

Tackling Corruption in Nigeria through Public Service Reforms

Eustace Uzor examines evidence from India which suggests that employing individuals with a natural aptitude for the public sector could help reduce corruption.

There is now a consensus across all segments of the Nigerian society that corruption is the single most important cause of waste and inefficiency in the public sector. Its **negative effect on public service delivery is well-known**. Despite adopting several policy measures to reduce widespread corruption such as the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in 2004 and the enactment of a Public Procurement Act in 2007, corruption in the public sector has worsened. This poor performance is evident in the recent data published by **Transparency International** and the **World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators**.

Without doubt, public sector corruption constrains sustainable economic development and effective public service delivery. In Nigeria where the public sector constitutes 62 per cent of the **wage labour force**, providing the right incentives and conditions is essential to maintaining productivity and performance. In recognition of this, Nigeria's government has implemented **14 Public Service Reforms (PSRs)**, with 10 reviewing wages and conditions of service between 1945-2013. Yet, there is no evidence to show that the scale of corruption in the period declined. With 32 per cent of the **proposed 2017 budget** financed by debt, the time to reduce public sector corruption is now.

Apart from the boom in crude oil which created free rents for politicians and bureaucrats to capture, some other important factors contributed to the rise in corruption. First, more than a generation of military rule (1966-1979 and 1983-1999), **created a democratic deficit** (Nye, 1967), considerably weakening accountability, checks, and balances. More so, considering that Nigeria inherited the Weberian model of bureaucracy from Britain after independence, with top-down lines of authority, military dictators (*principals*) appointed self-interested bureaucrats (*agents*) that could not be monitored, therefore allowing them monopoly in the absence of accountability structures. Given this historical context, public service bureaucrats in Nigeria engage in corruption since the expected benefit of their actions are undoubtedly higher than the cost of punishment, if any. Of course, the role of tribalism and Nigeria's gift-giving culture in promoting public sector corruption, cannot be neglected.



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A **mounting body of evidence** suggests that recruiting employees with strong innate motivation and preference for public sector work can reduce public sector corruption. Nigeria can benefit from this innovation in public service recruitment, particularly given clear similarities (ie, multiplicity of ethnicity and religion) with India where these experiments have been successfully conducted. Since Nigeria's Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) still relies almost exclusively on the use of traditional entrance examinations for recruiting public and civil servants, a first step will be to carry out an actual recruitment exercise to operationalise the recruitment approach mentioned above. This could be done randomly across government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). Lessons learned can then be *localised* and incorporated into the Human Resource Management System (HRMS).

Since bureaucrats cannot be fired easily, except for disobeying clear-cut public service rules, the Office of the Head of Service of the Federation should institute a *depoliticised* mechanism for transferring top bureaucrats in MDAs if evidence of corruption is established in a court of law under their leadership. This should be carried out irrespective of their involvement, cadre, and political affiliation. This can serve as a signalling mechanism for lower cadre bureaucrats, who are presumably rational. Considering that the procurement process is widely recognised as one of the key sources of public funds leakage, a centralised *Procurement Information Management System (PIMS)* can be established, and domiciled at the **Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP)**. The extent of cost-efficiency across MDAs, evident in PIMS data, can be used as performance scorecards for top-level bureaucrats. Periodic publication of this data could also improve collective action on the part of citizens and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) who advocate for transparency.

Three **policy measures** can be implemented to reverse this trend going forward. Public service recruitment should *actively* seek out employees whose personality attributes and innate motivation align strongly to public service work. A *depoliticised* transfer mechanism should be established and used whenever evidence of corruption is established under their leadership. Fiscal data from PIMS can be used to incentivise accountability and efficiency in MDAs, while also strengthening the extent of citizenship engagement with the government. These measures can considerably reduce corruption and inefficiencies in Nigeria's public sector.

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The views expressed in this post are those of the author and in no way reflect those of the Africa at LSE blog or the London School of Economics and Political Science.

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