

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE AND BUREAUCRATIC PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA: A HUMAN RESOURCE TRAJECTORY OF THE MUFFLING OF BUREAUCRATIC CAPACITY

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ABSTRACT: *The study focus on political interference and bureaucratic performance in Nigeria: A human resource trajectory of the muffling of bureaucratic capacity. The objectives of the study are to challenge the unbalance thesis of the overdevelopment of government bureaucracy stunting political development and by extension causing underdevelopment in Africa, examine the impact of political interference on the Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) human resources performance, and examine the extent to which temporary political executives seek to extend their reach in DESOPADEC by politicizing the bureaucracy and how cooperate governance is undermined in the process. Mixed methods research design was used for the study. The findings revealed that 86% of those recruited into the organization were influenced by political considerations and that political interference in bureaucratic organization's recruitment and selection processes heavily impede the bureaucracy opportunity to hiring skillful and qualified candidates. The researchers recommended that political executives and the political class should be isolated from bureaucratic recruitment and selection process to allow private sector consultants selected by host communities and civil society organizations to be allow to conduct merit based employment. It also recommended that host communities representatives and civil society organizations monitor the required process while advocating for the use of Information Communication technology tools to conduct transparent interview(s) to allow for transparency and equal opportunities for all participants.*

KEYWORD: bureaucratic performance, corporate governance, development, political interference and public policy environment.

INTRODUCTION

The bureaucracy is the institution through which government policies or intensions are effectively carried out or implemented. The concern of Delta State government between 2007 and 2011 was to provide a structure through which organized interventions would speed up development in the

neglected 19 oil producing areas of the state. The Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC) was established in 2006 but started its operation in the state in July 2007. The mandate of DESOPADEC within the time frame of 2007-2011 was to develop the oil producing areas of Delta State with critical attention to provide peace and security, infrastructure development and human capital development.

DESOPADEC was expected to fund its operation from 50% of the 13% oil derivation fund accruing to the state, as is enshrined in section 162 of the 1999 constitution and the DESOPADEC act of 2007. The organization of a state for the purpose of development must be subjected to political direction and control. This is done by appointing trusted and dedicated body of resource persons favourably disposed to the government herein referred to as board of commissioners to oversee the activities of bureaucratic organization in the interest of the state. This has serious implications for the operations of such bureaucratic organization as the pattern of relationship that exist between the board of commissioner as agent of the government and the bureaucracy as agent of development will shape and determine the control and management of resources available to it for the development of the state.

To implement government policies through intervention programme, DESOPADEC had to recruit qualified personnel in its service to be engaged in the day to day operations of the commission. This study is concern with how the recruitment in the commission was carried and what is the implication for the bureaucracy and the state in relation to meeting the development priorities of the state.

Statement of the problem.

Whether a state ideological leaning is liberal, socialist or developmental, it must function with the bureaucracy which is the core institution of governance design to implement government policies and programmes. Nigeria has a weak, fragile and underdevelopment private sector, which makes it extremely inevitable to give critical attention to the efficient performance of the public bureaucracy; because it is an agent of development we cannot fail to ignore.

Bureaucracy is a strategic factor in economic and social development. It influences and determine the success of any development plan, and is at the same time susceptible to deliberate social control and change (Rodman 1968). As a core institution of development, the bureaucracy is laden with the task of promoting development and sustaining civilization. Such vital institution which holds the thread that neat society into a designable pattern of development, must be efficiently manned by competent and skillful personnel, and adhere to rules, regulations and procedures in all its activities and programmes without compromise to development.

The measurement of an efficient bureaucracy lies in matching its objectives and strategies alongside its attitude (corporate culture) to produce a required output (performance) which fit into the development agenda set by the society from which it operates. Rodman (1968) and Ake (2001) affirmed that the inadequacy of administration in many developing countries is now recognized

as a major obstacle to development; with shortage of skills and tools, difficulties of organization and structure, political difficulties and cultural and attitude barriers are interconnected obstacles to development.

Having examined Rodman assertion, the researcher considers that from July 2007 to 2010 (3 years) DESOPADEC had received 79 billion naira from the state government to initiate development policies in the oil producing areas in Delta State. (<http://www.deltastate.gov.ng/insidedeltaAugust2010.htm>). This amount is substantially sufficient to bring about sizeable measure of development in the oil producing areas of Delta State but the general feeling of the host communities making up DESOPADEC mandate areas is that DESOPADEC has failed to produce the anticipated development it was set up for.

It is observed that political difficulties herein described as political interference overshadows the other variables mentioned by Rodman as they are conditioned and initiated by political interference in the operations of DESOPADEC. The operations of the board of commissioners serving as supervisory agent of the state over the bureaucracy as agent of development, both with divergent interest, tend to compromise corporate governance in the administration of the commission, especially in relation to staff recruitment and selection policies which ultimately serves as input in the enhancing the capability of the commission.

With the board of commissioners serving as agent of the state government and supervising the bureaucracy with formal knowledge and skills for implementing government policies, there is the domination of politics over administration in the commission and by extension, the escalation of bad governance in the human resources procurement policy of DESOPADEC.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. challenge the unbalance thesis which state that the overdevelopment of government bureaucracy stunted political development and by extension created a state of underdevelopment in Africa (Ademolekun 2006)
2. examine the impact of political interference on DESOPADEC human resources performance
3. examine the extent to which temporary political executives seek to extend their reach in DESOPADEC by politicizing the bureaucracy and how cooperate government is undermined in the process.

Research Questions

From the statement of problems, the following research questions were drawn

1. Does political interference limit bureaucratic performance in DESOPADEC?
2. Does political interference undermine corporate governance and breed a climate of struggle and conflict in DESOPADEC?

Research Propositions

Derived from the above, the researcher proposed the following propositions

1. Political interference limits bureaucratic performance in DESOPADEC
2. Political interference undermines corporate governance and breed a climate of struggle and conflict in DESOPADEC.

Significance of the study

The study is developed from the researcher's interest to understand the dynamic nature of the dialectical relationship existing between the political executives and administrators inside the bureaucracy. Major of earlier studies before this work tend to emphasize the forging of relationship existing between the political executives and senior bureaucratic officers in analyzing politics-administration relationship. This work is however unique in the sense that it tends to adopt a macro approach rather than micro approach that just state relationship without focusing on the type, pattern and impact of the relationship. The researcher stressed that there is a dialectical relationship existing between the political executive and the bureaucracy, which account for struggle and conflict between the duo as the former tend to dominate the latter and the impact is underperformance of the bureaucracy. Mustapha & Ifaka (2019) identified this to be the source of tension between democracy and the bureaucracy. The locus of the study is on human resources procurement which is politicized through political interference and is undermining corporate governance.

Definition of concept

Bureaucratic performance: The Bureaucratic organization is a structural institution that operate with rigid rules, regulations and procedures. It prescribes behaviours that seeks to ensure efficiency while observing corporate governance (adhering to organizational culture) which points to measuring results from expected established routine.

Corporate Governance: Corporate governance seek to ensure the management of an entity is carried out in accordance with the highest prevailing standards of ethics and efficacy, constraining behaviours to structures, bearing and specifying distribution of rights and responsibilities among participants in an organization. It is a means to safeguard and promote the interest of all stakeholders (Organization for Economics Corporation and Development, 2004)

Development: Government responsibility in developing countries is to cause development to occur. Nafziger (2005) citing Seer identified development as programme designed to reduced poverty, inequality and unemployment while Goulet (1996) expressed that development is a question of human value, human attitude and preference targeted to bring about change.

Political Interference: Political interference is the act of obstructing, hindering or circumventing a corporate standard or procedures of doing things. Political interference occurs when politicians' issues threat, instructions or other inducements to determine a state policy or behaviour of

bureaucrats. The United Nations Development Programme Economic Policy Research Center November (2007) report, see political interference as when politicians exert undue influence in the handling of matters under the confines and jurisdiction of the bureaucracy.

Public Policy Environment: Public policy is the official instrument of state for achieving development. Anderson (2003) disclosed that the public policy environment is characterized by both official actors (executives, legislators, administrators and the court) and non-official (citizen and civil society).

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Literature review:

The quest for development in third world countries especially the African continent gained currency immediately these countries in question attained independence in the era of 1960s and beyond. Worst still at the dawn of the 21st century, development have remained the singsong of the African continent with Nigeria having multitude of contradictions constraining her development. A shocking obstacle to development in Africa is the lack of skills forced into the bureaucracy through political interference in bureaucratic recruitment process. (Rodman 1968, Ake 2001).

A reminiscence of the development drive at the dawn of the 21st century has come from the Niger Delta with a catalogue of peaceful and violent protests, agitations and dialogue, calling on the Nigerian state to decentralize the accustomed oil rent management to oil producing states, local governments and even host communities. The rationale is to enable massive funds to be available for development of the Niger Delta region with the creation of interventionist agencies at federal level (Federal Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs 2008), regional level (Niger Delta Development Commission 2000) and State level (Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission 2006). With the flow of funds into these agencies, it appears that the concept of development been envisaged prior to their creation has been illusory and not achievable.

Very often it is seen that bureaucracy simply act according to the dictates of the political executive without any independent examination of issues. This trend can be attributed to the ever growing political interference in the affairs of administrations. Political interference and impartial administration cannot co-exist (Svara, 2001, 2006; Meier, Compton, Polga-Hecimovich, Song & Wimpy 2019). While the administrators do not perceive their role in policy making as docile to political leaders because of their knowledge and expertise, yet they have no control to the prerequisite of representative politics. The political leaders claim to be the true representative of the people and know what is good for them; this is what inform their superior position in dictating policy direction and execution procedures to the bureaucrats. The bureaucrats who are not obliging enough soon find themselves in trouble. The political master has many means of coercion- both overt and covert. Political interference can come in the form of intimidation deployed by politicians to influence the judgement of bureaucrats in the execution of public

policy. Transfer, promotion, suppression and compulsory retirement from the services are some of the means through which politicians silence the bureaucrats from expressing difference of opinion (Svara, 2001, 2006).

Political interference is usually used to disrupt administrative tasks that requires a programmed decision format. Political prestige motivates some projects and recruitment of constituency persons that requires political pressure to influence and bypass bureaucratic procedures and outcomes. Under this circumstance, political pressure rather than merit influences appoints and promotions in bureaucratic organization and prevent work behaviour guided by professionalism. By evading corporate governance, the actions of the political executive in bureaucratic organization create imbalance which lower bureaucratic performances (Adei 2006).

Public institution like DESOPADEC was created in 2006 by an act of the Delta State parliament. Being an interventionist agency that is saddle with the responsibility of tackling underdevelopment and ecological problems arising from the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in the oil and gas producing areas of Delta State. By this gesture, the commission receives and administer 50% of the 13% of the oil derivation funds. To carry out its enormous responsibilities, the commission is expected to recruit staff across the 19 oil producing local government. This is to enable the commission to secure an efficient administration which required the procurement of competent and most qualified workforce. The workforce is therefore expected to bring diverge skills into the effective execution of organizational policy. (DESOPADEC handbook on condition of service).

The DESOPADEC handbook on condition of service, section 5, subsection 1 provides that the commission recruitment policy will employ and retain high quality personnel for jobs in the commission. It shall take merit into account in recruiting for management and senior positions while taking necessary step to motivate and engage them optimally (DESOPADEC: handbook on condition of service).

The initial projection of staff for the commission was 300 in 2007 but when advertisement was placed for staff recruitment, more than 20,000 qualified persons applied for the various positions. A private human resource consultant was deployed by DESOPADEC to select the most suitable candidates. The consultant conducted 3 rounds of elimination interviews between October and November 2007 and published the less than 2000 persons who were successful. At this point the DESOPADEC board displace the consultant and restricted the next interview to verifying original certificates of candidates and ascertain their personal political contact with government officials in the state. All claims by the candidates at the interview were requested to be authenticated by a letter of introduction from their acclaimed sponsor as final verdict and requirement for securing the intending jobs. Most frustrating is that the candidates political sponsor is expected to submit the intending recommendation letter directly to the board.

Those who were earlier eliminated from the previous interviews, deployed available resources at their disposal to mobilize for their inclusion into the would be staff of DESOPADEC. This later group, were foremost to be adopted as DESOPADEC pioneer staff between October 2007 and march 2008. About 250 of them were recruited as junior and intermediate staff of the commission even when majority of them were qualified as senior staff.

The scramble for survival by the candidates who were shortlisted for the board interview and subsequently demanded to acquire political sponsor as prequalification for recruitment into DESOPADEC made the entire recruitment exercise a political battlefield with robust pressure on the DESOPADEC board from all sides of the state to the extent that staff lists were released in batches for an onward period of a year and six months. By the end of the exercise in May 2009, the staff list has culminated into 3657 staff (DESOPADEC payroll May 2009). Evidence of this was captured by the Nation newspaper of September 1st 2009, when it reported that staff list continuously rose because of the overwhelming pressure from the governor's office, ruling party members, law makers and communities' leaders who forwarded complementary cards to the DESOPADEC chairman.

The implication of the DESOPADEC recruitment policy render the organization vulnerable to inefficient administration, since it is now captured in the web of political maneuvering for staff recruitment, grading, placement and other benefits. The logic of benefiting from organizational activities, staff grading and placement was dependent on a staff political influence on the structure of the organization. This left a large percentage of more qualified persons and skillful staff at the mercy of the politically connected staff.

A critical example is the increasing abnormalities constantly witnessed in the payroll units of the finance department with difference to that of nominal roll in administration, which led to delay in the payment of salary. Another consequence of political influence was that there were increasing strives among staff to emerge as favourable choice of board members to occupy a particular position with juicy responsibility. The whole gamut of this policy is that political interference in DESOPADEC's administration undermined effective structuring organization to the extent that job descriptions were not properly defined as it is only privileged staff of the commission, consisting of less than 10% that were sincerely engaged in the operations of the organization.

To address the problem of overcrowding at the commission headquarter with no office space for staff to work, the commission resorted to decentralize the organization. DESOPADEC then created 37 Area/zonal offices from 19 oil producing areas of Delta State (although this was a violation of the DESOPADEC act which stipulates that each local government shall have one Area/Zonal office) to serve their host communities on behalf of DESOPADEC. The responsibility of the Area/Zonal office is to serve as project monitoring team in their various local government areas. This has only remained policy on paper as the Area/Zonal office has never received any detail of DESOPADEC projects, since these projects are contract allocated to top politicians in the state. Doing so will expose these politicians to bureaucratic ridicule.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretical framework serves as justification and explanatory tool for understanding a phenomenon under investigation. The theoretical framework for explaining this research are system theory and Iron law of oligarchy. System theory is used as the main theory and the Iron law of oligarchy is utilized as the axillary theory. System theory relates to interactions and interdependency of all parts, units or subsystems of an entity for the purpose of attaining optimization and maintenance of organization's goals. French (1987) expressed that a system is a linkage of interrelated and interdependent components having a facilitating effect on the carrying out of one or more processes of an organization. A system acquire human resources as input into an organization; the quality of the input, have consequences for converting the human resources into desirable quantities and outputs.

Isaac (1985) stated that a system has three main characteristics components: identifiable elements, relationships among the elements and their boundaries. The identified elements in the system under evaluation are the appointed board members or commissioner and the bureaucrats in the bureaucracy. The relationship is between the board members or commissioner and the bureaucrats while the boundary for the political executive is policy making on human resources recruitment guidelines and the bureaucrats is to implement the policy made by the political executives. The boundary for the political executive is policy making and for the bureaucrats is implementation. In the content of this research work, the system emphasizes the interdependent nature of the relationship between the political executive and the bureaucrats in the bureaucracy as a state system for causing development. The system is ecologically oriented. It places emphasize on the policy environment and how policy actors are connected in both cooperative or dialectical relationship.

Since governance is concerned with ensuring development in society, it requires that both temporary appointed political executives and the permanent career bureaucrats cooperate to push development across to society by utilizing competent human resources as inputs at its disposal. When the component parts- the political executive and the bureaucrats in DESOPADEC effectively interacts within the confines of corporate governance, the system produces anticipated results, through the recruitment of qualified and competent human resources based on competitive recruitment and selection process into the commission. The system attains efficiency and optimization which leads to system maintenance as there is harmony of interest. In reverse, if the relationship between the political executive and the bureaucrats is dialectically opposed and entrenched in crisis, the system becomes dysfunctional as the different components of the system with separatist interest struggle to achieve its individual goals as against the interest of the overall goal of the organization.

Though the system theory is a broad analytical framework in explaining large mass of information at a glance, the iron law of oligarchy is utilized as axillary theory to provide details of the complex

relationship between the policy actors in DESOPADEC. Michels (1915), expressed that oligarchy is the rule of a privilege few in an organization. He noted that the rule of the privilege few over the majority in an organization is the iron law of oligarchy. Michel affirmed that there is the inherent tendency of all complex organization to develop into a ruling clique of leaders with interest to dominate the organization itself rather than its official aims. In order to provide a stable and non-antagonistic working class, political office holders manipulate the recruitment process of bureaucratic organization for their own benefits and interest, since the recruits to bureaucratic organizations are mere selected candidates openly accessible to political executives who are expected to be loyal to the appointing authority and such appointments are usually based on connections on families ties- kinship and party affiliations among others.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The researcher adopted mixed method in carrying out this research. It adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods. Mixed method heightens complementarity of results from triangulation of different methods and strengthening the study's conclusion and validity (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Hollstein, 2014; Greener, 2007; Bryman 2006). The researcher essentially used qualitative method to collect and analyze secondary source of data that was extracted from DESOPADEC documents (Newsmagazine, Official documents, Newspaper publications and internet materials). The study covered the entire recruitment of the organization as a parameter to x-ray the condition of DESOPADEC. The data extracted from the secondary sources in DESOPADEC documents were codified into statistical tables. This therefore created room for quantitative analysis of the data extracted. Simple percentage was utilized in the analysis of the influence of political interference on bureaucratic performance.

Variable Definition:

Political interference served as independent variable and bureaucratic performance served as dependent variable. These constitute the variables and medium through which the discussion, measurement and analysis of this research was focused on. The movement and interactions of these variables are expected to provide a given pattern and trend through which political interference (independent variable) can determine or influence low performance of the bureaucratic organization (dependent variable).

Data collection and analysis

The researcher extracted thirty-nine (39) memorandums from the office of head of administration of DESOPADEC from July 4th 2008 to January 9th, 2009 and obtained payroll record from department of account and finance for June 2007 to May 2009 to establish the level of influence in determining appointment into DESOPADEC between 2007 to 2009. To manage the large volume of data, a survey for May 2009 payroll highlighted a typical indication of how recruitment influence was distributed between the political executives and the top bureaucrats.

Table 1: Influence on Employment in DESOPADEC for May 2009.

Authorization of employment showing influence	No. of Staff
Political	1580
Bureaucracy	254
Total recommendation	1834

Source: Ifaka and Odigie 2020.

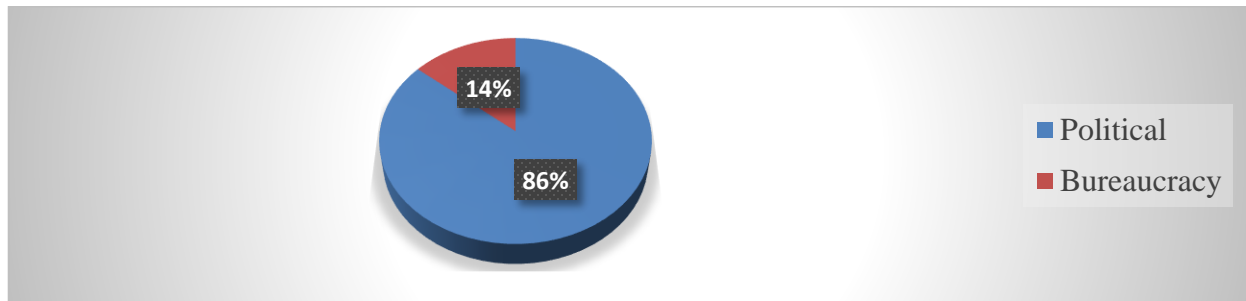


Fig. 1 Graphic Representation of Influence on Employment

Source: Ifaka and Odigie 2020.

Drawn from the table 1 and figure 1, it was evident that 1834 staff were recommended for employment in DESOPADEC May 2009; of this population, 1580 representing 86% of the population were recommended by the political executives and 254 representing 14% of the population were recommended into the commission for employment. This showed an overwhelming influence of political influence/interference in employment.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Discussion of findings

Evidence drawn from 39 memorandums studied showed that political interference heavily dominated and influenced the recruitment and selection processes of the commission with far reaching implication to hiring persons who have political connections with the State ruling class and political appointees/elected officials of government in Delta State. The implication of the findings is that due process were not followed in the various appointments and indications from observed data revealed that persons employed under this privileged scheme did not passed the merit based test to determine their suitability and acquisition of the necessary skills required for higher performance in the public service expected to respond to the needs of neglected oil bearing host communities in Delta State. Accessing the circumstance, political interference is responsible

for poor performance of the bureaucratic organization, since decisions are predominantly taken based on political consideration and interest.

Conclusion

The study was able to validate that political interference help to subvert due process in recruitment and selection process in bureaucratic organization. The implication of this is that the bureaucracy is thus heavily bothered by unqualified and unskilled staff that undermine and limit bureaucratic performance in public organization. The politicization of employment in the bureaucracy, allotted influential opportunities to those that are politically connected over their peers. This therefore is a source of tension between the political executives and the bureaucrats over the operation and the use of the bureaucracy.

Policies Recommendations:

The researcher recommends the following from the evidence drawn for the study:

1. The bureaucracy is a specialized and professional organization that is premised on efficiency in its operations. The political class and political executive should be isolated from recruitment and selection processes of the organization. This is in tandem with professional ethics that stipulates merit base recruitment is associated with innovative and skillful workforce acquisition. This is the only to proportionally stimulate higher productivity according to their designated capacities.
2. There should be private sector's human resources consultant(s) involvement in the process of recruitment and selection processes in bureaucratic organization. Host communities and civil society organizations should be involved in the engagement of the human resource consultant(s) in the recruitment process. Both host communities' representative and civil society organizations should monitor the process of recruitment and selection.
3. Information communication technology tools should be adequately utilized in the conduct of the various interview processes to ensure transparency of the process, credibility of the process and to provide equal opportunity for all participants.

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