countries like the United Kingdom, New Zealand and United States among others, public service in Nigeria is still marred with red-tapism, delays in service delivery, corruption and inefficient personnel. Thus, the need for a better reform became eminent in order to entrench and consolidate democracy and put the country in the path of progress and development. It is against this background that the Nigerian government introduced the New Public Management reform programmes to salvage the public service by making it more transparent and accountable which in the long run helps in sustaining democracy and ensures active participation of the private sector in the management of the economy. The questions now are what is the nature and character of NPM reform? How applicable is NPM principles in Nigeria's public service? Could NPM reform be in tandem with the current realities in Nigeria? What are the major challenges that may likely engender the success of the NPM project in Nigeria and how could it be overcome? The next section of the paper will attempt to answer these questions.

Public Service and New Public Management Reform in Nigeria: Myth or Reality

Evidently, the period of active colonialism was the beginning of contemporary public service in Nigeria. The institution was hitherto established to assist the colonial government in the administration of the country, especially in revenue collection in remote areas of the country. It was also meant to quash resistance against the colonial system and ensure that traditional rulers remain the instrument for the implementation of colonial policies. Because of its colonial posture cum prolong military rule, the institution had over the years failed to realize Nigeria's objectives of statehood as envisaged by its forefathers. It is in this wise that a number of reform programmes were introduced to revive the sector for better performance. Thus, New Public

Management Reforms has now been considered as a panacea to the crisis that embedded the sector.

As the name suggests New Public Management commonly refers to as NPM is a paradigm shift in the manner with which the public sector is managed. It implies applying private sector or market-friendly techniques in the administration of state, especially as it relates to service delivery, performance measurement and accountability in managing public resources. In his studies Borins (1995) defines NPM as a normative conceptualization of public administration consisting of several inter-related components: providing high quality services that citizens as customers cherish, increasing the autonomy of public managers; giving rewards and punishment for compliant and non-compliant behaviour on the basis of performance targets, availability of human and technical resources for efficient performance and being appreciative of the virtues of competition, openness and accountability in governance. Similarly, Osborne and Gaebler (1993) see New Public Management as a set of operating principles that guide the conduct of public managers: The principles include transition from rowing to steering, community owned government, competitive government, mission-driven government, result-oriented government, customer-driven government, enterprising government, anticipatory government and the market-driven government. The premise of the above definitions suggests that public officials shall be given autonomy to decide the delivery of services. In the same direction, service delivery shall no longer be provided by the government alone instead, the private sector both profit and not-for-profit organizations including the citizens shall be active participants in the delivery of services. It is in this regard that the scholars went further to argue that NPM is a remedy for a broken system of government and therefore, countries that apply the principle could be regarded as entrepreneurial government or market-based public administration.

Considering the centrality of the private in the NPM approach, Araujo (2001) distinguished between traditional public administration and NPM as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison between Traditional Public Administration and NPM

Elements	Traditional Administration	New Public Management
Government Organization	Services provided on a uniform basis operating as a single aggregated unit	Break-up of traditional structure into quasi-autonomous units
Control of Public Organizations	Control from the Headquarters through the hierarchy of unbroken supervision and check and balances	Hands-on-professional management with clear statement of goals and performance measurement
Control of Output Measures	Control on inputs and procedures	Stress results and output control rather than procedures
Management Practice	Standard established procedures throughout the service	Using private sector management style
Discipline in resource utilization	Due process and political entitlements	Check resources demands and do more with less

Adapted from Araujo (2001)

The above table shows that NPM is a radical break from traditional public administration. It is a mechanism that stressed the need to break-up rigid bureaucratic government organizations and make them more flexible so as to adapt to the environment within which they were established. Additionally, NPM advocates rendition of account or given explanation for conduct by both the political leadership and the private sector and this perhaps, explains why NPM called for separation of policy-making from implementation. While political leadership is responsible for policy-making, professionals with technical capabilities would be responsible for the provision of services. Each should be able to offer satisfactory explanations with regards to utilization of resources kept under his care. NPM also advocates for minimal state intervention where the role of the state shall be reduced to regulatory functions alone, leaving the private sector including voluntary not-for-profit organizations to perform commercial functions. This according to the proponents of this paradigm encourages and stimulates the private sector to take the lead in the management of the country's economy.

Some of the justification for NPM reform as observed by scholars includes economic and fiscal crises that affect the world economy. According to Larbi (1999) economic crisis is by far the most important factor driving the introduction of ambitious reforms in the public sector since the early 1980s. He went further to argue that many countries across the developed and developing nations suffered from unsustainable external and domestic debts, deteriorating real terms of trade, higher inflation, low level of savings and shortages of basic consumer goods. These problems coupled with severe institutional weaknesses, fiscal indiscipline and weak external competitiveness have caused economic and fiscal crises of intense magnitude which can only be called to order by a major reform of the public sector. Similarly, policy deficiencies, bad and excessive management of the economy, large scale institutionalized corruption, weak and demoralized public services, low productivity and political instability, all contributed to worsening the crisis and thus, called for the reform of the public sector. Accordingly, Sarker and Parker (cf Naz, 2003) notes that NPM reform emerged in response to a number of environmental forces which governments everywhere have been faced with in the twenty first century. According to them, a large and expensive public sector put pressures to cut programmes and increase efficiency; massive technological innovations, particularly, the development of information technology *vis-a-vis* globalization and liberalization had also influenced the reform of the public sector across the world. In addition, the sector is also considered to be obsolete and outdated considering the increasing demands for more services from the citizens. Thus, NPM is considered to be proven management ideas and techniques available to guide the public sector reform process (Pollit, 1998). Putting it in another way, NPM is a reform strategy aimed at reinventing the public sector for efficient service delivery.

The push for reform everywhere is inspired by the current realities of societies. Thus, environmental factors must be considered in pursuing reforms. However, reforms in Nigeria generally fail to take into cognizance the ecology of public administration in the country and that has posed a serious challenge to public administration in Nigeria. Indeed, the failure of public administration institutions cannot be unconnected with reforms that are incompatible with the environmental needs of the country. Thus, NPM as a reform externally smuggled into the country may end up like previous ones because firstly, citizens and public service in particular have not been co-opted in the packaging of the reform. Thus, citizens often reject the reform on the ground that it is anti-people and against the philosophy for which the state was established as

contained in the constitution. The SAP crisis in the 1990s and its attendant consequences is a case in point. Therefore, the failure of the reform to take into consideration the nature and the character of the state may endanger the success of the reform of public service within the framework of NPM.

Another major challenge to NPM reform of public service is the fact that the reform was introduced during the difficult times of the service. The public service is currently suffering from unqualified manpower, poor condition of services, institutionalized corruption and erosion of ethical values. These conditions have degenerated the service and made it impossible for the sector to adapt to new ways of doing things as popularized by the reform. Closely connected to this is the crisis of democratization and development that engulfed the Nigerian state. The crisis has almost made it impossible for any reform to yield fruitful result because of its negative impact upon the state. As pointed out by proponents of the reforms, the reforms are only realizable in a stable economic and political environment see Hammani *et al.*.. 2006, Larbi, 1999. This explains why Batley (2004) argues that structural adjustment and public sector reform have often been delayed until the point that the fiscal and (political) crises are deep and public resources exhausted. This argument suggests that reforms of the public sector are carried out in developing countries at a time when political and fiscal crisis had seriously hit the countries and resources meant for reform are either not available or embezzled by public officials. Therefore, reform at this point is very difficult if not impossible.

Additionally, the character of public service in terms of its human capacity has also put to test reform of the public service. In what Bartley refers to as weaker political economies (African countries Nigeria inclusive), the bureaucratic arena in these economies is highly politicized and inter-connected with societal interests. Thus, employment, postings and transfers, discipline and even remuneration are tied to one's political affiliation or socio-cultural background. Indeed, in most cases, political loyalty to the political party in power played a dominant role in the selection and recruitment of personnel, especially at state and local government levels. This attitude had made it impossible for continuity in governance and transformed public service into an instrument of coercion to punish oppositions and their supporters which in the long run affects democratic consolidation. This attitude led to over bloated public service with ghost workers who often appear only on the pay roll and pay day without any stake in state administration. This resulted to a serious decline of public service in terms of output and made any keen observer of the trend of event in the sector to believe that the country has reached a point of no return and that reform of the sector within the NPM paradigm has no relevance as far as service delivery and democracy are concerned.

Anchoring the above argument Agagu (2008) argues that applying market reform programme to reinvent public service will only minimize and marginalize the role of democratic decision-making and public governance. Clearly, the reform transformed citizens into customers thereby reducing the state to a market place where financial capabilities of the customer determine his influence in the market. This condition may reduce the democratic space, the scope of public service and raise fundamental questions about the ability of the reform to reinvigorate the public service.

CONCLUSION

Given the nature and the character of Nigeria's public service coupled with the political and economic environment, NPM reforms may likely if any achieve minimal results in shaping Nigeria's system of public administration. This is largely because the structure of public service is at variance with the ingredients of NPM reforms, especially its market characteristics. Thus, NPM reforms have low practical relevance as far as the crisis of Nigeria's public sector is concerned. This argument was corroborated by Pollitt (1994) where he notes that NPM reform may work better in some context than others. The public service sector covers a wide range of activities, some of which have high technological content (e.g. telecommunication) and others low, some are person-centred (e.g. health and education) and some not; some competitive, some very hard to remould into a competitive format. Thus it is important to bear all these in mind, because they decrease or increase the chances of NPM being a 'good fit' in crisis states. Against the background, a better and vibrant home-grown reform that respects the social and/or moral values of the environment must be a priority for the public service to be reinvented. While political commitment is considered to be a sine qua non for success in any reform programme, economic and political stability is seen as a fertile ground for effective and reliable reform programmes.

Closely connected to the above is the need to have apolitical, impartial and experienced public service to drive and guide the implementation of reforms. This is because of their strategic importance in state administration. In fact, no reform can achieve appreciable results without the institution of public service. In addition, issues of institutional and human capacities of the service must also be squarely addressed as this will enhance their competencies and abilities in contributing positively to the implementation of any reform programme. Similarly, the citizens who are the beneficiaries of reforms must in the first place desire it and secondly, must be well informed about the reforms. Inputs and contributions in terms of public debates and opinion about the legitimacy and support for reforms must be sorted and considered as this will help in consolidating democracy and pave the way for people-oriented policies and programmes. Likewise, any reforms either internally or externally crafted must be within the confines of the law as any attempt to breach the provision of the constitution will amount to breach of trust which is punishable according to public service rules and Nigeria's constitution.

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