

MANAGING ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

The behavior and practice of public servants all over the world, including Nigeria, are to be governed by the highest moral standard. The core values of these moral standards are loyalty, integrity, probity, honesty, impartiality, service, respect, transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, diligence, responsiveness, professionalism and political neutrality. Over the years, several efforts made by the country to improve the performance of its public service for national development and to overcome its current economic crisis appear to be fruitless. This is partly due to increasing unethical behavior among public servants. Existing data, survey method and content analysis used in the study have revealed that the factors responsible for unethical behavior among public servants include but not limited to colonial heritage, lack of accountability, scarcity of certain categories of public service, bottlenecks or organizations queuing, faulty placement and promotion of people to leadership position, gross indiscipline, greed and avarice, poverty, appointment of unqualified, incompetent and poorly trained staff. The paper therefore recommends mass education and enlightenment, enforcement of legal instruments, code of conduct and regulations, adoption of merit principle on recruitment, training and promotion and empowerment of appropriate institutions for managing ethics so that the level of performance in the public service can be improved if not raised to a level of excellence.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian public service, just like any public service in the world, is the machinery used by the government to formulate and execute public policies to serve public interest and promote national development. Public

servants are therefore important instruments needed to ensure a stable and efficient administrative system. To ensure that public servants and public institutions fulfill their functions and responsibilities properly and effectively, they are expected to conform to certain administrative ethical norms and values. Ethics and accountability are critical for administrative systems because they underlie the legitimacy of the government itself (ECA/AAPAS, 1991). The public servants are therefore expected to abide by a code of ethics and professional integrity. They are expected to maintain absolute integrity, political neutrality and devotion to duty at all times and to do nothing which is unbecoming of a public servant. They are expected to display promptness and courtesy to the public and to avoid dilatory tactics. They should not use their position or influence to secure employment or other benefits for any member of their family. They are expected to avoid any criticism of government through printed or electronic media. They expected to avoid becoming insolvent. They should not engage in any private trade or employment.

The core values of these ethical codes are loyalty, integrity, probity, honesty, impartiality, service, respect, transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, diligence, professionalism, responsiveness and political neutrality. Public servants should therefore conform to these administrative ethical norms in order to make public service efficient and effective in the discharge of its duties to the nation.

In recent years the debates on effort to curb ethical relations and enforce accountability have intensified in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular due to increase in the incidence of unethical practices and lack of accountability in the public service. Public servants, in every nation throughout history are therefore under pressure to meet special expectations concerning proper patterns of behavior (Dunner, 1964:169-170). Their actions are subject to greater scrutiny than are those of persons not on a public pay roll and they are the object of folktales, rumours, suspicions, and criticism to a much greater degree. In general, higher standards of honesty and morality are expected of public servants than others.

Over the years, several efforts made by Nigeria to improve the performance of its public service for national development and to overcome its current economic crisis appear to be fruitless. This is partly due to the increasing unethical behavior among public servants. Unethical behavior and

practices such as bribery and corruption, patronage, embezzlement, influence peddling, use of one's position for self-enrichment, moon-lighting, partiality, absenteeism, late coming to work, leaking and/or abuse of government information, etc, appear to have been institutionalized in Nigeria today for the fact that they seem acceptable and normal to the majority. Leaders no longer frown seriously at such unethical practices and its negative impact on public service performance because in most cases they stand to gain and benefit from it.

In spite of the numerous administrative reforms, the Nigerian public service does not seem to have improved in its performance over the years. This is partly because these reforms focused on transforming the structure and the competence of the public service, without paying adequate attention to the need to inculcate proper attitudes in both the public servants and the political executives.

Rules, regulations and agencies instituted by government to raise the standard of ethical behavior among public servants seem to be either inadequate or ineffective to a large extent.

From the foregoing it can be seen that unethical practices which have assumed a disturbing dimension has impacted negatively on the performance of public servants. Oladunni (2000) argued that the prevalence of unethical behavior and lack of accountability has led to mismanagement and total economic collapse in most developing nations. He emphasized further that one major reason why Nigeria's economy remains in the doldrums today is the mismanagement of the past on the part of public sector employees (public servants). It is this paradox that has formed the purview of this paper.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to examine the management of ethics and accountability as a basis for improving performance in the Nigerian public service. The specific objectives of the study include the following:

- (a) To identify the major causes of unethical behavior in the Nigerian public service,
- (b) To identify the institutional mechanisms established by the government to curb these unethical behavior; and
- (c) To assess the institutional mechanism set up to inculcate in the public

servants the culture of accountability, probity, high performance and productivity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a theoretical review of existing literature on ethics. To achieve the research objective, the study relies on secondary sources of data. These sources include journals, textbooks, seminar papers, magazines, bulletins, newspapers and periodicals. Based on the collected data and review of related literature, interpretation, analysis, conclusions and recommendations were made.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

At this juncture, it is imperative to explain the key words used in this paper so as to establish the linkage between ethics, accountability and performance in the public service.

Ethics: The term 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word 'ethos' meaning the character or custom of people. It is 'a systematic attempt through the use of reason to make sense of our individual and social moral experience in such a way as to determine the rules which ought to govern human conduct...' (DeGeorge 1982:12). Ethics is therefore concerned with the process by which we clarify what is right and wrong and by determining a proper course of action. In effect, a search for ethics is the search for moral standards. In the words of Asobie (2001), the concept ethics may be conceived in two alternatives, but related ways. In one sense, it means a system of morals. As a science of morals, ethics is that branch of philosophy which is concerned with human character or human conduct examined in the light of certain ideals, for instance, what is good versus the bad. It is a systematic study of society designed to determine what is virtuous or what is vicious, what is good and what is evil. As a system of morals, on the other hand, ethics is connected with the rules of behavior. It deals with standards of conduct.

Chandler and Plano (1988), on their part, define ethics as that branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to human conduct, with respect to rightness or wrongness of certain actions, and to the goodness or badness of the motives and ends of such actions. The World Book Encyclopedia (1992:239) describes ethics as the systematic general science of the right

and wrong conduct. That which is good in the context of this definition is that which is desirable or acceptable; that which is bad is that which is unacceptable or undesirable in the context of society or organization where the behavior is exhibited and evaluated (Nwagbara, 2003:49). Asok (1995), on his part, sees ethics as moral principles showing the rightness and wrongness of individual or group actions. It is about good and bad predicated on certain duties and obligations. It is rooted in social and ethical environment which shapes individual values, norms and attitudes. Olojede (2001) also noted that the concept of ethics throws up key elements essential for ethical conduct in all human behavior. There are uprightness, rectitude, probity and virtuous conduct. Thus, ethics remains a major conditioning factor in individual conduct and group behavior. Its importance, according to Seteolu (2001), permeates all strata of life, individual, corporate or public realm.

Common to all the definitions given above is the fact that the study of ethics is concerned with the moral principles that determine what is right or wrong conduct. It concerns itself with right and wrong, good and bad, duty and obligations, moral and responsibility.

Government institutions are therefore predicated on well defined laws, rules and regulation; certain moral principles underpin the workings of these institutions especially the role players. In the light of this, ethical standards are meant to guide those who exercise authority with a view to forestalling official misconduct and guarantee ethically sound judgment. These ethical standards necessitate accountable leadership in the public. The administrative ethics of Nigerian public service includes integrity, honesty, probity, transparency, accountability, impartiality, loyalty, efficiency and effectiveness, diligence, professionalism, responsiveness, and political neutrality on the part of public servants in the conduct of government business. This is to ensure that the actions and behavior of public servants are in line with the accepted standard of morality and accountability.

Accountability: Ethics and accountability complement one another. Accountability itself refers to the obligation required of a subordinate to be answerable to the superior in carrying out assigned duties and in exercising discretionary powers. In the public service, the concept and

practice of accountability is expected to make public officials responsible for their actions or inactions. Accountability is supposed to make government transparent, emphasize and enhance governmental responsiveness and legitimacy, and improve policy implementation. In terms of modern democratic theory and practice, the main principle at work here is that the civil service derives its authority from the population as a whole and its responsibilities and duties from the public interest. As such it must be answerable or accountable to the general public through the official – ideally, elected – representatives of the populace.

Performance: The concept ‘Performance’ just like ethics is difficult to define. However, the Concise English Dictionary defines, it as “the act, process or art of performing. According to Longmans Dictionary of Contemporary English (1978) performance is the act of doing a piece of work, duty etc, the performance of official duties. It can also be defined as how well or badly a particular work or activity is done. For the purpose of this study, we can define performance in relation to the activities of a public servant as his efficiency in producing certain quality of goods or services.

Although the institutionalization of ethical norms is the basis of accountable relationships, in the current Nigerian context in which public servants and their political masters operate, it has to be recognized that the linkages in this chain of authority – responsibility – accountability relationship are weak or even broken in some places. Poor public service performance has been one of the consequences.

THE OBJECTIVES OF A CODE OF CONDUCT

Any code of conduct must include these ideals of ethics, and simultaneously give rise to three major objectives.

- (a) Promotion and maintenance of responsible public official conduct;
- (b) Promotion of public confidence in public officials’ integrity’
- (c) Provision of guidelines to public officials for exercising their discretionary powers (Hanekom, 1987:163)

Lawton (2003) also identified the following objectives of a code of ethics:

- (a) To offer a clear statement of values, roles and duties, rights and responsibilities;

- (b) To clarify the behavior expected of public servants;
- (c) To act as guidelines in developing ethical conduct;
- (d) To provide a consistent use of criteria for ethical conduct;
- (e) To clarify procedures and sanctions to deal with misconduct;
- (f) To minimize ambiguity and reduce uncertainty;
- (g) Promote public trust and confidence and strengthen external credibility;
- (h) To generate pride among staff; and
- (i) To reaffirm the values of the public service

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Ethical Relativism (Bowman 1990). Ethical relativism is the view that right and wrong are a function of the moral teachings of each particular society. This theory argues that an act is right when the social group to which one belongs approves it and wrong if it is rejected. In other words, ethical relativism believes that there is no single ethical standard that applies to all people at all times. The ethical relativist believes that different societies have different standards and there is no one universal standard that applies to all. Actions that are immoral in some places are circumstances that are moral in others and that one can make moral judgments only by taking into account the context in which an action occurs.

On the surface, ethical relativism is very appealing. It would seem very unfair and chauvinistic, for example, for Americans to apply their standards of morality to every one else. It would even be unfair for one person to impose his or her standards on others in his or her own society. Suppose for example, that James considers polygamy to be morally wrong. Should he therefore condemn Muslims and Mormons, who believe in polygamy?

There are innumerable ethical issues such as capital punishment, abortion, and gay rights, which divide people in our society today. Wouldn't we all be happier if every one were free to believe according to his or her own conscience? The ethical relativist seems to say that every one should apply and be judged by his or her own standards, and therefore the ethical relativist seems to be open – minded, non – judgmental, virtuous, and correct.

This theory is relevant in that ethical degeneration in the Nigerian

public service is not only due to individual moral decay, but can also be attributed to structural factors, which are beyond the control of the individual. Such factors include family and tribal bonds, which compel public servants, in a bid to strengthen those primordial loyalties, to engage in nepotism, favoritism and other unethical behavior. It is also important to note that the historical, socio- economic, and political conditions in the country coupled with factors in the evolution of the Nigerian public service, have greatly affected the ethical fibre of the whole administrative system. Most public officials justify their ethically wrong actions by citing historical precedents, and taking solace in ethical relativism.

CAUSES OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

It may be understatement to lament that modern day public service lacks moral entitlement to service the public. There is a general agreement among scholars and even some practitioners that there is poor adherence to ethical standards by public servants in most developing countries. Simple laws, rules and regulations that could enhance good ethics and performance in the public service are often generally ignored. Not only that, there is absence of coordinated and harmonious roles, responsibilities and activities among institutions responsible for public service ethics. Seteolu (2001) observed that official misconduct by public officials and unethical practices have assumed disturbing dimensions globally. These manifest in political life, administrative corruption, bribery and money laundering, contract fixing etc. Enlightened public opinion tends to hold that career bureaucrats are greatly wanting on this account, their collective performance not withstanding. They tend to be portrayed as being rather self seeking, venal and nepotistic individuals (Takaya, 1982)

A number of factors are responsible for the entrenchment and perpetration of unethical behavior in the Nigerian public service

(1) Predominance of Unethical Behavior among Political Elites:

Even though the political executives cannot be held as the sole culprit in the perpetration of corrupt and unethical practices in Nigeria, it is however clear that the spread of corruption and other unethical behaviors among the public servants has to do with its predominance among political elites. This is because in situations where the politician's ethical behavior is not beyond reproach, it would be hard to expect the bureaucrats to act otherwise.

- (2) **Colonial Heritage:** The problems of unethical behavior in the Nigerian public service can be attributed to colonial heritage. In the colonial days, the people were fond of stealing government money and property as a way of venting their anger and displeasure with the colonialist, an act often regarded as patriotic and heroic by the citizenry. Since the post colonial state failed to attract legitimacy from the people, the same logic that applied to colonial institutions are also presently used in dealings with the state and its institutions. According to Osaghe (1993: 21) the weakness of the state arising from its lack of legitimacy makes it difficult for it not only to ensure discipline but also to get its policies efficiently and effectively implemented.
- (3) **Lack of Accountability:** Lack of accountability in the public sector is recipe for corruption and other unethical practices. The image of Nigeria is harmed immeasurably by lack of accountability and the attendant corruption that it breeds (Brushan, 1995).
- (4) **Scarcity:** Another major cause of ethical decay in the Nigerian public service is scarcity. Where certain categories of public service are scarce, or there is the existence of bottlenecks or organizations queuing, there is the tendency for corruption and other ethical malpractices. Where there is great difficulty in obtaining services in passport offices, licensing authorities etc, there is bound to be the existence of unethical behavior in form of giving and taking bribes in order to secure such services.
- (5) **Faulty Placement and Promotion of People to Leadership Position:** Another major factor that is responsible for ethical decay in the Nigerian public service is faulty placement and promotion of people to leadership position. Faulty placement and promotion may stem from other factors such as ethnic discrimination. Because recruitment in the public service has been and is still being influenced by patronages and political considerations, the loyalties, commitment and actions of public officials are often guided and shaped by their primordial, loyalties rather than the requirement of impartial professionalism (Rasheed, 1995:12-14). Mmobuosi (1984) also argued that faulty placement and promotion may arise from the composition of selection and promotion panels, the parastatals and Board members of which do not have the requisite skills and knowledge. ASCON Consulting Team (1983) also observed that the knowledge and skills may not be perfect in predicting effective performance but the appointment of pedestrians for the exercise can be dysfunctional in performance prediction.
- (6) **Gross Indiscipline:** In Nigeria today, gross indiscipline has manifested itself in different forms. The lack of accountability, unethical behavior and corrupt practices have become so pervasive and even institutionalized norms

of behavior in Nigeria to the extent that one may conveniently speak of a crisis of ethics in Nigerian public service (Rasheed 1995:12). Among such unethical behavior are stealing of government properties, embezzlement, ostentatious living, disregard for such values as cooperation, tolerance, honesty, sincerity, diversion to private use of seized contrabands, examination malpractices, inflation of census figures, admission and certificate racketeering, among others.

(7) **Poverty:** Poverty can also be identified as one important source of corruption and other unethical behavior in the Nigerian public service. Poverty has become more pronounced with the emergence of the economic depression which has intensified the effort for personal survival at the expense of upholding official norms. The poorer a person is, the greater the pressure to yield to the temptation of corruption or other unethical behavior.

(8) **Greed and Avarice:** These also constitute another source of corruption among public servants in Nigeria. These are human vices, which may exist regardless of the quality of national leadership, or whether there is scarcity or not. This has to do with the criminal tendencies inherent in the individual, particularly those who desire to look for more money at all costs.

(9) **Appointment of Unqualified, Incompetent and Poorly Trained Staff:** This is one of the stumbling blocks to achieving accountable and transparent public service. This has affected the performance of public servants negatively. As Ayida (1987:38) put it, a public sector that is drained of competent skilled manpower, even with a better staffed private sector, will spell doom for the country. The abuse of federal character principle as the basis of appointment into the public service has lowered the emphasis on merit, with competent and qualified Nigerians being prevented from employment in the public sector due to their state of origin.

(10) **Inflation:** As a result of high inflation, the salary and allowances of public servants have become grossly inadequate to meet their personal needs. The devaluation of the country's currency vis – a – vis other currencies is also a contributing factor to the poor financial condition of most public servants. These two situations have lured many public servants to join the band wagon of bribe takers in the service.

(11) **Acceptability and Institutionalization of Unethical Behavior and Practices.**

Unethical behavior and practices such as bribery and corruption, patronage, nepotism, embezzlement, influence peddling, use of one's position for self-enrichment, moon lighting, partiality, absenteeism, late coming to work,

abuse of property, leaking and/or abuse of government information, etc, appear to have been institutionalized in Nigeria today for the fact that they seem acceptable and normal to the majority. Leaders no longer frown seriously at such unethical practices and its negative impact on performance in the public service because in most cases they stand to gain and benefit from it.

(12) Unnecessary Political Interference in the Purely Administrative Process of Government:

Political interference in personnel matters - employment, deployment and promotion usually undermine the integrity of the Nigerian public service. Echoing the words of a one time Head of Service and Secretary to a Military Government in Nigeria.... "Whilst all have acknowledged the need to uphold integrity and discipline, and preserve the independence of the service, there have been cases where this principle has been sacrificed for political, tribal and other considerations" (Qdumosu, 1968:67).

(13) Weak Institutions: The Public Complaints Commission, the Code of Conduct Bureau, The Public Accounts Committee, The Code of Conduct Tribunal, the anti-corruption agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have proved inadequate or ineffective and weak to reduce or deter corruption and other unethical practices in the public service.

The Civil Service Commission set up to oversee the management of Civil Service regulations and conduct appears ineffective in handling ethical problems. With a high rate of unemployment and few vacancies, the Civil Service Commission has almost been rendered redundant in recruitment exercise into the civil service. The patronage system has taken over. This form of recruitment has gradually eroded the professionalism of the civil service (Moti, 2006:8).

THE CONSEQUENCES OF UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

The implications of unethical behavior are very great especially in the area of political and economic development.

Ikejiani-Clark (2001) had this to say of the consequences of unethical behaviour in the public service. Unethical behaviour leads to non-achievement of goals; diverts resources from public purse to private ones; weakens public bureaucracy; exerts a corrupting influence on other members of administrative apparatus; lowers respect for authority; diverts

energy into lobbying, fiddling etc, resulting in inappropriate criteria for arriving at decisions.; dilutes individual and group commitment to national values and civil responsibilities; slows down the pace of economic development through manipulation of funds for projects.; destroys or weakens efficiency and effectiveness of public services (both civil services and the corporations); endangers national security internally and externally e.g. officials selling state secrets by bargaining with foreign bodies on terms detrimental to the country; endangers national priorities and fairness if people in key positions promote projects or schemes in which they have personal or financial interest against that of the nation.; concentrates wealth in a few hands and hence widen the gap between the rich and the poor, creating discontent among the people, a situation which has larger implication for political development; and stunts the functioning of an economy because it leads government officials to take actions that are not in general interest.

Oladunni (2006:67) also corroborated this assertion:

The economy sinks deeper into doldrums as it comes under the full weight of corrupt and other unethical practices. Industries are grounded; those surviving are operating below capacity. Retrenchment has become a common feature in the public sector. There has been mismanagement and inefficiency on all fronts and the citizens are worst for it, as poverty runs deeper in the lives of the people.

To Oyedele (2004; 95),

Corruption and other unethical behavior can be seen as the cancer that eats into the heart of our societies particularly in public life. It has triggered certain components of economic crisis, which in turn intensified unethical behavior. Thus, the economic crisis that has gripped Africa is in some respect, both a cause and consequence of increased unethical practices.

Another major consequence of unethical practices, according to Oloyede (2004:95), is that it reduces the capacity of the civil service to provide goods and services for the benefit of the public it is designed to serve. More over, corruption and other unethical practices create a situation of potential political instability by destroying trust and confidence, which is the foundation for political stability. Leaders' preoccupation with serving section of interests magnifies divisions within the society and this leads to a loss of respect for authority and laws. Similarly, it has been noted that

unethical practices reduce government effectiveness by undermining the legitimacy of public authority, generating political instability and violence. It leads to absence of a sense of mission of professionalism and monumental distrust among public servants (Olowu, 1985).

MEASURES TAKEN BY THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT TO CURB UNETHICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

There have been series of enactment of codes and establishment of institutional mechanisms to enforce ethical behavior in an attempt to curb unethical practices in the Nigerian public service. These include but not limited to:

- (1) **The Public Complaints Commission:** This Commission was established in 1975 to investigate all complaints in respect of all administrative actions by officers of public agencies considered by citizens as contrary to law or regulation, arbitrary, unfair, oppressive or improper. The various efforts have however, not resulted in a satisfactory level of public accountability
- (2) **Code of Conduct Bureau:** This bureau is located under the Presidency. Their aims and objectives are to establish and maintain a high standard of morality in the conduct of government business and to ensure that the actions and behavior of public officers conform to the highest standards of public morality and accountability. The Code of Conduct Bureau is also empowered to scrutinize the declaration of assets by public officials in respect of their conduct in public office.
- (3) **The 1999 Nigerian Constitution :** As part of ethics in the public service, there is a section of the Nigerian constitution dealing with such areas as promotion of honesty and integrity. Specifically, the Fifth Schedule, Part I of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution provides for code of conduct for public officers requiring public officials not to allow personal interests to conflict with their official responsibilities; not to engage in pecuniary engagements, not to operate foreign accounts; not to ask for gifts; and to declare their assets immediately after taking office, every four years and at the end of their terms of office (Rasheed: 1995:12-14). It must be observed that the constitutional and legal framework have not enhanced ethics and accountability because, often times, assets seized from public officers indicted by probe panels and tribunals under one leadership are later returned to them under another.

- (4) **Law Enforcement Agencies/Law Courts:** Their basic responsibilities include ensuring that there is accountability and enforcement of laws and regulations so as to engender ethical behavior and promote efficient performance in the public service.
- (5) **The Public Accounts Committee:** This committee was empowered by both the 1989 and 1999 constitutions to prevent and expose corruption, inefficiency or waste in the execution or administration of laws or in the disbursement or administration of funds approved by the legislature.
- (6) **Code of Conduct Tribunal:** Tribunals such as the Code of Conduct Tribunals have been set up by the government to deal with ethical misconduct in the public service.
- (7) **Civil Service Rules:** The activities of the civil service are guided by civil service rules. In addition there is the financial instruction which spells out a set of directive, rules, and regulations by which authorized officials are required to observe in all decisions and actions having implications. Properly enforced, these instruments ensure a high degree of accountability and probity.
- (8) **Internal and External Auditors:** The government also appoints independent official charged with the responsibility for the auditing of government accounts. There are also internal checks and balances maintained jointly by the office of the Director of Budget and the individual ministries, departments and agencies of government. The emphasis of this internal control (e.g. circular letters) is on the honesty of official and regularity in financial practice. Quite often these auditors do not have the required apparatus for evaluation to enhance ethics and accountability.
- (9) **Pressure Groups and Public Opinion:** Public opinion is a potent force moderating the ethical conduct of public officials. Every office holder is an object target of petition by some individuals or groups or stakeholders leaving allegations of wrong doings by the former. Pressure groups such as Nigerian Labor Congress, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU) have also criticized the ethical behavior of public servants.
- (10) **Regulatory Agencies:** Regulatory agencies such as the Central Bank of Nigeria, National Agency for Food, Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Security and Exchange Commission, National Broadcasting Commission, etc, have been set up by the government to regulate the ethical conduct of some organizations and their officials.

- (11) There are **media campaigns** against corruption and other unethical practices such as the Ethical Revolution Campaign (1973 -1983), War against Indiscipline (1984 -1985), Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), National Orientation Agency.
- (12) The **Audit Alarm Committee** is also an innovation of the government, the purpose of which is to curb the incidence of spurious payments and to ensure that chief executives do not veto audit queries without remedy. The Auditor-General can also invoke sanctions against officers who misbehave financially or fail to attend to audit queries as appropriate. He also possesses powers to query not only civil servants but political appointees e.g. Ministers and Director Generals. Where the queries concern the accounting officer, it shall be answered personally by him.
- (13) **The 1975 Purge of the Civil Service:** In addition to the above measures, there was the purge of the public service in 1975 during which about 10,000 public officers were dismissed or retired on alleged inefficiency, old age, declining productivity and doubtful probity.
- (14) **The 1993/1994 Failed Parastatals Tribunal/Panel:** This tribunal was to investigate and recommend punishment for all those responsible for the failed parastatals under the government. The Failed Banks Tribunal is a good example.
- (15) **Establishment of Anti Corruption Agencies:** The government has also established anti-corruption agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to deal with corrupt practices in the public service.
- (16) **Due Process Policy in the Award of Contract and Procurement:** The government of ex- President Olusegun Obasanjo approved the new policy guidelines for procurement and award of contracts in government ministries, parastatals and agencies, to ensure accountability, efficiency, probity, transparency, value for money, and as a mechanism to check the excessive public procurement and award of contracts.
- (17) **Monetization Policy:** To eliminate wastages and corruption, ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo also introduced monetization policy in the Nigerian public service. This is a right step in addressing the problem of ethical misconduct in the public service.

Many of these measures and institutions, according to Rasheed (1995), have failed to live up to expectations because in most cases, measures introduced have been partial in nature and many of the institutions established to promote ethics are either inadequate, ineffective, weak or often lack the resources, public visibility, impartiality and public support that are critical to success.

The Public Complaints Commission, the Code of Conduct Bureau, The Public Accounts Committee, The Code of Conduct Tribunal, the anti-corruption agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) have proved inadequate or ineffective and weak to reduce or deter corruption and other unethical practices in the public service.

The Civil Service Commission set up to oversee the management of Civil Service regulations and conduct appears ineffective in handling ethical problems. With a high rate of unemployment and few vacancies, the Civil Service Commission has almost been rendered redundant in recruitment exercise into the civil service. The patronage system has taken over. This form of recruitment has gradually eroded the professionalism of the civil service (Moti, 2006:8).

MANAGING ETHICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR IMPROVED PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

In view of the cancerous effects of unethical behavior on the performance of the Nigerian public service and the nation in general, it is suggested that the various agencies, laws, tribunals and campaigns should be reorganized to be more effective to check corruption and all other unethical practices in the public service. This is why we are suggesting that the government should pursue with vigor, its plan to make the Code of Conduct Bureau more effective, to establish and maintain a high standard of morality in the conduct of government business and to ensure that the actions and behavior of public officials conform to the highest standards of public morality and accountability.

The government should embark on mass education/campaigns on the extent and negative cost of all unethical behaviors.

Ethics and societal norms should be taught in both the primary and secondary schools and it should be introduced as compulsory course in all higher institutions of learning.

The government should embark on sound welfare programmes and enabling conditions of service in order to cushion the effects of the harsh

economic condition of the country. This will reduce the burden on public servants and hence check corrupt and other unethical practices.

The government should enact, improve and effectively enforce legal instruments, code of conduct and regulations promoting ethics, accountability and good performance.

The principle of reward and punishment should be introduced to the issue of probity in the public service.

The government should intensify its policies on recruitment, training and promotion of public servants. This will to a great extent reduce or eliminate ethical decay in the service.

Political office holders and even the bureaucrats who loot public treasury should not only be humiliated but also to have the loots recovered by the succeeding government.

Nigerian government should emphasize preventive and enforcement approach more than institutional approach in curbing ethical misconduct.

Political office holders must be made to account for their stewardship in concrete quantifiable terms.

The decision-making process of the government should be transparent and open to public scrutiny.

The Code of Conduct Bureau, Code of Conduct Tribunal and the Civil Service Commission should be strengthened so that they can live up to their responsibilities by ensuring that appropriate procedures and sanctions are promptly applied to deal with ethical misconduct in the public service.

The government should adopt personnel policies, procedure and practices that help to promote ethical values and norms. Examples are the use of merit principle and granting of equal opportunities to all public servants.

The separation of public and private interests in the conduct of public servants is a necessary precondition for transparency and accountability. The decisions and actions of an office holder should, therefore, not be affected, or appear to be affected by personal interest. Conflict of interest is inevitable in any organization, but it should be defined, identified and managed in order to foster public confidence in the integrity of public servants and public decision making without unduly inhibiting the effectiveness and efficiency of the public service (Keulers, 204:21).

All professional bodies should not only set certain ethical or mode of behavior of their members but should also sanction erring members who violate these ethical codes. This is to ensure that the actions and behavior of their members are in line with the accepted standard of morality and accountability.

The politically inspired selection and appointments in the public service, even though inevitable in some cases, should be linked to merit selections, embedded in a strong ethical framework and counter-balanced by an effective system of checks and balances.

Measures should also be put in place to prevent undue interference in appointment, postings, training and promotion of public servants. The autonomy of the civil servants should be provided as it is the practice in the United Kingdom. Like the army, the civil service should be encouraged to remain apolitical and not get committed to a party or leader (Birkinshaw, 1993).

In order to demonstrate commitment to sound ethics in the public service, public servants should make it a fundamental policy not to pay bribe in return for special favors granted. Receipt of bribes or gratification by public officers should not only be prohibited but severely punished.

People's organization and NGOs also have crucial roles to play as watchdogs and as supporters of the role of other watchdog organizations, such as the media and ombudsman, sensitizing the public on blatant abuse of power and office, exposing corrupt and unethical behavior and demanding that such acts should be corrected and punished.

CONCLUSION

The promotion of ethics in the Nigerian public service is one of the positive steps in ensuring excellent performance. Public servants are therefore expected to work in accordance with a code of ethics which emphasis honesty, transparency, accountability, impartiality and professionalism. Over the years however, the ethical conduct of the public service has failed to improve the performance of the service. This is partly due to increasing unethical behavior among public servants such as insubordination, disobedience, infidelity, sexual harassment, dishonesty, moral ineptitude, disordering behavior, habitual lack of punctuality, negligence of duty, incitement to strike, criminal conviction, corruption etc. Many factors are responsible for unethical behavior among public servants. These include but not limited to gross indiscipline, poverty, unqualified, incompetent and poorly trained staff, lack of accountability, faulty placement and promotion of people to leadership position and lack of committed leadership.

The mechanism, policies and institutions put in place have not helped much in enforcing ethical code among public servants as ethical and accountable behavior in the Nigerian public service is still much to be desired.

In the light of the foregoing, we therefore recommend a comprehensive agenda to promote ethical conduct so that the poor performance in the Nigerian public service can be improved if not raised to a level of excellence.

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