

The Role of Administrative Ethics and Accountability in Public Service Effectiveness in Nigeria**Isa Muhammad Sama**Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sokoto State University,
Sokoto, Nigeriaisahsama94@gmail.com**Abstract**

This paper seeks to explore the role of administrative ethics and accountability in enhancing the effectiveness of public service in Nigeria. The paper examines the relationship between administrative ethics and accountability within the context of Nigeria's public service in order to identify the key factors that contribute to unethical practices in Nigeria's public administrative system. It argues that what has contributed to the ineffective, inefficient and non-productive performance in the Nigerian public service is the lack of sound administrative ethics and accountability which have over the years failed to be properly promoted or instituted in order to achieve the lofty goals and objectives of the civil service. Anchored on a qualitative research paradigm, the paper uses a conceptual approach by employing a literature-based methodology to understand the systemic and institutional dynamics that shape the ethical conduct within the Nigerian public sector. The paper finds out that there are ethical standards and rules which governs the Nigerian public service but these standards are undermined because of weak institutional framework to monitor its implementation. The paper advocates for sensitization and awareness programmes for civil servants on the values and standards outlined by the civil service rules, granting full autonomy to anti-corruption agencies in order to strengthen their operational capacity, the improvement of the working conditions of civil servants in order to reduce their temptations towards corruption and other unethical practices as well as the application of stricter penalties for corrupt practices as necessary deterrent to unethical conduct within the civil service.

Keywords: Accountability, Administrative Ethics, Bureaucracy, Civil Service, Public Service**INTRODUCTION**

Since independence, the Nigerian Civil Service has served as the administrative machinery for the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes of post-independent civilian and military administrations in the country. Structurally, the Civil Service was divided into various classes, administrative, executive, clerical auxiliary and professional, each supervised by the Civil Service Commission, particularly in matters of recruitment, promotion, transfer and discipline (Ugor, 2016). However, during the contemporary period, the role of civil servants have expanded beyond the known and established boundaries of policy formulation and implementation to include policy adjudication thereby making their responsibilities more complex. Thus, there is an increasing demand for greater efficiency and effectiveness within the Civil Service system (Ezekiel, 2025).

According to Eke (2016), the erstwhile colonial administration in Nigeria, bequeathed to the country, a Civil Service that was in every respect, alien, narrow in orientation and poorly equipped for developmental purposes. According to (Ugor, 2016), the Nigerian Civil Service has historically failed to uphold principles such as tenure security, political neutrality and impersonality. In accordance with the conclusion of (Eke, 2016), one of the most pervasive impediments to the effectiveness of the Nigerian Civil Service is corruption which according to him, remains deeply entrenched and widely believed to be a legacy of colonial administrative practices.

The Nigerian Civil Service was built on some core principles and values such as permanency of tenure, anonymity, neutrality, honesty, integrity, loyalty, impartiality, technical know-how and capacity. The civil service has a perpetual nature that operates on the basis of political neutrality, transparency, fairness and accountability. It is a going concern that offers free and frank advice to the government of the day, conducts a merit-based appointment and runs an open government stewardship. Thus, in its operational conduct, meritocracy serves as the guiding principle in all official undertakings without regard to status, gender or geo-political considerations. Whereas, professionalism, transparency and accountability are the watchwords. Operationally, civil servants are expected to be selfless in dealing with official issues, adhere strictly to service rules and regulations and display avowed commitment towards the attainment of organisational goals and objectives. Civil servants are equally expected to display exemplary conduct while dealing with subordinates and the general public. In both their behaviour and action, they must remain apolitical, unbiased and loyal to the government. Other guiding principles to civil servants are the application of merit and seniority principles in all matters of appointment and promotions.

However, in recent years, these avowed principles of the service have taken a downward spiral in practice. The Civil Service have been confronted with multitude of problems which have negatively affected its productivity. These problems ranges from pervasive corruption, operational inefficiency as a result of lack of clear vision or understanding, disregard to professional ethics, lack of qualified manpower to nepotism and mediocrity, inertia and torpidity amongst a host of other negative consequences of a disorganized vision in terms of clear goal attainment in service matters. What is to be done, why, how and when, for reasons of insufficient mental capacity or near absence of commitment to duty have become a mirage? Today, especially to most senior civil servants, what is of immediate concern and placed as a matter of priority is material acquisition or

get rich quick attitude. The determination to do what is correct at the appropriate time so that it could be emulated by subordinates or to be bequeathed to generations of the future has been completely jettisoned. This is primarily due to a weak enforcement mechanism within the administrative system which has been caused by a lack of properly instituted and nurtured administrative ethics within the Nigerian public service as a whole. This paper argues that what has contributed to the ineffective, inefficient and non-productive performance in the Nigerian public service is the lack of sound administrative ethics and accountability which have over the years failed to be properly promoted or instituted in order to achieve the lofty goals and objectives of the civil service. The civil service is an indisputable institution which functions as a bureaucracy for the formulation, sustenance, transformation and realization of the objective of the Nigerian Government within the realm of our policy and the international community. Consequently, its avowed guiding principles must be upheld at all cost. The service rules and regulations which serves as the ground norm of the civil service, must be strictly adhered to for effective goal attainment of public service objectives.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To explore the role of administrative ethics and accountability in enhancing the effectiveness of public administrative system in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the key factors that contribute to unethical practices in Nigeria's public sector.
- iii. To ascertain why the existence of several control measures and anti-corruption laws within the Nigerian public service failed to effectively combat unethical practices in public service.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Public Service

The term "public service" refers to all institutions, agencies and organisations that are fully or partially owned and controlled by government. Dominant among these are these public organisations are the civil service, local government services and local government service. Among these organisations, the civil service is more dominant because of its size, the relative influence it has over the others and the fact that it has established rules and procedures which are also applicable to other organisations in part or in full. The 1999 Constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) defines the public service as an organisation that is responsible for managing the resources of the nation on behalf of the people who are the owners of these

resources; it is run by both elected and appointed officials. Section 318 (1) of the Constitution states that elective as well as appointed officials include: The President, Vice president, Governors and their Deputies, Ministers and Commissioners, Members and Staff of Legislative Houses, Chairmen, Directors of all Corporations and Companies in which the government has controlling shares. According to (Marshall and Murtala, 2015), the public sector represent the realm where government operates for the benefit of the citizenry. The public sector, therefore, is a typical bureaucratic organisation made up of public servants who are recruited on the basis of their skills/qualifications and expertise.

According to (Kevin, 2011), the rendering of public service is the reason for the establishment of government. The public sector is the wheel upon which the government moves. The public sector is the apparatus which ensures the delivery of government policy and programmes to the people. It enjoys permanency, anonymity, political neutrality and impartiality because it is an institution that promotes societal welfare and stability. In this respect, it is a palpable fact that the efficiency, effectiveness and competence of the public service is sacrosanct to the success of any government. The public sector plays a vital role in national development and it has, thus, provided for institutional frameworks which creates enabling environment to promote growth and development in any country. According to (Adebanjo, 2015), for any country to achieve its development goals, the onus rest squarely on the role played by the country's public sector. As a result, public servants must be persons with a culture of the values of fair play, efficiency and accountability. Without these, the commitment to professional standards and resource management, social interventions, reforms and development cannot be effectively executed for efficient service delivery. According to (Kevin, 2011), a professional and dynamic, efficient and effective, proactive and productive public sector is the one that hold onto the tenets of integrity, meritocracy and discipline.

Civil Service

The civil service is a body or organ which enjoys continuity of existence. Its members unlike members of the National Assembly, or a House of Assembly are not limited to a short term of office at the end of which they may or may not be returned to office. When a civil servant relinquished his office for whatever reason, his place is taken by another person who similarly enjoys security of employment (Revised Civil Service Handbook, 2010). According to (Marshall and Murtala, 2015), the civil service is an organ created to ensure that policies and programs of

any government at any particular time are carried out and because its perpetual nature and the changing nature of constitutionally elected government, it has to be endowed with specific characteristics or leaning's of that government. Further characteristics of the civil service includes:

- a) It has to non-partisan to enable it serve any government of the day.
- b) It has to be made of up experienced men and women with the technical and professional knowhow to enable it implement government policies.
- c) It has to be orderly and also ensure that orderly administration of the country continues.
- d) The civil service is indispensable since it continues the traditional role of keeping the functions of government running no matter what changes occurs in the administration of the country.
- e) It operates under rules which guides its conduct. (Third Schedule of the Nigerian n1999 Constitution, as amended).

Administrative Ethics

In order to comprehend the term administrative ethics, we must first understand the concept of "ethics". The term ethics is referred to as a moral philosophy. According to (Jay and Williams, 2011), ethics is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct, often addressing disputes of moral diversity. It originates from the Greek term "ethos", which means "custom habit". The word ethics means several things. It can refer to; i, A person's own idiosyncratic principles or habits. ii, The questions concerning right conduct in some specific sphere. According to (Fox and Meyer, 1995), ethics is the process by which we clarify right and wrong and act on what we take to be rights, that is, a set or system of moral principles that is generally applied. Whereas, administrative morality is defined as the use of religious, political or social precepts to create standards by which the quality of public administration may be judged: in the main, the standards are usually those of: honesty, responsiveness, efficiency, effectiveness competence as well as effect on individual rights adherence to democratic procedures and social equity (ibid). According to (Julian and Peter, 2007), ethics is a set of practices and philosophy to guide members of a particular profession or community to act in a manner consistent with values and standards as established by the profession's or community's tradition, and to actively clarify and enforce these conditions rigorously in its administrative structure. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy states that the

word ethics is “commonly used interchangeably with ‘morality’...and sometimes it is used more narrowly to mean the moral principles of a particular tradition, group or individuals”.

Administrative ethics according to (Marume and Chikasha, 2016), denotes the professional code of morality in civil service. They constitute the moral fiber of civil servants. They regulate the conduct and behaviour of different categories of civil servants. Thus, they provide the “rule of the game”. The civil service, being a profession in the modern day state, has developed a code of morality for its civil servants. This code consists of traditions, precedence, and standards which have to be kept up by the civil servants. The civil servants are expected to set up high moral standards not only for themselves but also for the community at large. This is more so in the context of the growing size and role of administration and its impact on the society. The definitions offered by three leading scholars in the field are singled out because of their pertinent contributions to the subject under discussion. These are Chester Barnard, Glen Stahl and Paul H. Appleby. According to Barnard, ethical conduct or moral behaviour are “governed by beliefs or feelings of what is right or wrong regardless of self interest or immediate consequences of a decision to do or not to do specific things under particular conditions” Whereas, Glen Stahl remarked that “the problem of ethical conduct of public officials arises by virtue of the power and influence that he commands and the commitment that he undertakes of loyal and disinterested service to the public”. However, Appleby preferred the expression “morality” instead of “ethics”. He argues that morality and administration cannot be separated. He stated that “it is not merely bigger government that ultimately matters: what is significant is that morality in administration alone could ensure better government. One would not doubt that the morality in administration is sustained by patience, honesty, loyalty, cheerfulness, courtesy and like traits” (Barnard, Stahl and Appleby quoted in Marume and Chikasha, 2016). Thus, administrative ethics refers to the moral principles and standards that guide the behaviour of public servants in the performance of their duties. Ethics and accountability in public service focuses on the importance of maintaining ethical standards and ensuring accountability in the management of public resources and governance. It highlights the need for ethical governance practices and transparent accountability mechanisms to overcome the challenges of corruption and mismanagement in the public sector.

Accountability

Accountability is a noun that describes accepting responsibility and it can be personal or very public. Generally, accountability refers to answerability for one's action or behaviour. It equally refers to the acceptance of responsibility for honest and ethical conduct towards others. A government has accountability for decisions and laws affecting its citizens, an individual has accountability for acts and behaviours. Accountability is a fundamental value for any political system. It is all about being answerable to those who have invested their trust, faith and resources to you. (Adegite, 2010), defined accountability as the obligation to demonstrate that work has been conducted in accordance with agreed rules and standards and the officer reports fairly and accurately on performance results vis-à-vis mandated roles and/or plans. It means doing things transparently in line with due process and the provision of feedback. According to (Adebanjo, 2015), citizens should have the right to know what actions have been in their name, and they should have the means to force corrective actions when government acts in an illegal, immoral or unjust manner. Accountability provides government with the means of understanding how programmes may fail and finding ways that can make programmes perform better. Public accountability is an essential component for the functioning of political systems, as accountability means that those who are charged with drafting and/or carrying out policy are under obligation to give explanation of their actions to the electorate.

In the opinion of (Premchand, 1999), the capacity to achieve full accountability has been and continues to be inadequate, partly because of the design of accountability itself and partly because of the widening range of objectives and associated expectations attached to accountability. He further argues that if accountability is to be achieved in full, including its constructive aspects, then it must be designed with care. The objective of accountability should go beyond the naming and shaming of officials, or the pursuit of sleaze, to a search for durable improvements in economics management to reduce the incidence of institutional corruption. Accountability in this respect, consists in covering the macro aspects of economic and financial sustainability as well as the micro aspects of service delivery. It should envisage a three-tier structure, that of official (both political and regular civil employees), that of intra-governmental relationships and that between government and their respective legislatures. According to (Kaufman, 2005), an emphasis on accountability by citizens is one aspect of the growing emphasis on eliminating corruption and promoting transparency in government. However, according to (Coker, 2010), the various

approaches to accountability are grouped into two; Process Based Accountability: This approach measures compliance with pre-set standard and formally defined outcome. This includes fiscal and managerial accountability with reliance on the use of accounting methodologies. Performance Based Accountability: This approach measures performance against broad objectives. This measure may be qualitative and the criteria against which performance is measured is less precisely defined. (Adegite, 2010), stated that there are four different types of accountability;

i. Financial Accountability: The obligation of any one handling resources, public office or any other positions of trust, to report on the intended and actual use of the resources or of the designated office.

ii. Administrative Accountability: This type of accountability involves a sound system of internal control, which compliments and ensures proper checks and balances supplied by constitutional government and an engaged citizenry. These include ethical codes, criminal penalties and administrative reviews.

iii. Political Accountability: This type of accountability fundamentally begins with free, fair and transparent elections. Through periodic elections and control structure, elected and appointed officials are held accountable for their actions while holding public office.

iv. Social Accountability: this is a demand driven approach that relies on civic engagement and involves ordinary citizens and groups exacting greater accountability for public actions and outcomes. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), two pillars that support accountability are transparency and integrity. Transparency is the state of a thing or act been transparent. Thus, to be transparent is to be completely open. The general meaning of the word transparency, therefore, is of a person, a thing or an action having the quality of being easily seen through, not blurring or hiding anything. Integrity on the other hand, refers to a quality of a person's character based on the display of honesty, accountability, trustworthiness and truthfulness in dealing with others.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several theories that are applicable for a research that examines the relationship between administrative ethics, accountability, and the effectiveness of the public service. However, this study adopts the social contract theory for its analytical framework because the theory provides

the basis for understanding the relationship that exists between the government and public officials in terms of agreements and obligations. The Social Contract Theory was propounded by Three Primary Enlightenment thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jack Rosseau. The theory continues to be a cornerstone of modern democratic governance. Social Contract theory is a political and moral framework proposing that individuals consent, either explicitly or tacitly, to surrender some of their individual freedoms in exchange for the state's protection of their remaining rights and the maintenance of social order. It asserts that legitimate governmental authority is derived solely from the consent of the governed. The theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between the government and the citizens, based on mutual agreements and obligations. This theory suggests that citizens have a right to demand ethical behaviour and accountability from public officials, and public servants have an obligation to serve the public with integrity. Unethical behaviour on the part of public officials in Nigerian public service is viewed as a breach of contract between the state and its citizens leading to a breakdown in trust and public cooperation. This theory can be used to argue that ethical governance and accountability are essential for maintaining the social contract between the state and its citizens (Moore & Bruder, 2004; Okeke, 2005).

METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a conceptual approach by employing a literature based methodology. According to Lin (2009), the literature based methodology entails reading through, analyzing and sorting a lot of literature in order to identify the essential attributes of the subject matter under study. It is generally referred to as the non-contact method as it does not deal directly with the object under study, but indirectly accesses relevant information from a variety of sources. This makes the study to be a meta-synthesis as it integrates results from a number of different but inter-related qualitative studies (Walsh & Downe, 2005). Thus, this study draws its conclusions from deductions made through the reviewed literature, which forms the basis for the proffered recommendations.

FINDINGS

The Nigerian public service has put in place internal mechanisms and control measures to ensure that bureaucracy conducts its business within some ethical parameters. These internal mechanisms not only provide an ethical environment within which the bureaucracy is expected to perform its responsibilities but also act as a form of accountability measures for the service. These are the

civil service rules (CSR) and the Civil Service Handbook. Through these service rules, a civil servant is expected to perform his duties properly and efficiently and display professional discipline, dignity, integrity, equity, impartiality, fairness, high-spiritedness as well as courtesy in the discharge of his functions. At the same time, the civil servant is expected at all times to manage public property in the most appropriate and efficient manner. His conduct shall be deemed appropriate only when he behaves in a manner that enhances public confidence and boosts the image of the service.

In a bid to have an ethically upright and accountable bureaucracy, the Handbook and the CSR are further complimented by the following documents, the guidelines for appointment, promotion and discipline issued by the Civil Service Commission, the Code of Conduct Bureau whose mandate covers the behaviour of both political and public servants alike. The Fifth schedule of the 1999 federal constitution contains codes to guide the conduct of officials with emphasis placed on how to avoid conflicts of interests. There is also a Code of Conduct Tribunal whose responsibility it is to bring to trial or prosecute all cases of infringement or non-compliance of the ethics governing the conduct of government business. However, despite the enormous importance of the code of conduct and its powers under the constitution, there are scanty of cases at the code of conduct tribunal. Indeed, its performance has been adjudged to be very poor. The tribunal hardly passes judgement against violators of the code of conduct and the law. Equally many public servants are not fully aware of the provisions of the code of conduct and even those that are aware, hardly put its provisions into implementation.

However, despite the control measures put in place to ensure an ethical Nigerian public service system, bureaucratic ethics has been abandoned and act of corruption has become the norm in service. It is pertinent to state that one of the principal contributory factors responsible for lack of administrative ethics and lack of accountability in service are largely due to political, economic, social and cultural factors. These factors involves deliberate violations of established ethical standards by the political class, driven by corruption and the erosion of bureaucratic principles. There is also a consistent lack of political will and commitment among both administrative and political leaders to combat corruption and unethical behaviour within the civil service. At the cultural level, an entrenched culture of corruption has gripped the Nigerian civil service. These corrupt cultural practices ramifies family pressures, ethnicity as well as customs and traditions

serving as motivating factors for unethical and corrupt behaviours within the public service. There is also the worsening economic situation in the country which has eroded the official income of the bureaucratic class, prompting negative survival strategies. Cumulatively, these practices undermine efficiency, discourage investment and disproportionately harm marginalised groups particularly women and children. Unethical administrative practices also undermines state effectiveness in service delivery, fosters political instability and corrodes public trust.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Administrative ethics refers to the moral principles and standards that guide the behaviour of public servants in the performance of their duties. Ethics and accountability in public service focuses on the importance of maintaining ethical standards and ensuring accountability in the management of public resources and governance. It highlights the need for ethical governance practices and transparent accountability mechanisms to overcome the challenges of corruption and mismanagement in the public sector. The relationship between these principles and the effectiveness of public service is crucial, particularly in the context of Nigeria, where public administration faces significant challenges such as corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of transparency. In the context of public service, ethics ensures that government actions align with legal frameworks, social expectations, and the public good. Accountability, on the other hand, involves the responsibility of public officials to report and justify their actions, ensuring that they are answerable for the consequences of their decisions. Ethical governance is the foundation of trust between the state and the citizens it serves. Without ethics, there can be no meaningful accountability. This statement underscores the interdependent nature of ethics and accountability in ensuring public trust and public service effectiveness.

Within the Nigerian public service, there are internal mechanisms and control measures put in place to ensure that bureaucracy conducts its business within some ethical parameters. These internal mechanisms not only provide an ethical environment within which the bureaucracy is expected to perform its responsibilities but also act as a form of accountability measures for the service. These are the civil service rules (CSR) which replaced the general orders bequeathed to the service by the colonialists and the Civil Service Handbook. The CSR is the ground-norm for service conduct and it covers from appointment to separation from service, discipline, salary, leave and reward for performance. These civil service rules are enshrined in order to continue to move

the civil service in the right direction. Thus, a civil servant is expected through these rules to perform his duties properly and efficiently and display professional discipline, dignity, integrity, equity, impartiality, fairness, high-spiritedness as well as courtesy in the discharge of his functions. At the same time, the civil servant is expected at all times to manage public property in the most appropriate and efficient manner. His conduct shall be deemed to be appropriate only when he behaves in a manner that enhances public confidence and boosts the image of the service (Civil Service Handbook, Revised Edition, 2010). These expected behaviour of the civil servant in Nigeria specifies duties which are the behaviours of persons who occupies certain roles, that is, the obligations taken on when assuming a role or profession. Thus, for persons who work in government, duties have special importance. They must serve the public, fulfill the expectations of public office, and be trustees of public resources. These are the actions required by their occupation of public offices which are often not given due primacy by either the government or regulatory bodies.

The civil service handbook acts as a reference material and guide for all levels of personnel in the service. The scope of the handbook is quite exhaustive, dealing with all salient features of the service including the role of the civil servant in government and the manner in which government business should be conducted in order to have an efficient and effective administrative system capable of winning public confidence. In a chapter titled “code of ethics in government business”, the values of discipline, loyalty, honesty, courage, courtesy, cooperation, tact, industry, fairness and equity were emphasised. In a bid to have an ethically upright and accountable bureaucracy, the Handbook and the CSR are further complimented by the following documents, the guidelines for appointment, promotion and discipline issued by the Civil Service Commission, the Code of Conduct Bureau whose mandate covers the behaviour of both political and public servants alike. The Fifth schedule of the 1999 federal constitution contains codes to guide the conduct of officials with emphasis placed on how to avoid conflicts of interests. There is also a Code of Conduct Tribunal whose responsibility it is to bring to trial or prosecute all cases of infringement or non-compliance of the ethics governing the conduct of government business. The Bureau has been mandated by law to request all public officers to declare their assets and liabilities before taking office, at the end of their term, and periodically as required by the law. The Bureau also enforces ethical codes such as preventing conflicts of interest, bribery and abuse of office as outlined in the Fifth Schedule of the Nigerian Constitution. However, despite the enormous importance of the

code of conduct and its powers under the constitution, there are scanty of cases at the code of conduct tribunal. Indeed, its performance has been very poor (Marshall and Murtala, 2015). The tribunal hardly passes judgement against violators of the code of conduct and the law. Equally many public servants are not fully aware of the provisions of the code of conduct and even those that are aware, hardly put its provisions into implementation. Thus, it can be argued that the Nigerian public service is not lacking in adequacy of control measures and the ethical parameters to ensure an ethical and effective bureaucratic system, but what is lacking is an effective enforcement mechanism as well as the desire and willingness by civil servants to adhere to the public service rules and regulations and not to violate the laws.

It is pertinent to state that one of the principal contributory factors responsible for lack of administrative ethics and lack of accountability in service is largely due to political factors. According to (Eneanya, 2010), there has been a consistent lack of political will and commitment among both administrative and political leaders to combat corruption and unethical behaviour within the civil service. Accordingly, these political factors involves deliberate violations of established ethical standards by the political class, driven by corruption and the erosion of bureaucratic principles. The politicians who formulate and implement laws on behalf of the people do so in their own interests and not to protect the interest the very people they are supposed to serve. This perspective is supported by (Smith, 2008), who argues that Nigeria suffers from widespread corruption due to the fact that its leaders are inherently corrupt. Thus, it can be conveniently stated that Nigeria's civil service has been plagued by a lack of innovation and unethical practices which have led to inefficiency, low productivity and a lack of responsiveness to public needs. The former Governor of Kaduna State, Nasir El-Rufai, speaking from experience, stated that anyone entering into public leadership in Africa and particularly in Nigeria is confronted by two predictable outcomes. The first is to join a dysfunctional and corrupt system and enjoy the spoils of corruption and end up becoming consumed by it. The second is to desire a change in the system for the betterment of the society but which attracts deviant aggravation, frustration and other forms of retribution (El-Rufai, 2013).

Apart from the political factors discussed above, there are equally economic, social and cultural factors responsible for unethical practices among civil servants in Nigeria. The worsening economic situation in the country has eroded the official income of the bureaucratic class,

prompting negative survival strategies. This economic problem is exacerbated by dwindling oil prices and hyper-inflation which reached 24.5% in 2023 and 31.6% in 2024 before moderating to 20.7% in 2025 (AfDB, 2024). Despite the occasional increases in salaries and emoluments to civil servants, the inflationary pressure in the country rendered such increases rather fruitless and without much economic benefit. The purchasing power of civil servants in Nigeria have continuously been eroded by the pressure of inflation making it very difficult for them to meet their basic needs. According to (Eneanya, 2010), public servants in Nigeria were the hardest hit by economic hardship. Their salaries though sometimes increased but not significantly adjusted to reflect the rising cost of living. In addition to these difficult conditions, they are poorly remunerated and exposed to irregular payments pushing them further into unethical practices including lack of commitment, theft and indiscipline. This trend only serves to heighten the vulnerability of civil servants which also makes them predisposed to unethical practices like bribery and corrupt inducement.

At the cultural level, an entrenched culture of corruption has gripped the Nigerian civil service. These corrupt cultural practices ramifies family pressures, ethnicity as well as customs and traditions serving as motivating factors for unethical and corrupt behaviours within the public service. The practice where corrupt individuals are celebrated and awarded political appointments and traditional titles reinforces a culture that prioritises wealth over integrity. In this scenario, societal norms seems to equate wealth with success regardless of the source of such a wealth. The glorification of former Governors of Bayelsa State, Diepreye Almieyeseigha and Delta State, James Ibori who received warm welcomes in their home states despite their corruption convictions, exemplifies the normalization of corruption in some Nigerian customs (Salisu, 2000). This shift towards materialism, though new in Nigerian culture and tradition, has invariably serves to weaken moral authority. Similarly, the Nigerian new cultural practices of awarding traditional titles on the basis of financial influence rather than achievement and integrity seems to be encouraging unethical and corrupt behaviour and seriously impacting negatively on both the image, morale and integrity of the Nigerian civil service. This issue was exemplified by the award of a traditional title to Alhaji Ahmed Idris, the former Accountant General of the Federation by the Daura Emirate Council in Katsina State despite his arraignment in Court for corruption enrichment while in office.

CONCLUSION

Public service is the vehicle for public service delivery and governance. The quality of public service largely determines the pace of development of any nation. This is because of the crucial role played by civil servants in the formulation and implementation of programs of government. Thus, the public officers who are supposed to propel the engine of societal growth through the bureaucracy must as a matter of principle set good examples to other members of the society by acting in consonance with stipulated laws and regulations governing public conduct. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) has provided the template for the kind of behaviour expected of public servants in terms of accountability, probity and transparency. In a bid to have an ethically upright and accountable bureaucracy, the Constitution is further complimented by the Handbook and the Civil Service Rules as well as the Code of Conduct Bureau whose mandate covers the behaviour of both political and public servants. There is also a Code of Conduct Tribunal whose responsibility it is to bring to trial or prosecute all cases of infringement or non-compliance of the ethics governing the conduct of government business. Though, the performances of the Code of Conduct and its Tribunal has been abysmal and unsatisfactory.

However, despite the control measures put in place to ensure an ethical Nigerian public service system, bureaucratic ethics has been abandoned and act of corruption has become the norm within the Nigerian public service. This is primarily due to a weak enforcement mechanism within the administrative system which has been caused by a lack of properly instituted and nurtured administrative ethics within the Nigerian public service as a whole. Thus, it can be argued that the Nigerian public service is not lacking in the adequacy of control measures and the ethical parameters to ensure an ethical and effective bureaucratic system, but what is lacking is an effective enforcement mechanism as well as the desire and willingness by civil servants to adhere to the public service rules and regulations and not to violate the laws. Overall, accountability and good governance in Nigeria, can only be sustained when the enhancement of the rule of law as well as the promotion of ethical re-orientation among Nigerian citizens are strengthened.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Since unethical behaviour and lack of accountability have become entrenched in Nigerian culture and society, stiffer penalties and sanctions have also become necessary in order to deter

offenders. In this respect, Nigeria's legislature must enact stricter laws to address fueling corruption in the country. However, these measures must align with human rights standards to ensure fairness and proportionality in enforcement.

- ii. There is need for wide awareness on the part of civil servants on the values and standards set for civil servants as outlined in the civil service rules (CSR), anti-corruption laws, codes of conduct and international code of conduct for public officials. Thus, continuous public sensitization on the dangers of corruption should be intensified.
- iii. Civic education programs should be integrated into school curricula to promote ethical values among youths. This must be followed by political will and commitment to institutionalizes and enforce these standards. There is, therefore, a need for a shift towards a culture of integrity within the public service supported by strong leadership and an independent judiciary. Institutional reforms to strengthen the public administration sector are necessary and must focus on education, capacity-building, and a legal framework that enforces ethical behaviour. These reforms should aim to integrate ethical conduct into the professional development of public servants, ensuring that public administration is driven by integrity, transparency, and responsiveness to citizens' needs. One potential avenue for reform is strengthening the relationship between the public sector and civil society organisations. Civil society organisations can facilitate greater oversight, allowing for more robust monitoring of public sector actions and ensuring that public officials remain accountable to the people.
- iv. The autonomy of anti-corruption agencies such as the Code of Conduct and the Code of conduct Tribunal must be strengthened. These agencies should operate independently without political interference. Both agencies should be insulated from political control and influence. The appointment of leaders of these agencies should be based on merit and confirmed by a non-partisan process to ensure fairness in their operations. Their financial autonomy must be guaranteed in order to increase their performances. Further to this, these anti-corruption agencies should be given adequate funding to enable them more effective.
- v. It is crucial to improve the working conditions of civil servants in order to avert or tremendously reduce temptations towards corruption and other unethical practices. Issues of timely payment of pensions and gratuities, adequate salaries packages, due promotions and training should be given priority attention by concerned authorities. This should be followed by appropriate rewards for deserving civil servants who excelled in their assignments and

responsibilities as well as punishment for wrong-doings in order to instill discipline and integrity in service.

- vi. Regular, independent audits of Ministries, departments and Parastatals should be mandated by law. This will ensure financial transparency, reduce embezzlement and improve trust in the management of public funds. Audits should be free from political or institutional pressures to deliver unbiased reports. Additionally, transparency initiatives should be expanded to include budget processes, online portals for government transaction and public access for government contracts and procurement information. There is also the need for e-governance initiatives such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA), Integrated Personnel Payroll Information System (IPPIS), and Biometric Verification Number (BVN) which should be expanded to reduce corruption opportunities in the financial management system of the public service.

References

- Abdullahi, M. (2013). Ethics and accountability in Nigerian public service: its collapse and the way forward. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 2 (5).
- Adebanjo, A. (2015). "Ethics, accountability and transparency in the public service" A Paper Presentation at a Training Programme on Anti-Corruption, Fiscal responsibility and Good Governance for State Government Officials, EFCC Academy, Karu, Abuja.
- Adejite, E.O. (2010). Accounting, accountability and national development. *Nigerian Accountant*, 43 (1):56-64
- African Development Bank (AfDB). (2024). Nigeria economic outlook: recent macroeconomic development and pojections for 2025. <https://www.afdb.org>
- Ani, C. A. (2009). Cultural traditions as factors influencing corruption in Nigeria: a critical analysis. *Journal of African Studies*, 12(4).
- Coker, C.O. (2010) "Accountability in third sector organisations: what role for accounting? *Nigerian Accountant*, 43(1).
- El-Rufai, N.A. (2013). The accidental public servant. Safari Books.
- Eke, G.F. (2016). Corruption in the civil service: the dearth of effective service delivery. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 5(2), 290-301.
- Eneanya, A.N. (2010). Ethics and accountability in Nigerian civil service since independence. In S.O. Akinboye and M.M. Fadakinte (eds.), fifty years of nationhood? State, Society and Politics in Nigeria (1960-2010). Department of political science Publication.
- Eneanya, A.N. (2013). *Theory and practice of public administration*. University of Lagos Press.
- Eugene, K. (2006). *The basics of western philosophy*. Greenwood Press

- Ezekiel, S. (2025). Ethics and accountability in Nigeria's civil service for sustainable development. *Journal of Administration and Governance*, (15)1.
- Federal Government of Nigeria. (2010) Civil service handbook (Revised Edition).
- Fox, W., & Meyer, I.H., (1995). *Public administration dictionary*. Juta and Company.
- Hughes, O.E. (1998). *Public management and administration: an introduction (2nd ed.)*. Macmillan Press.
- Jay, L.G., & William, E.W. (2011). *The Oxford handbook of world philosophy*. Oxford University Press
- Kaufman, D. (2005). *Myths and realities of governance and corruption*. World Bank Governance Programme, Washington, DC
- Kevin, B. (2011). "What is the function of the civil service in the United Kingdom?" <http://www.kevin-barr.suite101.com/what-is-the-function-of-the-civil-service-in-the-united-kingdom-a343090>
- Lin, G. (2009). "*Higher education research methodology-literature method*". International.
- Marshal, J.B., & Murtala, A.M., (2015). Public service in Nigeria: an overview of functions and code of conduct. *European Centre for Research Training and Development*. 3(1).
- Marume, S.B. M., & Chikasha, A.S., (2016). Administrative ethics. *International Journal of Business and Management Invention*. 5 (8).
- Moor, B.N., & Bruder, K. (2004). *Philosophy the power of ideas (Six Edition)*. McGraw Hill, USA.
- Okeke, I.E. (2025). Administrative ethics and accountability in public service. *American Journal of Sciences and Engineering Research*. 8(3).
- Ogbedi, M. (2012). Political leadership and corruption in Nigeria since 1960: a socio-economic analysis. *Journal of Nigeria Studies*, 1(2).
- Ezekiel, S. (2025). Ethics and accountability in Nigeria's civil service for sustainable development. *Journal of Administration and Governance*, (15) 1.
- Omoyele, E.O. (2012). *The civil service in Nigeria: evolution and challenges*. CSS Press.
- Peter, G. (2007). "Performance-based accountability" in Shah, A. (ed). "*Performance accountability and combating corruption*", World Bank on line at <http://worldBank.org>
- Premchand, A. (1999). "Public Financial Accountability" in Schviavo-Campo, S. (ed). "Governance, Corruption and Public Finanacial Management", Asian Development Bank. Manila, Philippines on Line at www.adb.org
- Salisu, M.A. (2000). *Corruption in Nigeria (Working Paper)*. Lancaster University Management School.
- Smith, D.J. (2008). *A culture of corruption*. Prineston University Press.

Ugoh, S.C. (2016). *Ecology of public administration and politics in Nigeria: contemporary issues*. Sam Iroanusi publications.

Walsh, D., & Down, S., (2005). "Meta-synthesis method for qualitative research: a literature review.