

# **PUBLIC BUREAUCRACY AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA: THE NEO-WEBERIAN EXPLANATION**

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## **Abstract**

*The main objective of this paper is to examine the impact of public bureaucracy on service delivery in Nigeria using the Neo-Weberian model. With a reliance on secondary data, the paper observed that the delivery of goods and services by the government rests on the public bureaucracy and institutions of allied mandates as pivot. The Neo-Weberian model proved useful in highlighting the deficits in public service delivery in Nigeria. It infers that for the Nigerian public bureaucracy to achieve its mandate of qualitative service delivery to the populace, government should make use of professionals in the provision of the public services as reinforced in the Neo-Weberian model. The study recommends that government needs to embark on a programme for improving the working conditions of public bureaucrats as this will help to build their morale, dedication and commitment to provide efficient services.*

**Keywords: public bureaucracy, service delivery, Neo-Weberianism, bureau pathology**

## **Introduction**

For any country to develop, it is very imperative for its government to provide goods and services that the private sector sparingly venture into, especially water, roads, health, education, electricity to mention but a few. These services are those that people cannot afford the price at the given market value (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2006). The delivery of such goods and services is premised on strong bureaucracies and institutions of the country (Ibietan and Oni, 2013). Bureaucracy is a type of formal administration with the characteristics of division of labour, rules and regulation, hierarchy of authority, impersonality of social relationships and technical competence (Reicheld and Sasser, 1990). The essence of bureaucracy is to manage large organisations to achieve efficiency and be more accountable to the people (Olatunji, 2013). Weber (1946) cited in Aluko and Adesopo (2004) refers to bureaucracy as the ideal and rational type of administration useful for

achievement of positive results. Public bureaucracy has become inevitable in any modern society and, as such, much importance is attached to it (Makinde, 2005). This is because; it is the public bureaucracy that determines the course and speed of policy implementation. Technically, it is the public bureaucracy that decides what should be done; how it should be done and who actually benefits (Osawe, 2015).

In an attempt to improve service delivery by government agencies, ministries and departments, the Nigerian public sector has undergone a process of restructuring in the last two decades (Bureau of Public Service Reforms, 2007). The justification for the reforms has been to make it more responsive to the needs of the citizen by increasing the levels of accountability, promoting efficiency and effectiveness, introducing participative decision making and adopting pro-active steps and practices in the public sector (Makinde, 2005; Abah, 2010). Njunwa (2007) asserts that the introduction, adoption and implementation of public sector reforms has seen a shift in focus, from the adherence of formalized procedures to an emphasis on resource allocation and goal achievement for improved service delivery to the public.

Despite these efforts at extensive reforms in the public sector for improved service delivery, the results are not so impressive. For instance, the depressing state of public service delivery in Nigeria is noticeable in the collapse of public utilities and educational system, State hospitals which had 'first degenerated into consulting clinics' has now become 'places to die' and the quality of services rendered by government agencies being the subject of continuous lamentation by the citizens (Akume, 2015; Osawe, 2015).

Furthermore, Onah (2003) contended that the general inefficiency, ineffectiveness and poor service delivery in the Nigerian public service result from inadequate recruitment and selection procedures and practices in the employment of manpower and lack of clear human resource objectives. Also, issues such as excessive bureaucracy, political interference, corruption, poor working conditions, poor work ethics, outdated and outmoded systems, procedures and practices among others, conspire to impact adversely on service delivery by public sector organizations (Ezeani, 2004). The poor performance of public bureaucracy is sometimes blamed on its principle of impersonality, which often creates a gap between the bureaucrats and the citizens.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The concepts of bureaucracy and service delivery are explained in this section.

#### **The Concept of Bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy as a term is derived from two words; "bureau" and "Kratos." The word "bureau" refers to the office, while the Greek suffix "Kratos" means power or rule. Thus the word "bureaucracy" is used to refer to the power of the office (Hummel, 1998 in Wasim 2011). "Bureaucracy" is rule conducted from a table or office, that is, preparation and dispatch of written documents and electronic

one. Bureaucracy is borrowed into the field of public administration from sociology (Akume, 2012). It was borrowed by public administration in a similar way that practices of business were borrowed from Business Administration and Economics. The term is used by Sociologists in designating a certain type of structure, a specific organisation with unequally coordinated rationality, and rejects bureaucracy as a term which equates red tape, inefficiency and other derogatory synonyms.

Bureaucracy as a concept is subjected to repetitive criticisms among various scholars (Stillman, 1980; Okafor, 2005; Osawe, 2015). Notwithstanding the above, Akindele, Olaopa and Obiyan (2002) perceived that bureaucracy is an ambivalent term that can be taken to mean different things. For instance, it could be taken to mean different organisations used by contemporary governments in conducting its functions and encapsulated in the administrative system of the civil service. He added that bureaucracy could also mean a mechanistic and formal approach used in carrying out the functions of government to the point of indifference towards the effects achieved.

Gerth and Wright (1979) in Nwankwo, Ananti and Madubueze (2015) conceives bureaucracy as a hierarchical management that exist in organisations based on a line of authority and division of labour embedded on this arrangement. Gbenga and Ariyo (2006), in their work portrayed the concept as the apparatus which consist of the professionals, workers who are subjected to hierarchical supervision and carrying out their duties in an organized manner backed by rules and regulations from their superiors. In the light of this, bureaucrats are identified by their activities in formal and public organisations. Bureaucracy also denotes the system of authority relationships that exist between men, offices and methods that government uses to implement its programmes. It does not cover political appointee such as Ministers and Advisers or members of the judiciary at the federal, state and local government tiers of government (Eme and Onwuka, 2010). Wallis, (1993) in Eme and Ugwu (2011) sees bureaucracy as a word in which its ordinary use conjures bad images in the mind of the people. Bureaucracy can suggest a slow moving organisation, associated with government which serves the populace with a mixture of intentional obstruction, arrogance and incompetence. The term is sometimes employed as an insult, whilst bureaucrats are most time seen as figures of laughter. Bureaucracy widely defined, refers to the machinery of government created to execute the decisions and policies of government. Political office holders make policies, while the public bureaucracy implements it.

Bureaucracy is a structure with highly routinised operating tasks that can be achieved through formalised rules, regulations and specialisations of tasks grouped into functional departments, centralised authority, narrow spans of control and decision making that are in line with chain of command (Robbins and Judge, 2007). Coser and Rosenberg (1976) affirm that bureaucracy is a type of hierarchical arrangement that exists in an organization and it is designed rationally to coordinate the work of employees in the pursuit of large-scale administrative tasks, administrative organization based on a hierarchical structure and governed

by written rules and established procedures. The authority attached to an official and the position of an official within the hierarchy depends on the office held, rather than the personal attributes and status of the incumbent.

### **The Concept of Service Delivery**

Service delivery is another concept central to this paper. Service delivery according to Lovelock (1983) encompasses a number of economic sectors that are not concerned with the production of manufactured goods and are therefore placed under a generic service umbrella. The service industry as a whole in turn comprises distinct segments such as financial services or telecommunications, which are all different. Professional services are delivered to clients through on-going relationships in which professionals and their clients interact to develop a shared history of the clients' needs in order to solve their problems (Jaakkola and Halinen, 2006). Service delivery is a complex term within the public sector. The term does not just focus on meeting expressed needs, but looking out for the needs that are not expressed, setting priorities, resource allocation, publicly justifying and been able to account for what has been done (Gowan, Seymour, Ibarreche, and Lackey, 2001).

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (2006) see service delivery as the extent to which an organization meets or exceeds the expectation of customers. Parasuraman et.al (2006) corroborated further that expectations are what beneficiaries think service should deliver rather than what would be offered. Carlson, Davis and Leach, (2005) in their work conceptualized the term service delivery as the relationship that exists between policy makers, service providers and the populace. To them, it consist services and its supporting systems which are generally referred to as state responsibility. These services include infrastructure, social service and service that enhances personal security. Public service delivery can be regarded as providing citizens with services of public interest. Examples of these services of public interest include: security, education, energy, water, public transport and healthcare. There are requirements placed on public services which are quite different from products and services that are provided by the market. To Steenhuisen (2009), public service delivery/quality is an all-round perception. In this view, it is challenging to evaluate quality (De Bruijn, 2007).

Service delivery according to Yayale (2004:12), is the concept that presupposes that in public service, there is a contractual relationship between the public and the service provider (government agency) which obliges the latter to render service to the former in the most satisfactory way, be it in terms of utility, quality, convenience, timeliness, cost, courtesy, communication or otherwise. He posits further that, the following are the Nigerian public's expectation of the public service in terms of efficient and effective service delivery:

- (i) An organization that is staffed with competent men and women and well-managed;
- (ii) A public service that is:
  - Courteous, friendly, receptive and is helpful in its relationship with the public;

- Eager and proactive in offering information to the public with feedback and follow-up;
- Transparent, honest and averse to corruption, fraud and extortion of the public in official dealings;
- Exemplary in its standards of efficiency in both production and rendition of services, with minimal waste;
- Punctual and time conscious in all official business;
- Run on well planned programmes with activity schedule and calendar that are firm and respected;
- Prompt in response to problems and complaints of the public, which are conclusively attended to;
  - (iii) A public service whose:
    - Service and products that are almost of cutting edge standard and rendered with minimal need for members of the public to leave their home to visit the office concerned or to spend substantial amounts of money or provide copious documents and passports photographs;
    - Public infrastructural facilities are built to unblemished standards, regularly maintained and properly prepared and;
  - (iv) A public service with:
    - Continuous improvement in service mix and methods based on communication and feedback from the public.

### **Public Bureaucracy and Service Delivery in Nigeria: a Review**

Obasi (1988:23) views Nigerian civil service as a colonial creation and a replica of the British public bureaucracy in terms of its structural characteristics. Due to the fact that Nigeria could not figure out her own system like the ancient Greece and China, she adopted the British model. Adebayo (2001:212) documented the initial objectives of the Colonial bureaucracy in Nigeria as follows:

- i. Maintenance of law and order
- ii. Ensuring that the Nations pay taxes as when necessary, and express full allegiance to the British monarchy.
- iii. Ensuring that raw materials needed for production in the British industries were supplied as at when due while finish products are brought back to the colonies for consumption.

The Nigerian civil service was established as a career structured organization based on the Weberian orthodoxy. The civil service possesses the following qualities as postulated by Weber: impartially, hierarchy of authority, meritocracy, career development and permanence (Nwankwo, 1986:74). The Nigerian civil service at the end of colonialism witnessed a mixture of meritocracy and ecological model to the practice of bureaucracy (Olowu; Otopo and Okotoni, 1997). Civil service in Nigeria functioned more effectively at the time of colonial administration, and its internal efficiency was patterned along the lines of merit. In 1960 when the country gained independence, the roles and functions of the

Nigerian civil service moved away from the imperialist interest of maintenance of law and order, to that of facilitating the realization of the country's developmental aspirations. The Civil Service represents the machinery through which the government formulate and implement its public policies. The public service performs these roles by translating the programmes and actions of government into solid public goods and service for citizens' use. No matter the type of system of government a country practices, the public service is designed to drive both economic and social development of the nation. Among the problems of government in a country like Nigeria is the inability of the civil service to direct its aspirations, goal and objectives properly towards improving the welfare of the populace. The efficiency of the Nigerian civil service has been put to test and it has experienced series of economic, political and structural transformations by various regimes and administrations in the country at one time or the other. The Nigerian public has faced numerous challenges with service delivery since her independence in 1960. Nigeria like any other developing nation of the world has reviewed its service delivery procedures and processes with a view to having better performance and productivity in the public service. The Nigerian government introduced several reforms and strategies to mitigate ineffective service delivery in the public bureaucracy.

One of the problems confronting public service is that there are too many policies that lack political will for its implementation. The history of the public service reforms in Nigeria is dated back to the colonial era, and there have been several reforms targeted at improving the quality of service delivery in the public sector. But the most worrisome part is the fact that many of these reforms did not achieve their purpose and intentions as the country still battles with very high rates of poverty, poor power supply, unemployment, bad rail system, poor road connections and insecurity to mention but a few. President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration of 1999-2007 and the President Yar'dua/Goodluck Jonathan administration introduced wide ranging reforms programmes targeted at making the public service deliver goods and services effectively and efficiently but the results have been dismal (Omisore, 2013). Among the reforms introduced by the Nigerian government in the last one decade are: Public Private Partnership, Banking reforms, Pension, Electoral and Service Compact with Nigerians (Servicom). One notable strategy designed by the federal government of Nigeria to enhance service delivery is SERVICOM (Oyedele, 2015). Servicom was geared towards effective and efficient delivery of public service. Servicom as an acronym for service compact with Nigerians is a policy initiative geared towards achieving excellent service in the public sector in Nigeria. Olaopa (2008) noted that Servicom reform emanated from a technical assistance provided by the British Government through the DFID to the Federal Government. The strategy was conceived against the backdrop of declining quality of public goods and services. The Servicom office in its publication, emphasised the charter on the need for the Nigerian public service to deliver its mandate and handle challenges, issues and criticisms that may arise in the process of carrying out its promises. Servicom does not only pay

attention on the type of services provided, but how the services are delivered to the citizens. The bottom-line of the Servicom strategy is to provide value for money spent by public sector institutions (Omisore, 2013). Although the Servicom initiative was an attempt at tackling inefficient and ineffective delivery of services in the public sector, it seeks to address the attitudinal issues of Nigerian public service, geared towards service delivery with a focus on customer/ citizen's satisfaction. The Servicom charter has a number of inherent challenges and lapses. Among the lapses of the Servicom initiative is that there was no baseline data that could bring out the public interpretation of the conditions in the Nigerian Civil Service as at 2003, thus there was no benchmark for measuring the impact of the reform programmes being implemented on service delivery in Nigeria (Olaopa, 2008). Low level publicity is also one of the lapses that the Servicom strategy encountered.

### **Bureau Pathology and Public Service Delivery in Nigeria: an Examination**

Bureau pathology according to Peter (1997) implies negative administrative behaviours of professionals and experts in organization which impede achievement of public goals and delivery of quality public service to consumers. Modibo (1978) avers that these are administrative lapses through which public servants, while misconceiving their powers, functions and responsibilities, act *ultra vires*, in bad faith, out of malice or even with ill-motives, thereby extorting image, tips, importance and cash benefits from service consumers. He further describes bureau pathology as phenomena by which public servants use their statuses, positions and authority to procure for themselves some benefits from investors, contractors, consultants and suppliers. To Peter (1997), bureau pathology is the administrative evil in public service delivery, because it is arbitrary due to the use of discretionary power, violating economic, social and political rights of consumers of public service, it sabotages government socio-economic and political programmes to the disadvantage of constituents; delays service delivery to strategic investors and other consumers, and its association with self-egoism of professional and experts.

In Nigeria, bureaucracy has significant impact on the quality of public service. This dysfunctional characteristic of bureaucracy manifests in the Nigerian factor. As a result, the public service is characterized by spirit of animosity and jealousy, rather than of cooperation and team work. This spirit of animosity exists between peers, superiors and subordinates (Maduabum, 2014). The Nigerian bureaucracies are corrupt, inefficient and overstaffed (Ekpo, 1979). This affirms the Udoji Report of 1974 which accused the bureaucracies of nepotism, ethnic loyalties, corruption, inability of superiors to delegate responsibilities, unreliability of junior staff in executing delegated tasks, failure to apply specialized knowledge and training skills in the management of the public service, and lack of compliance with timelines or efficiency in the performance of tasks. In pursuit of private goals, several officials in the Nigerian public bureaucracy form cliques and informal groups in order to maximize their benefits; at the expense of the attainment of

institutional goals. In effect, bureaucracies which are corrupt and steadily suffer goal displacement can hardly be expected to be efficient. If the bureaucracies are efficient at all, it is in the special role of protecting its class interests rather than serving the masses whose interests it was created to serve (Eme and Emeh, 2012). Furthermore, Adu –Gyamfi (2005) criticises Weber’s concept of bureaucracy as being responsible for the following:

- Lack of initiative, creativity and innovation in public service delivery.
- Delays in in service delivery to customers by public agencies.
- Emergence of esprit de corps, self-egoism and ritualism instead of team work.
- Centralisation of strategic investment services by top public officers.
- Rigidity and inflexibility of middle class public servants leading to exploitation of the consumer in service delivery.

The next section discusses the theoretical framework considered applicable to this paper.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Neo-Weberian Model**

The term Neo-Weberian usually refers to the application of Weberian principles to a modern state or organization. The concept of the Neo-Weberian State (NWS) was first introduced by Pollitt and Bouckaert in their book *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis* (2004) and later advanced by Drechsler (2005), Drechsler and Kattel (2008), Pollitt (2008), Randma-Liiv (2008) and others.

According to Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004), the NWS can be considered a variant of public-management reform. Drechsler and Kattel (2008) maintained that NWS encompasses the ideas of political power and modernization thus:

First, the state remains a strong steering and regulating presence within society. Thus the objective is not the minimal state ... The state is ... the guarantor and partner of both a strong economy and a civilized, socially cohesive society. It is the initiator or facilitator of a whole range of additional democratic mechanisms, central and local, both representative and direct ... Second, the state is steadily modernizing, professionalizing and seeking improved efficiency. But there is no assumption that aping the private sector is the *only way* to achieve efficiency and professionalism. Private sector methods *may* be chosen on some occasions and for some policies, but they have no automatic priority or superiority (Pollitt, 2008:14) Additionally, as Pollitt (2008) underlines, the NWS is not just a mix of traditional Weberian bureaucracy with some NPM efficiency tools; rather, it seeks to modernize the state and includes both “Weberian” and “Neo” elements. The latter preserve the main part of the traditional Weberian model and modernize it (which can take various contexts - and country-specific forms) (Drechsler and Kattel, 2008). This comes in accordance with Larbi’s (1999) claim that a careful and selective adaptation of some NPM elements to certain sectors may be beneficial for societies.

### **Features and Application of The Neo-Weberian Model**

The “Weberian Elements” of the NWS model describe the strong Weberian basis on which reforms should take place in order to ensure that they work well. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2004) summarise their description of the Weberian basis of the model in the following four points:

- Reaffirmation of the role of the state as the main facilitator of solutions to the new problems of globalization, technological change, shifting demographics and environmental threat;
- Reaffirmation of the role of representative democracy (central, regional and local) as the legitimating element within the state apparatus;
- Reaffirmation of the role of administrative law – suitably modernized – in preserving the basic principles pertaining to the citizen-state relationship, including equality before the law, legal security and the availability of specialized legal scrutiny of state actions;
- Preservation of the idea of a public service with a distinctive status, culture and terms and conditions.

Apart from the ‘Weberian Elements’ as highlighted by (Kostakis, 2011), the NWS includes also some ‘Neo -Elements’ that are summarised in the following four points:

- Shift from an internal orientation towards bureaucratic rules towards an external orientation in meeting citizens’ needs and wishes. The primary route to achieving this is not the employment of market mechanisms (although they may occasionally come in handy) but the creation of a professional culture of quality and service.
- Supplementing (not replacement) of the role of representative democracy by a range of devices for consultation with and the direct representation of citizens’ views.
- In the management of resources within government, a modernization of the relevant laws to encourage a greater orientation on the achievement of results rather than merely the correct following of procedure. This is expressed partly in a shift in the balance from ex-ante to ex-post controls, but not a complete abandonment of the former.
- A professionalization of the public service, so that the ‘bureaucrat’ becomes not simply an expert in the law relevant to his or her sphere of activity, but also a professional manager, oriented to meeting the needs of his/her citizen/ users. (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004:99-100).

In the work of Cepiku and Mititelu (2010), Neo –Weberian framework was summarized into five principles namely:

- Bureaucracy as external orientation to the fulfilment of citizens’ needs;
- the strategic role of professional managers in the implementation of policies;
- collaboration of public and private sector;
- representative democracy which is supported by public consultation and public participation;

- The separation of politics from administration with an emphasis on administration professionalization.

The Weberian model continues to serve as the intellectual foundation for thinking about governing, and as the model against which most attempts to reform are directed. Indeed, the Neo-Weberian model of the State has become important as a means of understanding what is happening with government after the reforms of the New Public Management have run their course (Bouckaert and Pollitt, 2004; Randma-Liiv, 2009).

The basic logic of the Neo-Weberian State is to retain many of the efficiency values associated with the New Public Management, while recapturing some of the emphasis on probity and accountability that were more central to traditional models of the public sector. The Neo –Weberian State have the capacity to provide some improvements in efficiency as well as probity.

The Neo-Weberian theory is relevant and applicable to this study, because it enables us to establish the basis for assessing the Nigerian public bureaucracy and service delivery. It provided the much needed framework for interrogation and analyses of issues and the dysfunctions inherent in the operational modalities of the Nigerian public service. The Neo-Weberian theory also illuminates our understanding on the possible causes of poor and ineffective service delivery in the Nigerian public sector. The theory applies to this study based on the fact that the quality of the bureaucracy determines the quality of service delivery and the capacity of the State and its institutions as platforms and agencies of development.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This paper examined the impact of public bureaucracy on service delivery in Nigeria through the Neo-Weberian model. From the foregoing, it is deductible that the delivery of goods and services is premised on public bureaucracy and other institutions in the country. Bureaucracy as a formal administration with the characteristics of division of labour, rules and regulation, hierarchy of authority, impersonality of social relationships and technical competence underscore the operations/activities in the Nigerian public sector.

The Neo-Weberian model of the State has become important as a tool for understanding resource utilisation, management and public sector governance. Also, the model highlighted professionalisation of the public service, such that the ‘bureaucrat’ becomes not simply an expert in the law relevant to his or her sphere of activity, but also a professional manager of public resources and affairs.

Predicated on the above, the Nigerian government should encourage professionalism in the public bureaucracy and ensure that service delivery is anchored on the tenets of Neo- Weberian model. The involvement or utilisation of professionals will enhance the delivery of qualitative public goods and services. Government should also embark on a programme for improving working conditions of the public bureaucrats, as this will help to build their morale, dedication and commitment to efficient service delivery.

The governing elite must consciously attempt to reduce the extent to which politics interferes with the bureaucratic process. This will ensure that bureaucrats are capacitated to function on the basic ideals of the Neo-Weberian model of bureaucracy.

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