

**ETHICS IN NIGERIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND  
SERVICE DELIVERY**

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**Abstract**

Absence of ethical conduct and moral value in public administration in Nigeria has been a major source of corruption and monumental decay in public infrastructure development and public service delivery. Despite attempts to uphold ethical standards in public service through the promotion of ethics infrastructural and establishment of institutional mechanism to checkmate the ugly trend, unethical practice and corruption appears to be on the increase with its attendant negative effect on general economic outlook. This paper examines the ethical issues in public administration to encourage the application of ethics in public administration and ensure efficient and effective public service delivery. In this regard the paper relies extensively on secondary source of data collection method and use content analysis for data analysis. The study found out that the introduction of ethics infrastructure and institutions for arresting unwholesome practices and misconduct in public service could not yield the desired result. The high level of corruption exhibited by public office holders in service delivery is due to lack of transparency in its conduct of public duty. The paper therefore suggested election of a political leader with political will that will enforce high level of ethical standard which in turn will stimulate overall development in the society.

Key words: Ethics, public administration, public service, value, moral, accountability, development.

**Introduction**

The origin of ethics, as a word, could be traced from the ancient Greek word 'ethos' which connotes custom, success, nature, character, and manner of thought. Ethics is a system of accepted beliefs, morals and values that influence human behaviour (Ibietan and Joshua, 2013). It has been stressed upon in individual life as well as public life through time immemorial through sacred texts and theorists like the Doniger and Smith (1991), Narayan (1973), Dharma (1999), Bentham according to Postema (2006) as well as Rawls (1990) among others respectively. However, the study of ethics is relatively a recent phenomenon in public administration but until now, public administration had existed without value such as ethics. But the application of morals and values in public administration has significantly changed the roles and duties of public administrators towards provision of common good for the citizens (Gow in Ibietan & Joshua, 2013). The expectation here is that those saddled with the responsibility of service delivery are under moral obligation to carry out their duty and are also morally accountable for outcome of decision taken and face sanctions in the case of established misconduct.

It is on the basis of this ethical obligation by public office holders that beliefs, morals and value that influence human behaviour are the bedrock of Public Service ethics and accountability principles.

These principles are enshrined in the rules and regulations to ensure proper conduct of officials, corporate bodies and government organs, so as to facilitate efficient service delivery which in turn translates to societal development (Bem, 2014). In public administration, ethics addresses the fundamental aspect of a public administrator's duty of rendering service to the public (Radhika, 2012). In other words, it is the moral justification and consideration for decisions made and actions taken by the public administrator in the course of carrying their duty of providing for the general services of government and non-profit organizations.

Societies today face various challenges that demand concerted efforts from both citizens and institutions of government saddled with the responsibility for providing common good. All these challenges are reflected in the evolving relationship, in each country, between the state and its citizens. In turn, the expectation which citizens hold of the state that serves them is a function of two central parameters: the problems that faced citizens and the tools they have at their disposal in order to make their demands known (European Ombudsman, 2012).

The desire for good governance across countries of the world is a suggestive of the fact that there is urgent need for establishment of effective government that should guarantee the protection of human rights and freedoms. Kaznacheyev (2001) observed that society placed high premium on responsive government because of the fallout of government's slow progress in achieving administrative reforms. This has led to citizens' been 'impatient with the slow pace and unevenness of the administrative reform' as well as with inefficiency in terms of poor services delivery by 'government agencies and intolerable levels of corruption'. In recent years there is a new discussion on the need for serious changes in the ethics of public administration that would translate to good governance. This new discussion drives from the real and positive changes in political, economic, and social lives, as well as the depth and character of reforms which is a function of moral and ethical qualities of those entrusted with public administration (European Ombudsman, 2012). Despite these attempts not much effort has been made to identify what exactly constitute the essence of ethics in public administration.

The problem of ethics in public administration has become a serious issue with the continuous decline in the standard of living and the consequent rise in the number of poor ones in the society. There is a growing concern on the rate of decline in the moral standard of public office holders who are to deliver on the public good (Ogbonna, 2018). But the problem of public administration and service delivery is not a novel issue. Though it has attracted the attention of scholars but from the available literature it has not really triggered much interest as to why in spite of all the efforts made to address the challenges public administration, the issues persisted in an increasing manner. Consequently, this paper seeks to examine the increasing spate of moral and ethical decay in public administration which has resulted in poor service delivery and high level of corruption in our society. It is therefore instructive to reflect on the crux and importance of ethics in public administration which is the focus of this paper. To this effect some questions are raised: what are the ethical issues in public administration? How can we encourage ethical behaviour in the public service? The essence of this paper, however, is not only to examine the ethical issues in public administration but also to identify ways to encourage ethics in public administration to ensure efficient and effective public service delivery.

### **Concept of Ethics in Public Administration**

In recent time there has been a growing concern in the study and application of ethics in public administration. Several attempts have been made by scholars (Radhika, 2012 and Cooper, 2001) to explain a number of ethical and philosophical perspectives regarding the concept of ethics in Public Administration. The Behaviouralist school of thought drew a line of separation which brought distinction between facts and values in decision making and made it strictly rational. This was not without its shortcoming: as values and emotions cannot be quantified, this aspect was largely dropped in most of the fields of study including Public Administration (Eagle, 2005). Again, great attention was given towards the restoration of the relevance of this idea through the emergence of the New Public Administration school of thought which brought back values at the centre stage along with facts and rationality in decision making process of public service delivery. Ethics as a value in public administration, suggests accountability in carrying out public functions (Eagle, 2005). Consequently,

there is common agreement among scholars (Radhika, 2012) that since the era of New Public Administration, a great deal of changes have been recorded through the application of administrative ethics, which has resulted in paying attention to ethical issues in today public administration.

The need for sustainability of concept of ethics in public administration has been highlighted by Cooper (2001) who argued that ethics in public administration is an approach that has shown a great deal of sustainability and that its relevancy to the study of public administration is inestimable. The argument above seems to underscore the utility of ethics in human endeavour and makes its impact in society and is basically indispensable for good governance. Nonetheless, good governance as an attribute of democracy finds its root in normative ethics and expressed fundamentally as an element of principles of democracy. Following this line of thinking, it is evident to suggest that when misconduct and scandal are committed in government, they pose a great threat to the democratic principles of the rule of law, equality and individual right. By extension, fraud, bribery and other abuses in government take away power from the people and bestow it in the hands of a few in position of control, which distorts the concepts of all participants of public life (Dmochowski et al 2012). Removal of power from the people as a consequence of public misconduct is of central concern to addressing the issue of negation of democratic principles which is at the centre stage of public discourse on democracy. This, however, has posed a serious impediment to the growth and sustenance of democracy in Africa and other third world countries.

This is why Ikeanyibe in Ibietan et al, (2013) argue that ethics as a branch of philosophy deals with the analysis and evaluation of human conduct to determine the fundamental principle that makes it good or bad, right or wrong. However, this corroborated the position of early philosophers who employed this aspect of philosophy to handle questions on how humans ought to behave. What is good life for man? How do we determine which actions are rightly or wrongly performed? How do we arrive at a decision that certain actions are right or wrong? Upon what criterion or standards are such judgements made? Deriving from the above questions, ethics can be conceived as a science of morals (meta-ethics), and as a system of morals which defines or states the code or set of principles by which men live. As a science of morals, it investigates the nature, sources and fundamental principles that should guide human actions. In other words, it is a normative science that aims at stating the way human beings ought to behave, rather than empirical science which attempts to describe the way things are, (and) the way things behave. Flowing from the above, Ikeanyibe adopted Ekennia, (2003) and Eboh, (2005) definition of ethics "as an inquiry into how men ought to act in general, not as a means to a given end, but as an end itself". This definition, however, appears to invigorate the moral foundations and underpinnings as guides to human behaviour in their conceptualisation of ethics in public administration. The issue of corruption, abuse of power, and fraud underscore the importance of public administration in recent time and consequently has given rise to serious erosion of public confidence in governmental affairs.

Ethics is, therefore, conceived as the entirety of rules of proper moral conduct corresponding to the ideology of a particular society or organization (Radhika, 2012). However, public sector ethics is a broad topic because values and morals vary between cultures. Despite the differences in ethical values, there is a growing common ground of what is considered good conduct and correct conduct with ethics. As an accountability standard, ethics emphasizes on the way by which the public will scrutinize the work being conducted by the members of organizations (Bem, 2014). In other words, ethics as a value in public administration suggests observation of high accountability standard in carrying out public functions.

While on the other hand, Dmochowski, Jurczuk and Szczepankowski (2012) conceive public administration from the ideas of Charles de Montesquieu view of public administration, which sees executive branch of government as element of state power. This element consists of Agencies, Ministries and other structure jointly referred to as 'public administration'. This view of public administration assumes a degree of concession of state power to public administrators in relation to agencies or ministry concerned in the performance of public service. In this wise, public administration takes into account all the general activities that concern itself with issues of 'public good' and public interest. Alongside Bentham and other utilitarians, the conception of 'the public good' is on ensuring 'by careful calculation, the achievement of the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. Further, as the utilitarians would

argue, it was important for government to understand the wishes and will of the people since this was the only way of ensuring its proper functioning (Knuttila&Kubik, 2000). For this reason, the concession of degree of state power to public administrators is justified.

#### Theoretical Underpinning

The modern managerial approach to public administration

Prior to modern approach to public administration, the classical approach derived from Weber, Wilson and Taylor whose idea greatly dominated most of the 20th century public administration. It could be argued that Weber's theory of bureaucracy is the most important theoretical principle of the traditional model of public administration. The introduction of the market-based form of public administration was because of the change introduced in the mid-1980s which discredited both the theoretical and practical traditional public administration. This innovation led to a change in management style and as well to the role of government in the society and also the relation between government and the citizenry. A shift in paradigm was established through the introduction of modern managerial approach and the adoption of new management role.

It was observed that before the introduction of the concept of 'new public management' the new model of public sector management had several names such as managerialism, new public management, market-based public administration, post-bureaucratic paradigm, as well as entrepreneurial government (2012).

The thrust of this approach is on management and it focuses on objectives and performance of the management. It also focuses on the use of market and market-type mechanisms in the place of centralised command and control style of regulation, competition and choice, and devolution with a better matching of authority, responsibility and accountability. The application of this approach however, yielded positive result in in both United Kingdom during the reign of Thatcher regime and in United State during the regime of Bill Clinton. It was also adopted in Australia and New Zealand for developing the new public management. It is not only in industrialised countries that this approach has been used effectively but also was used by the international organisation such as the organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. The import of this approach is basically its premise on the Weberian principles of hierarchy, neutrality and career civil servants, the reforms in the public sector introduced different models of governing which has its basis on market principles and the transfer of the private sector.

This role of government and the relationship between government and citizenry underscore the importance of this approach in the place of government in the welfare of the people. This welfare of the citizens can only be achieved in a situation of responsible public office holders that are committed towards the application of ethical standards and adequate accountability principle to ensure public service delivery. Adequate ethical and moral standard of public officers guarantees efficient and effective public administration and service delivery.

#### **Ethical issues in Public Administration in Nigeria and Service Delivery**

Globally, public sector is established to adhere strictly to ethical and accountability principle. In line with this, the Nigerian Constitution provided for ethical codes as a guideline for public servants' proper conduct towards efficient service delivery and sanctions are also enunciated for misconduct. The Nigerian public space as observed by scholars is 'muddy, murky and in a state of decay' from the view of infrastructure, human and state morals (Kukah, 2012; Bem 2014). The observation above stems from the fact that Nigerian environment exhibits unethical features such as high scale of corruption with its negative impact on economic growth, which also undermines stability and erodes trust in Public Institutions. There are lack of qualitative public infrastructure and services which are mainly borne by the poor in the society. Much of these issues in Public administration in Nigeria appear to be blamed on the Nigerian environment. Kukah (2012) noted that the Nigeria environment appears to be very much responsible for absence of ethical value in the country and consequently has lowered our individual and collective zeal for patriotism. Leading to questions such as how far the environment can continue to affect ethical consideration in Nigeria. The situation appears to suggest that there is tendency to believe

that Nigeria has no public code of ethics that binds the people together as a country. Yet, like other countries of the world, say United State of America, Britain, France among others have a Constitution that sets out laws and rules, Codes of ethics to guide various professions and the bureaucracy, as a condition sine quanon for national growth.

In spite of the foregoing, it has been established that lack of transparency and corruption still thrive on a high scale in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world thereby thwarting development, despite the huge sums of monies committed by governments world over to tackle the world's most pressing problem. The 2010 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) updated in 2013 shows that nearly three quarters of the 178 countries in the Index score below five on a scale from 10(very clean) to 0 (highly corrupt), which indicate a serious corruption level (CPI 2010). Nigeria ranked position 134 with a score of 2.2 indicating that it is highly corrupt, which again is a confirmation that the Nigerian Public Service is very much encumbered by unethical and non-accountability practices.

Nigeria corruption perception index scores from 2010 to 2017 and 2005

Nigeria position: 149

2017	27.00
2016	28.00
2015	26.00
2014	27.00
2013	25.00
2012	27.00
2011	24.49
2010	24.00

Source: Corruption Perception Index (2017) by Transparency International

Apparently, what the above corruption index depicts is the extent corruption has permeated the fabric of the country's economy, as the profile rating from 2010 to 2017 appears to be growing bad indicating a serious cause for concern because of its unfavourable stance to majority of the people. In other words, choices made are not in the interest of the generality of the people or are not what is permissible and as such, this results to unethical conduct. Thus, corruption is one symptom of poor administration and management, which allows unscrupulous public officials to exploit the opportunity for putting self above Public interest contrary to Public Service detects (Ogbonna, 2018).

#### **Measures to Arrest Unethical Situation in Nigeria**

In an attempt to arrest this unethical behaviour or misconduct in public administration, there has been an effort by the Division of Public Administration Development Management (DPADM) under the auspices of United Nation Department of social and Economic Affairs, to address this serious challenge to global development. This move seeks to support the idea of setting institutional standards, for carrying out policy analysis and assisting in building capacity institutions to save guard public sector ethics, transparency and accountability. The DPADM also preserves activities of other Public officials by putting in place ethics infrastructure that not only provide guidance for good conduct but also administratively and legally punishes misconduct (Bem, 2014). In Nigeria, similar attempts have been undertaken to ensure that the Public Service carry out its obligations to the public and is properly guided to judge appropriately what is good for national growth. Such infrastructure includes the Departmental Circulars, Civil Service Rules, Financial Regulations and currently Due Process as well as institutions such as Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), Independent Corrupt Practices & other related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) were all established to ensure ethical conduct, transparency and accountability in the Nigerian Public Service.

The perceived effect of unethical behaviour or misconduct of public officers in public administration in Nigeria has been attributed to abysmal development structure in both economic and infrastructural aspect of development. Bem, (2014) noted that the Nigerian society has however been adjudged to have remained underdeveloped because of corrupt Public Service. Arguing from the angle of

infrastructural and institutional failure the author stated that the failure of such mechanisms (corrupt fighting institutions) to achieve envisaged results could be attributed to obvious reasons of double standards fuelled by selfish interests. For instance, it is observed that the institutions established to fight corruption and other similar vices in the service could not achieve results because such institutions are known to be used selectively in fighting perceived enemies (Anibeze, 2018). This view however, appears to suggest that African leaders, especially the civilian leaders, never practiced the virtues they preached in terms of good governance and public administration as well as service delivery. Illustratively, Nigeria's case of infrastructural decay as witnessed between the periods of 1999-2007 was handy, that despite increase in revenue from oilcum provisions of Ethics and code of conduct principles in Public Service, the country still experienced greater infrastructural decay. Also, the failure of Nigeria to overcome the evil of corruption and by extension poverty which are by-products of unethical behaviour and misconduct could be attributed to ignorance which is deliberately entrenched in the country to subject Nigerians perpetually poor for corruption to thrive.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Ethics in public administration and service delivery in Nigeria is one of issue that has affected the economy in a negative way leading to poor service delivery by the public office holders. However, with the introduction of the New Public Administration, emphasis is now on the possible changes that could lead to the application of administrative ethics, thus the clamour for ethical issues in today public administration. The intention is that those incumbrances that has inhibited positive transformation of the society could be addressed. The introduction of ethics infrastructure and institutions for arresting unwholesome practices and misconduct in public service could not yield the desired result because of corruption hence, lack of transparency in the conduct of public duty by public office holders. Consequently, meaningful development is near absent because most resources meant for public good is converted to personal use. The above situation is indeed scary and suggests that unethical and the inability of the policy makers and administrators of the Nigerian public administration to play by the rules of ethical codes and moral conduct as the spirit of the New Public Administration upholds appears far at sight in Nigeria. Little wonder unethical practices continued unabated, thereby entrenching corruption deeper, resulting to greater poverty and enslavement of majority of the people in the country.

To mitigate these issues examined, it is the position of this paper that greater attention should be given to issues of ethics and moral conduct in public administration in Nigeria. Needless to say, that this would go a long way to raise the consciousness of the people towards electing good and exemplary leaders who will lead by example and ensure proper conduct of public affairs. Furthermore, under such circumstances leaders with exemplary quality, are bound to demonstrate adequate political will to enforce sanctions against unethical conduct which will undoubtedly accelerate and stimulate overall development in Nigeria.

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