

Bureaucracy and Socio-Economic Management in a Depressed Economy

BUREAUCRATIE ET GESTION SOCIO-ÉCONOMIQUE DANS UNE ÉCONOMIE STAGNANTE

Idakwoji S. P.¹

Abstract: This paper examined the role of bureaucracy in socio-economic management in a depressed economy, using Nigeria as a case study. The logic and validity of the proposition that bureaucracy is the nucleus of governmental management has long been acknowledged by scholars of development administration. The contributions of such scholars have led to the realization that without a vibrant and dynamic bureaucracy, national socio economic development in less developed societies will nose-dive. The need for vibrant and dynamic bureaucracy in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised taking into cognisance the parochial political culture of the country. Again, the dominance of the political system by the amateur political class places heavy task on the bureaucracy in ensuring the proper functioning of the governmental system. However there are challenges facing bureaucracy in Nigeria which include cold war between bureaucrats and the politicians and the absence of national ideology amongst others. The paper concluded that for effective socio-economic development of the country, the political and the bureaucratic elites should work together as partners in nation building. This can only be attained with a clear national ideology and in a situation where each appreciates the role of the other and work within the limits of each boundary as spelt out by the law of the land.

Key words: Bureaucracy; Ideology; Parochial political culture

Résumé: Cet article examine le rôle de la bureaucratie dans la gestion socio-économique dans une économie stagnante, en prenant le Nigeria comme un cas d'étude. La logique et la validité de la proposition que la bureaucratie est le noyau de la gestion gouvernementale sont reconnues depuis longtemps par des spécialistes de l'administration du développement. Les contributions de ces spécialistes ont conduit à la prise de conscience que sans une bureaucratie vivante et dynamique, le développement socio-économique nationale dans les sociétés moins développées va descendre en piqué. La nécessité d'une bureaucratie vibrante et dynamique au Nigeria ne peut pas être surestimée en tenant compte de la culture politique paroissiale du pays. La domination de la classe politique amatrice dans le système politique pose de nouveau des tâches lourdes sur la bureaucratie en assurant le bon fonctionnement du système gouvernemental. Cependant, il y a des défis auxquels sont confrontés la bureaucratie au Nigeria, telles que la guerre froide entre les bureaucrates et les politiciens et l'absence d'idéologie nationale entre autres. L'article conclut que pour un développement socio-économique effectif du pays, les élites politiques et bureaucratiques doivent travailler ensemble en partenariat dans la construction de la nation. Ce ne peut être atteint qu'avec une idéologie nationale claire et dans une situation où chacun apprécie le rôle de l'autre et travaille dans les limites de chaque frontière en conformité avec la législation nationale.

Mots clés: Bureaucratie; Idéologie; Culture politique paroissiale

1. INTRODUCTION

Bureaucracy is the nerve centre of governmental management. Thus, bureaucracy is an important conditioning factor or determinant of the success or failure of any government development policy or strategy. The logic and validity of the proposition that bureaucracy is the nucleus of governmental management has long been acknowledged by scholars of

¹ Department of public administration federal polytechnic, idah, kogi state, Nigeria.

E-mail: isalamipious@yahoo.co.uk

*Received 5 January 2011; accepted 28 February 2011

development administration such as Fred Riggs, Lucian Pye, and Katz, S.(Abdulsalami 2007). The contributions of studies by those scholars and others have led to the realization that there is a relationship between national socio-economic development and bureaucracy. The relationship is so strong that without a vibrant and dynamic bureaucracy, no nation can achieve the desired objectives of improved socio-economic development.

The importance of bureaucracy in the management of socio-economic development of the country is more acknowledged in an era of economic depression or economic melt down as being witnessed globally today. The survival or otherwise of any nation in an era such as this owe much to the nature and type of bureaucracy which can collaborate with the political class to ensure effective and efficient management of the national resources for development.

As it is generally the norm in government, the political class has been bestowed with the responsibility of formulating various policies of socio-economic development. The organ that is responsible for the day to day execution of the policies so formulated by the political class is the bureaucracy.

The relevance of bureaucracy in managing public socio-economic affairs becomes so glaring when one considers the parochial political culture of Nigeria which is characterized by little awareness on the part of the citizens of the operations of the political system in terms of demands, pressures on political system, (that is input), and what policy decisions are made and why, (that is) output process. The political system is like a black box to the citizens, what government does, why and how it does it are not clear to the citizens (Almond and Vebra in Cibueze (2001).

In a society characterized by parochial political culture, opportunity for participation in decision-making process by the citizens is so little or nonexistent at all, and as such citizens become alienated from government.

Given the foregoing circumstances, the only enlightened and organised body that can be the bridge between the political class and the masses is the bureaucracy.

It is germane to note that the era of economic depression is an abnormal situation which poses a lot of challenges to government of both developed and the developing world; and especially in the developing world where the political culture is characterised by:

- I. apathetic and passive citizens
- II. policies that flow from rulers rather than from citizens
- III. loss of faith in the ability of the political system to provide
- IV. a situation where there is resentment and sense of frustration among citizens.
- V. Citizens that seek change through violence

In such a political culture the only means to hold the country together and ensure stability is the availability of vibrant and strong bureaucracy which can interpret policies, implement and manage the socio-economic environment for national development. The challenges facing bureaucracy in this situation is enormous.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we shall examine the following:

- 1) Bureaucracy as a concept
- 2) Role of bureaucracy in socio-economic management
- 3) Challenges facing bureaucracy in Nigeria
- 4) Conclusion and recommendations

2. BUREAUCRACY AS A CONCEPT

Bureaucracy is often used in connection with the conduct of public affairs and the activities of public officials in particular. Bureaucracy is not limited to public organization; it is also applied to private large scale organization. In the conduct of public affairs, bureaucracy is always used pejoratively to refer to inefficiency, lack of initiative, regimentation, rigidity in the approach to human problems and downright stubbornness (Adebayo 1984). However, bureaucracy, as concerned by Max Weber, is a social mechanism that maximizes efficiency in administration. Thus, bureaucracy, according to Weber, is a legal-rational authority which is based on legal contract between the parties involved (Marshal and Molly, 2004). Based on Weber's proposition, bureaucracy is a great social innovation which would inevitably lead to mass democracy. This would happen because of the strict rules and regulations that must be followed under bureaucracy. Thus, bureaucracy relies fundamentally on the rule of law and equality before to law. Bureaucracy, where properly practised brings about speed, precision, unambiguity, continuity and orderliness, avoidance of conflict and provides for cooperation, efficiency and effectiveness (Idakwoji 2009).

From the above, it can be rightly asserted that bureaucracy is the procedural processes institutionalised for efficient and effective administration of any large scale organization. The superior effectiveness of bureaucracy, its capacity to coordinate large scale administrative task, and superior efficiency are the expected results of its peculiar characteristics as outlined by Webber (Mbawike, 2003). It is for the purpose of effectiveness and efficiency that peculiar features such as expert knowledge, specialisation, rationality, impersonality, systematic discipline, procedure, hierarchy, and career orientation are the hallmarks of bureaucracy.

3. BUREAUCRACY AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC MANAGEMENT

Bureaucracy is an indispensable agent of social change. Bureaucratic role in socio-economic management varies from one country to another, depending on the level of economic, political, social and technological development of the country, its history and other related antecedents. In low-income and less developed countries like Nigeria, bureaucracy plays a very significant role in socio-economic decision-making and provision of services that affect virtually all aspects of societal life (Abdulsalami 2007).

The major role bureaucracy plays in socio-economic management of Nigeria according to Abdulsalami (2007) include (and not limited to) security of life and property, infrastructural facilities administration in the areas such as transportation, communication, water resources development and management (for domestic, agricultural, industrial, commercial and recreational purposes), energy (electricity, fuel gas, etc); and ensuring freedom of movement and association, and above all maintenance of law and order in the society. Hence, it has been widely acknowledged among scholars that the effectiveness, efficiency and efficacy with which public services are delivered depend to a great extent on the quality of its bureaucracy. Bureaucracy therefore, plays a pivotal role in assisting the political class in the formulation, execution and management of public policies and programmes designed to foster the socio-economic development of the nation and to promote nation-building.

In a less developed state like Nigeria, where the political class is dominated by the amateur politicians, such 'political immaturity' places a very heavy task on the bureaucracy in ensuring the proper functioning of government.

Hence, the conventional wisdom as articulated in classical writings in the field of public administration describe the bureaucracy as the 'nucleus' of government executive organ which is greatly involved in the management of socio-economic affairs of any nation.

In developing society and particularly in Nigeria, this involvement emanated from the lack of knowledge and time on the part of the political class coupled with the nature of our political culture which is characterized by:

- 1) Little awareness on the part of the citizens about the workings of government
- 2) The immaturity of the political class which prevents the politicians from knowing the dynamics of holding political office. Because of this, political office holders hardly articulate socio-economic problems of the society for agenda setting in government.
- 3) Apathetic and alienated masses who do not expect anything from the political system because of loss of confidence and betrayal of trust by the political class overtime.

Against the foregoing backdrop, the primacy of the bureaucratic class in shaping public policies becomes a necessity. Bureaucracy, being the only 'organized and knowledgeable body' of indigenous people has to take the challenge of articulating the societal socio-economic needs pushes them to the political class in form of policy recommendation role. As rightly observed by Omoleke (2004), public policy issues in governmental setting in modern era, involve matters of technical complexity, requiring specialized knowledge and attention. Since the political class lacks the necessary technical knowledge and attention, they have to rely on the bureaucracy on such technical matters as economic and social development issues.

Again in the area of information and record management, which are necessary for policy choices and decision-making it is only the bureaucracy that has the custody of the needed information and records. Thus, the quality of policy choices and decision making is anchored on the available records and information at the disposal of the decision-maker.

The most crucial responsibility of the bureaucracy is that of implementation of the policies and programmes of government. In this very important task, the bureaucracy is expected to exercise considerable discretionary powers by wielding remarkable influence on the pattern and quality of policy outcomes.

The implementation can only become successful if, and only if the bureaucracy, as the reservoir of the labour force, is allowed to recruit, deploy and manage the available human and material resources to achieve a given goal. The non-professionalisation of bureaucracy affects policy implementation and project execution. This is a serious administrative lapse especially when the political class meddles with administrative matters, as it is always the case in Nigeria.

Another major reason why bureaucracy takes pre-eminence in policy matters in Nigeria is the lack of responsiveness of the political class. Government responsiveness means that the political leaders take into account the 'will' of the masses when taking decisions on state matters. Political leaders, according to Idakwoji, (2008), exercise responsibility when they make intelligent judgment concerning political demands. As Key (1960) observed, in America, political leaders are thought that leaders should respond to the 'will' of the people and that holding public office is accepting public trust. These lessons, according to Key, (1960) ingrained in an American at an early age, are reinforced as a citizen assumes and serves in leadership capacity. This political culture in America is quite at variance with that of Nigeria where people see public office as avenue to amass wealth. The absence of enduring political culture makes the bureaucracy in Nigeria to play a leading role in the socio-economic transformation through innovation and social engineering.

4. CHALLENGES FACING BUREAUCRACY IN NIGERIA

The Nigerian bureaucracy is facing enormous challenges which mostly emanate from various sources. The sources of challenges include the political climate of Nigeria which poses a kind of threat to bureaucratic efficiency. The political climate in Nigeria does not pave way for proper bureaucratization and professionalisation of the bureaucracy. There is too much amount of meddlesomeness of politics with administration. Political interference with purely administrative matters such as staff recruitment, staff deployment, promotion, etc constitutes dysfunction to the bureaucratic processes and its efficiency.

Another major challenge facing bureaucracy in Nigeria is the cold-war between the bureaucrats and the political office holders. The cold war, though unpronounced exist between the political office holder (who assumes to be the master) but without adequate knowledge and time, but yet does not want to appreciate and acknowledge the technical competence of the bureaucrat/technocrat create an atmosphere of 'cold war' and "Let us watch and see" syndrom in the relationship between the career officers and the political office holders. This constitutes impediment to policy and programme initiation and management as it leads to administrative tension.

Again, one other major challenge facing bureaucracy in Nigeria is the low level of technological development. This has made procedures and methods in bureaucracy to become outmoded and not in tune with global trend. This greatly affect the efficiency level of the bureaucracy as the operations are archaic and ou of tune with the dynamism in the world of work.

Another challenge is the absence of national ideology. The presence of national ideology fast tracts the definition and location of national purpose and national objectives. This will lead to the identification of basic national values which can be taught to the citizens and ingrained in them right from childhood to adulthood. The vacuum created by lack of national ideology is responsible for ethnic, tribal, religious and other divisive sentiments/forces that have brought about mistrust and disunity which have resulted in backwardness in the socio-economic development of the country.

5. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

The inability of the Nigerian bureaucracy to deliver the much needed services in the socio-economic life of the citizens which has led to the decline of the standard of living of the Nigerian people is not entirely the fault of the bureaucracy. Rather the bulk of the blame is more on the political class (whether military or civilian) which failed to chart a national ideology and value system that could encourage nationalism and patriotism. As Self (1977) rightly observed, politics determine the general contours of administration, and administrators work delicately within the dictates of their political masters. Since the political class could not assume their proper position as definers of national ideologies/objectives and molders of the entire society for socio-economic development, and they have not paved way for the bureaucracy to properly bureaucratize, using the Weberian legal- rational authority, the end result is the inefficiency and ineffectiveness witnessed in the nation's many years of quest for socio-economic development. A country where the political class is amateur in the management of the nation's socio-economic affairs, it requires a strong bureaucracy to use its legal-rational authority and knowledge to manage the development programmes of the country, provided of course the political class gives free hands to the bureaucracy to function.

There is always some degree of conflict between politicians' interests in helping their supporters and administrators' concern with the impartial rules and procedures to produce desired services. The political concern or obsession with issues of control (albeit wrongfully) conflict with the administrators' interest in effective delegation of discretionary powers/authority. Such delegation is needed and necessary to increase the consistency and promptness of decision-making and also to increase the power of bureaucracy in policy/programme execution. In this way, the roles of the politicians and the bureaucrats are clearly demarcated, and the bureaucrats' intellectual integrity gets better protection. In the final analysis there should be closest rapprochement between politicians and bureaucrats since the two are partners in nation – building.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proffered in order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the management of socio-economic affairs of the country.

(1) In-as-much-as there is no water tight separation between politicians and bureaucrats are partners in the area of public management, yet there is a clear demarcation of the role each is expected to play. It is therefore recommended that each party should be allowed to carry out its responsibility within the confines of the law. Thus, political meddlesomeness with administrative matters such as staff recruitment, promotion, posting, staff posting/assignment, etc should be avoided to create room for discipline and service delivery in the bureaucracy.

(2) It is also recommended that politicians should always recognize and appreciate the professional and technical competencies of the bureaucrats/technocrats and accord them their due respect and authority. As we know, politics is an area of change and in determinacy while administration is one of stability and routine. Thus settled decisions that are pushed to the bureaucracy for execution should be allowed to follow the normal due process. It is when this is done that political control and monitoring can be effective.

(3) The era of globalization calls for alignment of one system with others in the global village. The low level of technological development in Nigeria has greatly affected all spheres of development, including social and economic spheres. The need to fast track technological development of the country should not be over-emphasised. It is when this level is attained that bureaucracy can function effectively especially its record and data management which are the main stay of socio-economic decision-making.

(4) It is important to note that no country can develop without any clear national ideology. The most obvious and universal contribution of politicians to policymaking occurs through the formation of general attitudes, opinions and ideologies. Thus climate setting for ideological development (ought to be) is within the domain of politics. However, where the politicians fail in this direction the intellectuals within the bureaucracy could assume such role. Nigeria as a country lacks national ideology which can guide the behaviour of public officials (political and bureaucratic). The political and bureaucratic elites are therefore challenged to define and design national ideology for Nigeria which can move the country to the next level..

REFERENCES

- Abdulsalami, I. (2007). The Role ofn Public Administrartion in National Development Stratgy, Challenges and Prospects. *NIM Journal*, 43(2), 30-33
- Adebayo, A. (1981). *Principles and Practice of Public Administration in Nigeria*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Almond, S. and Vebra S. (1965), in Chibueze. C. I. (2001). Public Opinion and Bureaucratic Actors in Public Policy Process in Nigeria: Some Theoretical ad Empirical Observations. *Calabar Journal of Politics and Administration*, 1(2), 42-43.
- Idakwoji, S. P. (2008). Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness: The Bedrock of Democracy, Paper Presented at *National Conference of SASS*. Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja.
- Idakwoji, S. P. (2009). *Fundamentals of Administrative Theories and Management*, Revised Edition, Idah: Odoma Presss.
- Key, V. O. (1964). *Public Opinion and American Democracy*. New York: Knopt.
- Marshal, S. and Molly G. S. (2004). *Leadership Act Matters*. Benin City: Gospel Press.
- Mbawuike, E. O. (2003). *Poverty and National Development*. Benin: Ethiop Publishing co.
- Omoleke, I. I. (2004). The Bureaucratic Failure in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis of Nigeria Government Bureaucracy, *JSS*, 8(1).
- Self, Peter (1977). *Administrative Theories and Politics*. Britain: George Allen and Unwin.
- Tukur, M. (1999). *Leadership and Governance in Nigeria: The Relevance of Values*. Oxon: Book Point Ltd.