



## Revisiting Ethics and Values in Nigerian Public Service

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**Abstract:** *This paper focused on revisiting the ethics and values of Nigeria public service. It tried to uncover the maxims of ethics and values and how they can be promoted in public service. The study was anchored on the consequential theory. Qualitative research method was adopted with secondary data as the major sources of data collection. Data were contently analyzed. Findings revealed a high prevalence of negligence of ethics and values in the Nigeria public service occasioned by lack of integrity among public servants and the complex nature of corruption coupled with some extant cultural problems. The paper concluded that proper ethical and value - oriented behaviour requires that public servants should act in such a way that best serves the interests of the public.*

**Key words:** *Ethics, values, public service, service delivery*

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### INTRODUCTION

The Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service sets forth the values and ethics of public service to guide and support public servants in all their professional activities. It serves to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of the Public Service. The Code also serves to strengthen respect for, and appreciation of, the role played by the Public Service within Nigerian democracy. The Public Service of Nigeria is an important national institution. Through the support they provide to the duly constituted government, public servants contribute in a fundamental way to good government, to democracy and to Nigerian society. The role of the Public Service is to assist the Government of Nigeria to provide for peace, order and good government.

It is a fact that the Nigerian society is facing tremendous ethics and value crisis today due to personal greed, selfishness, indifference to others, conflict of interest, laziness, etc. These have brought about large scale corruption in almost all spheres of life- personal and public, economic and political, moral and religious. Over the years, there has been erosion of the essential social, moral, and spiritual ethics and values and an increase in cynicism and nihilism at all levels. Francis, F (1997) writes that “the difference between poor and rich societies is the difference in Social Capital”. Social Capital according to Francis refers to high stock of values like honesty, loyalty, trust, integrity, discipline, hard work, etc. The Nigeria public servants are mandated to abide by conduct rules otherwise known as public service rules which are in the nature of dos and don'ts. The rules are totally not enough to deal with cases of misconduct of public servants as they give numerous escape routes for the unscrupulous. It is therefore high time the rules are expanded to make them adequate and properly strengthen code of ethics and values for civil servants. Ethics and value are meant to prescribe standards of integrity and conduct that are to apply to public service. Code of ethics and values cover such issues as; public comment, release of information, integrative role of public services, and continuous improvement through

professional socialization and team work.

Thus, ethics and values among other things should include; integrity, impartiality, service orientation and procedural fairness, open accountability and transparency, devotion to duty and exemplary conduct, etc. Ethics and values help give public servants a vision, a purpose and an idea to strive for in the course performing their duties. A high standard of ethics and values among public servants is necessary to set example for the larger populace.

### **Problem Statement**

There is a perception that standards in public life are in decline. This raises questions about the costs of misconduct on the part of those who have been entrusted with guarding public interest and resources. These costs are losses in trust and confidence in public institutions and losses in precious resources which were meant to support the economic and social development of nations and peoples (United Nations 2000). As government business grows in complexity with the adoption of technological innovations in government, governance in Nigeria's public sector becomes more problematic and ethically tasking as a result of endemic corruption. Despite attempts by successive governments in Nigeria to ensure ethical standard, value and improved attitudes for better performance of the Nigerian Public Service, several challenges still militate against its being ranked as one of the best in the world. There are cases of gross indiscipline, lack of accountability and transparency, unethical behaviour and corrupt practices to the extent that one may conveniently speak of a crisis of ethics and values in the Nigerian public service. This paper sets to investigate into this problem of crisis of ethics and values in the Nigerian public service.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to identify the ethics and values and examine the extent of their application in Nigeria public service. The specific objectives are to;

- 1 examine public service ethics and values.
- 2 determine the factors that militate against full adherence of the ethics and values of public service in Nigeria
- 3 explore ways of promoting ethics and values in Nigeria public service

### **CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

**Ethics:** Ethics is a moral law of human conduct or behaviour considered from the point of view of good or evil. It is an action, which is morally good or morally evil. Ethics derives from the Greek noun "ethos" meaning "the customs and conventions of a given community" Fredrick (2017).

Bottorff (1997) (as cited in Casimir, Izueke and Nzekwe, 2014) describes ethics as a body of principles or standards of human conduct that govern the behaviour of individuals and groups. Ethics means principles by which to evaluate behaviour as right or wrong, good or bad. Mautner (2000) (as cited in Agba, Ohimana and Abubakar, 2013) says ethics from a normative perspective is a rational inquiry into or a theory of, the standards of right and wrong, good and bad, in respect of character and conduct, which ought to be accepted by a class of individuals. Put differently, ethics could be described as a body of standards that the professionals in question

ought to accept and observe. Pollitt (2003) defines ethics as rules of conduct and behaviour, which relate to questions of right or wrong, good or evil. Ethics refers to a system of moral principles or rules of behaviour (Oxford dictionary 7th edition). Laxmikant (2007), puts it thus 'they provide rules of the game'.

From the definitions above, it could be deduced that ethics are well based standards of right and wrong which prescribe what individuals ought to do usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefit to the society, fairness, or specific virtues. In public service, ethics refer to the professional code of morality expected of civil servants in the civil service. They constitute the moral fiber of civil servants and regulate the conduct and behaviour of different classes of civil servants. Thus, misconducts which are not permitted in the public service are unethical conducts.

**Value:** In the words of Obiora (2017) ethics is about values and values are not merely utopian'. Value is that which men desire, expect or forbid. Values are stable long lasting beliefs regarding what is important in a variety of situations. According to Ezeani (2005) values represent what individuals, organizations, nations etc. desire and want. Values differ from individual to individual, group to group, institution to institution, community to community, profession to profession, etc.

Therefore, values refer to beliefs about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. They are those enduring beliefs that influence the choices people make among available means or ends. They are those things that are vital to or valued by someone or organization. They are what public servants and the general public see and judge to be right. They constitute the moral, professional, and ethical attributes of character which must be instilled in the members of the public service. Values are what define individuals, institutions, cultures and people. They are "a set of principles or standards of behaviour regarded as desirable, important and held in high esteem by a particular society in which a person lives, and the failure to hold them results in blame, criticism or even outright condemnation" (Obiora, 2016). Thus, values guide persons to do the right things, act morally, be morally sound, and give meaning and strength to a person's character.

Studies show that ethics and values are inter-related and are often used inter-changeably. Ethics which are founded on values are vital codes of human conduct. Ethics promote harmonious life of integrity. Ethics deal with the integrated development of human personality. It touches the human person, human dignity, and all the obligations that flow from the nature and dignity of human person in relation to oneself, others, colleagues, and the society at large. Ethics focuses the attention of people on the ultimate human goal which influences all good values to replace every evil value in the society. Hence, it is the definition of this paper that ethics and values of the public service refer to morally correct, honourable and acceptable behaviors required of public servants.

**Public Service:** This generally means the activities of government employees and institutions aimed at formulating and implementing governmental policies and programmes for the interests of the masses (public) Agba, et al (2013). According to Adebayo (2000), civil service or public service is responsible for the management of the machinery of government and carrying out the day-to-day duties that public administrations demand.

**The Public Service of Nigeria:** The Nigerian public service is an embodiment of the civil service, line ministries and extra-ministerial agencies. It also includes states and national assemblies, the judiciary, the Armed forces, the police and other security agencies, the paramilitary agencies, departments and agencies. The public service in Nigeria plays a lot of roles in the policy. These functions include rendering professional and technical advice on government policies based on expertise; experience acquired over a long period of service. The public service of Nigeria also ensures the implementation of all government policies and programmes for the achievement of set goals and objectives. Also, the Nigerian public service is responsible for monitoring and evaluation of all on-going government projects and programmes to ensure they comply to plans, due process and adequately or properly implement projects. Again, the Nigerian public service ensures operation of development consciousness, performance oriented, effective and efficient administrative system. It promotes the dynamic growth of socially responsible private sector within the framework of national economic objectives and acts as a springboard for public policy, especially where the political leadership is weak.

The Public Service of Nigeria is an important national institution, part of the essential framework of Nigeria presidential democracy. Through the support they provide to the duly constituted government, public servants contribute in a fundamental way to good government, to democracy and to Nigerian society. The role of the Public Service is to assist the Government of Nigeria to provide for peace, order and good government. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria and the principles of responsible government provide the foundation for Public Service roles, responsibilities and values. The democratic mission of the Public Service is to assist Ministers, under law, to serve the public interest. The Values and Ethics Code for the Public Service sets forth the values and ethics of public service to guide and support public servants in all their professional activities. It serves to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of the Public Service. The code also serves to strengthen respect for, and appreciation of, the role played by the Public Service of Nigeria

### **Maxims of Ethics and Values**

Generally, ethics and values contain such principles as; integrity, loyalty to the nation, honesty, efficiency, non- partisan attitude, humbleness, incorruptibility, devotion to duty, sense of public good, secrecy, neutrality, anonymity, impartiality, fairness, and sincerity. Section 23 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria as amended says ‘‘the national ethics shall be discipline, Integrity, and dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance, self- reliance, and patriotism’. The civil service hand book of Nigeria contains code of ethics in government business to include; discipline loyalty, honesty, courage, courtesy, co-operation, tact, and industry, avoidance of delay, tidiness, helpfulness, and kindness. Nigerian public servants are trained to operate on laid down rules and regulations and to go by the rules and regulations. In abiding by these rules and regulations, public servants are largely expected to be very conscious of the ethics and values of the civil service which demand impartiality, neutrality, and anonymity.

To enhance full compliance to these ethics and values, there are anti- corruption laws, financial regulation, public service handbook, etc which lay down what constitutes misconduct and serious misconduct for public servants. These ethics and values are inscribed to help check arbitrary civil servants, instill and promote in public servants a sense of administrative responsibility, establish and promote correct relations between citizens and public servants, and maintain high standards of conduct among public servants. They are also meant to control

administrative power and discretion which cannot be controlled by formal laws, methods and procedures. Thus, it is expected that with high morals fostered and maintained through ethics and values, stability and harmonious relationship can exist between public servants and citizens, and between public servants and their political executives, and among the civil servants themselves.

Yuk (2013) summarizes the principles of ethical leadership as: (a) honesty and integrity (including consistency of actions with espoused values), (b) behaviour intended to communicate or enforce ethical standards, (c) fairness in decisions and the distribution of rewards (no favouritism or use of rewards to motivate improper behaviour), and (d) behaviour that shows kindness, compassion, and concern for the needs and feelings of others (rather than attempts to manipulate, abuse, and exploit others for personal gain).

In a nutshell, the Canadian public service (2003) has provided what constitute public service ethics and values as follows;

- ❖ **Democratic Values:** Helping Ministers, under law, to serve the public interest. Public servants shall give honest and impartial advice and make all information relevant to a decision available to Ministers. Public servants shall loyally implement ministerial decisions, lawfully taken. Public servants shall support both individual and collective ministerial accountability and provide Parliament and Nigerians with information on the results of their work.
- ❖ **Professional Values:** Serving with competence, excellence, efficiency, objectivity and impartiality. Public servants must work within the laws of Nigeria and maintain the tradition of the political neutrality of the Public Service. Public servants shall endeavour to ensure the proper, effective and efficient use of public money. In the Public Service, how ends are achieved should be as important as the achievements themselves. Public servants should constantly renew their commitment to serve Nigeria by continually improving the quality of service, by adapting to changing needs through innovation, and by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and services offered in both official languages. Public servants should also strive to ensure that the value of transparency in government is upheld while respecting their duties of confidentiality under the law.
- ❖ **Ethical Values:** Acting at all times in such a way as to uphold the public trust. Public servants shall perform their duties and arrange their private affairs so that public confidence and trust in the integrity, objectivity and impartiality of government are conserved and enhanced. Public servants shall act at all times in a manner that will bear the closest public scrutiny; an obligation that is not fully discharged by simply citing within the law. Public servants, in fulfilling their official duties and responsibilities, shall make decisions in the public interest. If a conflict should arise between the private interests and the official duties of a public servant, the conflict shall be resolved in favour of the public interest.
- ❖ **People Values:** Demonstrating respect, fairness and courtesy in their dealings with both citizens and fellow public servants. Respect for human dignity and the value of every person should always inspire the exercise of authority and responsibility. People values should reinforce the wider range of Public Service values. Those who are treated with fairness and civility will be motivated to display these values in their own conduct. Public Service organizations should be led through participation, openness and

communication and with respect for diversity and for the official languages of Nigeria. Appointment decisions in the Public Service shall be based on merit. Public Service values should play a key role in recruitment, evaluation and promotion.

### **Instances of Unethical Behaviors in the Public Service of Nigeria**

Dubhashi (2012) once opined “it is of utmost importance that public administration should be efficient but is even more important that it should be ethical. It is said of an individual that if character is lost, everything is lost. It could be stated about public administration that if ethics is lost, everything is lost”. Despite the existence of this code of ethics and values in the Nigerian public service, research indicates that the Nigerian society still witnesses various cases of corruption, business malpractices, illicit operations, wheeling dealing, and unhealthy nexus between politicians and public and administrators. Over the years, the media has been awash with cases of; causing loss to the government by negligence, moral turpitude, acceptance of gift, misappropriation of public funds, abnormal delay in settlement of compensation claims to displaced persons, acceptance of illegal gratification in recruitments, postings, transfers, secondments, and promotions, under-assessment of income tax for pecuniary gains, claiming of false travelling and house rent allowances, irregularity in granting of import and export license, etc.

The public sector in Nigeria is prone to many cases of unethical practices, where many cases are of sophisticated white collar crime, and senior private business leaders, politicians and senior government officials who engage in deals involving their own families. . Reports abound whereby big businessmen, dishonest merchants, contractors and suppliers bribe civil servants so as to get undue favours from them.

Ene, Arikpo, Jeffery, & Albert (2013) citing Achebe (1983), maintain that corruption in Nigeria spans from budgeting abuses, political patronage, public funds being doled out to political allies and personal friends; collection of mobilization fee or full payment without executing the contract, rewarding politicians who failed elections with ministerial appointment, re-assigning ministers, commissioners or council members who are involved in scandals to another ministry or department.

Agba, *et al.* (2013) after summarizing ethics in the Nigerian public service briefly into impartiality, meritocracy, honesty, transparency, loyalty, discipline, courtesy, etc observed that in the Nigeria public service, the acceptance of bribes and secret profits, and the use of spare time are regulated by statute. The fifth schedule of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that a public officer must not put himself in a position where his personal interest conflicts with his duties and responsibilities. A public officer must not ask for or accept any property or benefits of any kind for himself or any other person on account of anything done or omitted to be done by him in the discharge of his duties.

### **Empirical Review**

Casimir, Izueke and Nzekwe (2014) carried out a study on Public Sector and Corruption in Nigeria: An Ethical and Institutional Framework of Analysis. The paper examined the imperatives of good ethical conduct in the conduct of government business in Nigeria. It observed that unethical practices and the systemic abandonment of core African human values by the Nigerian public servants oil the wheel of public sector corruption in Nigeria. The paper recommended a more realistic African traditional approach to ethical restraint of public servants

from indulging in corrupt behavior by subjecting them to customary oath taking based upon the theistic values of fear of sin against mother earth, (a departure from the western style, which sees public service as no man's business). The paper stresses further that these core African values that emanate from theistic humanism should also permeate the various anti-corruption organizational frameworks in Nigeria to coordinate the national fight against corruption in the public sector.

Fatile, (2013) studied 'Ethics and Performance in The Nigerian Public Sector'. The paper discussed the challenges of promoting ethical behavior in Nigeria. The major causes of unethical behavior in the public sector were identified and the institutional mechanisms established by the government to curb these unethical behaviors were enumerated. It argued that these measures have failed to provide the service with the necessary ethical environment in the post-independence period due to deliberate frustration by civil servants and the government hence resulting in unethical conducts and unbridled corruption in the public bureaucracy. The paper therefore recommended among others, a comprehensive agenda on mass education to public servants and the general public on the extent and cost of corruption and unethical behavior as well as enacting, improving, and effective enforcement of legal instruments, code of conduct, and regulations that will promote ethics and performance of ethical values in the public sector. Actualization of the above according to the paper however would depend on the prevalence of good governance, transparency, and accountable leadership.

Adebayo, (2014) examined Ethical Issues in Public Service in Nigeria. The paper was concerned with unethical behaviours among public servants in the public service of Nigeria. Adopting the historical and literature review methods, the paper examined the historical antecedents of Civil Service in Nigeria; and revealed some unethical behaviours among the career civil servants which include; gratification for service rendered, deception, espionage, unlawful Conduct. The paper recommended that ethics should be made a compulsory subject cutting across all the various disciplines as a way to help revive, promote and sustain the culture of excellence.

Cheteni and Selemani (2017) studied ethical leadership in South Africa and Botswana. The study was conducted to investigate the extent of ethical leadership practices in African public utilities, given the relatively high corruption reported in such institutions, with consequences of seriously constrained development of national economies and significant hindrance to good governance. Their aim was to establish potential benefits from ethical leadership in public sector agencies by analysing ethical leadership characteristics in the public sector from Botswana and South Africa. They measured ethical leadership perceptions utilizing a combination of scales in an attempt to encompass the larger breadth of ethical leadership scales found in the literature in order to determine how employees perceived their managers in terms of being moral people and moral managers. A total of 108 respondents completed questionnaire. Results indicated that there were significant differences between the perceptions of managers' moral conduct. South African leaders were perceived as relatively weaker moral managers as compared to those in Botswana. The paper recommended that efforts should firstly be made to make it easier for subordinates to report ethical misconduct and that ethics training should be provided to employees, to indoctrinate ethical behaviour and to help improve understanding of the importance of ethical leadership and values. It also adds ethics should be used as a criterion in decisions involving hiring and promotion.

Agba, Ochimana and Abubakar (2013) analyzed public service ethics and the fight against corruption in Nigeria: The paper critically analysed contemporary administrative and philosophical issues – public service ethics and the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The paper argued that ethics and anti-corruption campaign have become an integral part of the Nigerian public service and governance but with little relevance, and large scale evidences of failure. In other words, the effectiveness of ethical codes of conduct among civil servants, politicians and the noise about anti-corruption campaign remain doubtful in the face of the rising spade of ineptitude to work, embezzlement of public funds, bazaar mentality, insecurity of lives and property, bribe-taking, and the likes. Inability to arrest these vices in Nigeria has circumvented sustainable development in the country. The paper therefore recommended that government and leaders at federal, state and local government levels should enthrone ethical codes through living by example and the various anti- corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) through capacity building and the employment of men of integrity to work in them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of consequentialism is adopted as the theoretical frame work for the study. Consequentialism holds that the consequences of one's conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. Thus, from a consequentialist standpoint, a morally right act (or omission from acting) is one that will produce a good outcome, or consequence. In an extreme form, the idea of consequentialism is commonly encapsulated in the saying, "the end justifies the means", meaning that if a goal is morally important enough, any method of achieving it is acceptable. Consequentialism is the view that morality is *all* about producing the right kinds of overall consequences. Here the phrase “overall consequences” of an action means everything the action brings about, including the action itself

### **CONCLUSION**

Ethics and values in the public service have been espoused. To behave ethically implies that public servants should behave in a manner that is consistent with what is generally considered to be right or moral. Public servants are morally enjoined to tell the truth, keep to their words, respect the people and their property, and always observe the provisions of the law in the discharge of their official duties.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is need to continuously organize seminars, meetings, and roundtables among public servants to discuss different aspects of morals and ethical values in public service.

1. It is high time Nigeria infuses ethics and values into politics and the code of ethics and values for public servants
2. Since ethics and values are not laws, it is high time the punitive character of the Code of ethics and values are reduced in order to emphasize education, without an over reliance on punishment; To the extent that ethical conduct is intended to protect primarily the public service, not the individual civil servant, a sound human resources policy should emphasize professionalism, qualification, and retraining programmes which should include ethical notions and principles.



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