Institutional Rehabilitation of the Nigerian Public Service in Achieving National Development

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of the public service is central to the achievement of national development, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. This paper examines the need for institutional rehabilitation of the Nigerian public service in achieving sustainable development outcomes in the country. Within the framework of Weber's Bureaucratic theory and the New Public Management (NPM) theory, the paper adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach, relying on secondary data source. The paper reveals that while Nigeria's public service has the potentials to drive national development, its effectiveness is constrained by systemic challenges such as bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, weak institutional frameworks, weak accountability mechanisms, and inadequate capacity. The paper concludes that the effectiveness of any state is largely determined by the capacity, integrity and responsiveness of its public institutions. Where the public service is characterized by professionalism, accountability and efficiency, it becomes powerful instrument for policy implementation, service delivery and socio-economic transformation. The suggested policy recommendations include; institutionalization of merit-based recruitment and promotion systems anchored on competence, transparency, and equal opportunity; sustained investment in capacity building and human capital development; an expanded digital public infrastructure that would ensure interoperability across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs); redesigning of performance management systems to link individual and institutional outputs with national development goals; and strengthening accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms to reinforce the roles of oversight institutions among others.

Keywords: Public Service, National Development, Reforms, Institutional Rehabilitation

INTRODUCTION

The functionality of governments globally depends to a large extent on the efficient performance of the public service due to the pivotal position the service occupy in the onerous task of implementing governmental programme and activities. The public service translates the broad political intentions, policy goals and programmes of government into concrete and impactful services that are beneficial to the lives of citizens (Asaju & Yakubu, 2024). Governmental policies are developed to achieve specific goals or objectives such as promoting economic growth, poverty reduction, environmental protection or improving public health. These policies are often implemented by the public service as it is the engine room for a functional government and the backbone of any thriving nation. An efficient and motivated public service is critical for the effective governance, production and distribution of public goods as well as the formulation and implementation of economic policies and the management of public expenditure.

Government across the globe are continuously focused on ensuring that their public service are equipped with the right skills, initiatives, ethos and accountability mechanisms to deliver high quality public services that will bring about economic growth and national development (Asaju & Ayeni, 2021; Idanmuze, 2025). Without a professionally competent public service, the responsibility of converting governmental policies and programmes into tangible results that can improve the lives of citizens and stimulate national development cannot be achieved. Although the Nigerian public service in the immediate post-independence era played a central role in national developmental goal by administering public policies, managing resources and ensuring the stability of governance, it is however plagued with several challenges. The public service has long struggled with the issue of inefficiency, delays in service delivery, multi-layered corruption structures, bribery, extortion and political patronage (The Guardian, 2024). These challenges according to the Civil Service News (2024) stem from the systemic pathologies such as poor remuneration, lack of meritocracy in appointments and promotions, career stagnation and inadequate succession planning which undermined the effectiveness and by extension, the government's ability to achieve its developmental objectives.

Despite the series of reforms that successive government in Nigeria has introduced over the years, the Nigerian public service has regrettably not performed up to conceived expectation. While the service remains populated by skilled workers and pockets of excellence, its overall performance are hampered by structural weakness, bureaucratic red tape, poor work culture, inefficiency and multi-layered corruption (Civil Service News, 2024). Due to the increased role and intervention of the state in virtually all aspects of development in modern state, the role of the public service in the quest to achieve national development in both developed and developing countries cannot be downplayed (Asaju & Yakubu, 2024). In order to make the public service functional and operational, the service has to be constantly overhauled, reformed, reshaped, reoriented and rehabilitated. It is against the foregoing that this paper seeks to examine the dysfunctionality in the Nigerian public service, the reform efforts of successive administrations, the role of the public service in national development, and the urgent need for institutional rehabilitation. In order to achieve the stated objectives, the paper is divided into sections. The first section is the introduction which gives a preview of the study, conceptualization of key terms adopted in the study was subsequently carried out, followed by the theoretical framework of the study. Thereafter, a review of areas of dysfunction in the Nigerian public service was done, followed by a historical overview of reforms carried out in the public service by successive governments in Nigeria since independence and the potentials of reform efforts in the public service. Also examined was the role of the public service in the achievement of national development. This was followed by the conclusion and suggested recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Public Service

The public service is a body or department in the executive arm of government with the responsibility of assisting in the planning and implementation of government policies. It is not profit-oriented but an institution established to deliver essential services to the people (Arowolo, 2021). The public service is described as the body of men and women in a civil capacity and non-political career basis by the national and subnational governments primarily to render and faithfully implement and give effect to their decisions. The public service is the engine hub of governance and it is the chief instrument for implementing the will of the state as expressed through public policy (Shimawua, 2020). The service is indispensible to the functioning of the modern state.

The public service in the Nigerian context embraces the civil service machinery of the three tiers of government (Federal, state and local governments), the national assembly service, the judiciary, public officers in the military, police and paramilitary services, employees of parastatals, educational and health institutions, staff and management of statutory corporations and government owned companies among others. From the foregoing, it could be said that the public service and the civil service are clearly different in concept. The public service is broader in scope and it encompasses the civil service together with the armed forces, the judiciary, the police, government institutions, parastatals, government owned companies and statutory agencies. The public service is the arm of government whose primary responsibility and duty is the implementation of government policies in conformity with constituted rules and procedures. According to Shimawua and Iorhemen (2018), the public service is the machinery used by the state to administer and supervise all aspects of the society. The state of a society is to a large extent determined by the public service and it remains the only feasible instruments for policy formulation, implementation and advice (Ifeyinwa, Olufunmi & Feyisara, 2024). It is the machinery through which the government implements its policies and programmes.

National Development

National development refers to the overall progress of a country to improve the social and economic well-being of its citizens. Todaro and Smith (2015) describes development as a multidimensional process involving improvements in living standards, reduction in inequality, and expansion of human capabilities. Earlier, Seers (1969) argued that development must address poverty, unemployment, and inequality to be meaningful. Achieving development is a complex challenge that depends on many intertwined factors like economic growth, human capital development and political institutions. For a country to develop, it needs to invest in its human and physical capital, that is, improving access to healthcare and education, building infrastructure like roads and railways, and promoting new technologies and skills training.

National development can be seen as the process through which a nation transforms itselt from a state of relative underdevelopment to one where citizens enjoy better living conditions, greater opportunities, and improved well-being. It involves building a society where individuals can access good education, quality healthcare, decent jobs, and live in a safe and just environment (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2022). Economically, national development involves growth in production, industrialization, improved infrastructure, and efficient use of resources. It also emphasizes equitable distribution of wealth, reduction of unemployment, and poverty alleviation (Olagunju, 2021). Socially, national development focuses on improving human welfare. This includes raising literacy levels, reducing disease and mortality rates, promoting gender equality and ensuring access to basic services such as clean water and housing (OECD, 2021). The World Bank (2023) highlights that countries that invest in human capital such as education, health, and skills, tend to achieve more sustainable and inclusive development outcomes.

Politically, national development entails the establishment of stable, transparent, and accountable governance systems. It requires the rule of law, protection of human rights, active citizen participation, and effective public institutions. Acamolu and Robinson (2022) emphasize that inclusive and accountable institutions are fundamental drivers of long-term national development. Technologically and institutionally, national development involves innovation, modernization, and the strengthening of systems that support progress. This includes adopting new technologies, improving administrative capacity, and building institutions that can sustain growth and development over time (UNDP, 2022).

National development in contemporary times is a holistic concept that combines economic growth, social progress, political stability, institutional strength, and environmental sustainability. It is not merely about how wealthy a country is, but about how well its people live, how fairly resources are distributed, and how resilient the country is in the face of emerging global challenges. According to Todaro and Smith (2015), true development requires structural transformation. It is a fundamental goal of every sovereign state, reflecting improvements in economic performance, social welfare, and political stability.

Institutional Rehabilitation

Institutional rehabilitation refers to a deliberate, systematic process of restoring, restructuring, and strengthening public institutions to improve their capacity, integrity, effectiveness, and responsiveness to governance demands. It goes beyond mere reform to include rebuilding institutional norms, values, systems, and performance standards that may have deteriorated over time (Olaopa, 2022; World Bank, 2023). In the Nigerian public service, institutional rehabilitation is particularly significant because the public service functions as the central administrative machinery through which government policies are formulated and implemented. However, decades of structural inefficiencies, politicization, weak accountability mechanisms, and capacity deficits have eroded its effectiveness. Thus, institutional rehabilitation in this context implies a comprehensive transformation aimed at repositioning the public service as a competent, professional, and citizen-oriented institution capable of driving effective governance (Bureau of Public Service Reform (BPSR), 2021).

Institutional rehabilitation can be understood from several interrelated dimensions which include structural, functional, human resource, normative or cultural, accountability and governance dimensions. The structural dimension involve reorganizing ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) to eliminate redundancy, clarify mandates, and enhance coordination (Ogunrotifa, 2021). Structural rehabilitation ensures that institutions are

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properly aligned with governance objectives and are not burdened by overlapping functions. The functional dimension focuses on improving the operational capacity of public institutions. It includes strengthening administrative processes, adopting modern management techniques, and enhancing service delivery mechanisms. The introduction of digital governance tools and performance management systems in Nigeria illustrates efforts to improve institutional functionality and responsiveness (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2024). Functional rehabilitation ensures that institutions not only exist but also perform effectively.

The human resource dimension emphasizes the development of skilled, motivated, and ethical personnel within the public service. It involves merit-based recruitment, continuous training, and performance-based evaluation systems. It also includes addressing issues such as poor remuneration and low morale, which have historically affected productivity in the Nigerian public service (PSIN, 2023). Without competent personnel, institutional reforms are not likely to yield meaningful results. The normative or cultural dimension deals with values, ethics, and organizational culture. It requires a shift from entrenched practices such as corruption, patronage, and inefficiency toward professionalism, accountability, and service orientation. This cultural transformation is critical in Nigeria, where institutional weaknesses are often reinforced by informal norms and practices (Transparency International, 2024). Rebuilding trust in public institutions depends largely on this ethical reorientation.

Closely related is the accountability dimension, which involves strengthening mechanisms for transparency, oversight, and control. It entails reinforcing both internal and external accountability systems, including audit mechanisms, legislative oversight, and anti-corruption agencies. Recent reforms such as the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS) are examples of efforts to institutionalize financial discipline and reduce corruption in Nigeria's public service (Adebayo, 2022). In relation to effective governance, institutional rehabilitation of the Nigerian public service is indispensable. Effective governance depends on the ability of public institutions to deliver services efficiently, enforce laws, manage resources responsibly, and respond to citizens' needs. A rehabilitated public service enhances policy implementation, reduces corruption, improves public trust, and ultimately contributes to socio-economic development (BPSR, 2021; World Bank, 2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical underpinning of this paper is anchored primarily on Weber's Bureaucratic Theory and New Public Management (NPM) Theory, as they provide complementary perspectives on understanding the operations, effectiveness, and developmental impact of the public service in Nigeria. Weber's Bureaucratic Theory posits that a rational and structured administrative system, governed by formal rules, hierarchical authority, and specialization of labor, is essential for organizational efficiency and societal stability (Weber, 2022). In the context of the Nigerian public service, the bureaucratic model highlights the importance of institutional structures, standardized procedures, and merit-based recruitment as critical tools for ensuring effective policy implementation and delivery of public goods and services. Scholars have argued that the Nigerian public service's dysfunctions often stem from deviations from these bureaucratic principles, such as corruption, nepotism, and political interference, which undermine national development objectives (Adeyemi & Oke, 2023). Thus, Weber's theory provides a foundational lens through which the institutional rehabilitation of the Nigerian public service in achieving national development can be understood.

The New Public Management (NPM) Theory emphasizes efficiency, accountability, performance measurement, and customer-oriented service delivery in public administration (Hood, 2021). NPM challenges traditional bureaucratic rigidity by advocating for managerial autonomy, results-oriented practices, and public sector innovation. In Nigeria, NPM principles have informed recent public service reforms aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks, and promoting service quality (Okeke, 2022). The integration of NPM into public administration underscores the need for a balance between bureaucratic stability and adaptive management practices to achieve sustainable national development. By integrating Weberian bureaucracy with NPM principles, this study adopts a hybrid theoretical lens that captures both structural stability and performance-driven reform in the public service. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how institutional arrangements, governance practices, and reform initiatives collectively influence the public service's capacity to support sustainable national development.

The Dysfunctionalities in the Nigerian Public Service

The strategic relevance of the public service in policy formulation and implementation cannot be over emphasized. In Nigeria, especially in the immediate post–independent era, the public service assumed the pivotal role as the vehicle for national development. Studies have shown that the Nigerian public service was able to provide quality services to the citizens immediately after the post-independence years particularly in the period between 1960 - 1970. During this period, the public service was regarded as one of the best in the commonwealth, up till the mid-1980s (Ogochukwu & Nnamani, 2015). However, over the years, there has been increasing evidences pointing to the deterioration of the public service performance in Nigeria, as the service has become overly bureaucratic, with complex and time-consuming processes that hinder efficiency and responsiveness.

One of the most significant manifestations of dysfunctionality in the Nigerian public service is bureaucratic inefficiency. Public institutions are often characterized by excessive red tape, slow decision-making processes, and procedural bottlenecks. These inefficiencies delay service delivery and discourage both local and foreign investment. According to Adegoke (2022), administrative delays and rigid bureaucratic structures have contributed to declining public confidence in government institutions. Similarly, the World Bank (2023) notes that inefficiency in public administration remains a major obstacle to effective governance in Nigeria. Closely related to inefficiency is the issue of corruption, which is widely regarded as a systemic problem within the Nigerian public service. Corruption manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and contract inflation. Despite the existence of anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), corrupt practices remain pervasive. Transparency International (2024) ranks Nigeria among countries struggling significantly with public sector corruption, highlighting the weak enforcement of accountability mechanisms. This persistent corruption erodes public trust and diverts resources meant for development.

Another critical dimension of dysfunctionality is political interference and lack of autonomy. Ideally, the public service should operate as a neutral and professional body; however, in Nigeria, it is often subject to political manipulation. Frequent changes in leadership following political transitions disrupt policy continuity and institutional stability. As noted by Ogunrotifa (2021), political patronage and favoritism in appointments undermine meritocracy and weaken institutional performance. This politicization reduces the professionalism and independence of civil servants, making them more loyal to political actors than to public interest. The problem of poor human resource management also contributes significantly to dysfunctionality. Recruitment processes are often influenced by nepotism and patronage rather than competence. In addition, inadequate training, poor remuneration, and limited career development opportunities demotivate workers and reduce productivity. A report by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023) indicates that low employee morale and skill gaps are major factors affecting public sector performance in Nigeria. Without a well-trained and motivated workforce, effective service delivery remains unattainable.

Furthermore, weak accountability and transparency mechanisms have exacerbated dysfunctionality in the public service. Oversight institutions are either ineffective or compromised, allowing misconduct to go unpunished. Internal control systems are often weak, and performance evaluation frameworks are poorly implemented. As Ezeani (2022) argues, the absence of strict accountability measures encourages impunity and inefficiency within public institutions. Another major issue is the inadequate use of technology and innovation. While many countries have embraced digital governance to improve efficiency and transparency, Nigeria's public service has been slow in adopting modern technologies. This digital lag contributes to inefficiencies, data mismanagement, and limited access to public services. According to the United Nations E-Government Survey (2022), Nigeria still lags behind in e-governance development compared to other emerging economies.

Additionally, policy inconsistency and poor implementation further illustrate the dysfunctionality of the Nigerian public service. Policies are often well-formulated but poorly executed due to lack of coordination, insufficient funding, and weak institutional capacity. Frequent policy reversals also create uncertainty and hinder long-term planning. As observed by Igbuzor (2021), the gap between policy formulation and implementation remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria's governance framework. The consequences of these dysfunctions are far-reaching. They include poor service delivery, underdevelopment, increased poverty, and erosion of public trust in government institutions. Citizens often resort to alternative means to access basic services, further weakening the legitimacy of the state. Dysfunctionality in the Nigerian public service is a multifaceted problem rooted in corruption, inefficiency, political interference, weak accountability, and inadequate human resource management. Addressing these challenges requires institutional rehabilitation which includes strengthening institutions, promoting merit-based recruitment, enhancing transparency, and embracing digital governance. Without such comprehensive reforms, the public service will continue to fall short of its critical role in national development.

Public Service Reform Efforts by Successive Administrations in Nigeria

Public service reform in Nigeria has remained a central governance priority, reflecting persistent efforts by successive administrations to improve efficiency, accountability, and service delivery. These reforms have evolved in response to changing political, economic, and institutional realities, yet they continue to face implementation challenges that limit their overall impact. In the post-independence period, early reform efforts were primarily concerned with indigenization and administrative reorganization. However, the most notable early reform was the Udoji Commission of 1974, which introduced modern management techniques such as Management by Objectives (MBO), unified grading systems, and performance evaluation frameworks. Although the reform aimed to enhance efficiency, it became more associated with wage increases than with productivity gains, thereby limiting its transformative impact (Olaopa, 2014).

The military era, particularly under General Ibrahim Babangida, witnessed the 1988 Civil Service Reform, which fundamentally altered the structure of the public service. This reform sought to professionalize the service and align it with policy objectives by making top bureaucrats politically responsive. However, by politicizing the civil service and weakening its neutrality, the reform undermined institutional stability and professionalism (Adamolekun, 2002; Olaopa, 2018). Subsequent revisions in the 1990s attempted to restore some level of administrative balance, but systemic inefficiencies persisted.

With the return to democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria entered a new phase of reform characterized by comprehensive institutional restructuring. The Obasanjo administration (1999–2007) implemented wide-ranging reforms under the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Key initiatives included the monetization policy, civil service downsizing, pension reform (Pension Reform Act 2004), and the establishment of anti-corruption institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC). Additionally, the introduction of the Due Process mechanism in public procurement significantly improved transparency in government contracting (World Bank, 2021; Bureau of Public Service Reforms [BPSR], 2022).

The Yar'Adua and Jonathan administrations (2007–2015) continued these reforms with a focus on institutional consolidation and modernization. Initiatives such as Vision 20:2020, the Seven-Point Agenda, and public financial management reforms were introduced to strengthen governance systems. During this period, digital reforms gained prominence, including the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), and early implementation of the Treasury Single Account (TSA). These reforms were aimed at reducing corruption, eliminating ghost workers, and improving fiscal discipline (BPSR, 2022; IMF, 2023).

Under the Buhari administration (2015–2023), public service reform efforts intensified, particularly in the areas of anti-corruption and digital governance. The full implementation of the TSA, expansion of IPPIS, and strengthening of GIFMIS significantly improved financial transparency and accountability. The administration also introduced the Whistleblower Policy and the Open Treasury Portal, which enhanced citizen participation and oversight. Furthermore, the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) emphasized public sector efficiency as a driver of economic recovery (IMF, 2023; World Bank, 2022). Despite these achievements, resistance from public servants and capacity constraints slowed reform progress in some sectors.

The current Tinubu administration (from 2023) has signaled a renewed commitment to public service reform, particularly through digital transformation, performance management, and revenue optimization. Early initiatives focus on restructuring key government agencies, improving tax administration, and enhancing service delivery through technology-driven governance systems. There is also increasing emphasis on aligning public service performance with national development goals, although these reforms are still unfolding (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2024).

Potentials of Public Service Reform Efforts in Nigeria

The potential of public service reforms in Nigeria is significant and multifaceted. Reforms can greatly enhance efficiency and productivity within the public sector by streamlining processes, reducing bureaucratic bottlenecks, and promoting result-oriented management practices. This is particularly important in critical sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure (World Bank, 2022). Public service reforms promote transparency and accountability. Digital financial management systems such as TSA and GIFMIS reduce opportunities for corruption by ensuring that government revenues and expenditures are properly tracked. This has the potentials of strengthening public financial management and fosters trust in government institutions (IMF, 2023).

Reforms can improve service delivery and citizen satisfaction. By adopting e-governance and digital platforms, the government can provide faster, more accessible, and user-friendly services. This not only enhances public trust but also encourages civic engagement and participation in governance processes (AfDB, 2024). Public service reforms contribute to economic growth and development. An efficient and transparent public sector creates a conducive environment for investment, improves regulatory quality, and supports private sector development. This, in turn, drives job creation and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2021).

Additionally, reforms have the potential to professionalize the civil service by promoting merit-based recruitment, continuous training, and performance evaluation. This ensures that public servants are competent, motivated, and capable of implementing government policies effectively. However, the realization of these potentials depends on addressing persistent challenges such as political interference, weak institutional capacity, inadequate funding, and resistance to change. Sustainable institutional rehabilitation requires strong political will, consistent policy implementation, stakeholder engagement, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. It can streamline processes and reduce bureaucratic red tape, leading to faster and more efficient service delivery. A functional, transparent and efficient public service could unlock Nigeria's enormous potentials, rebuild public trust and provide the infrastructure for sustainable national development.

The Role of the Nigerian Public Service in the Achievement of National Development

The public service plays a central role in the pursuit of national development in Nigeria. As the machinery through which government policies are formulated and implemented, the Nigerian public service is pivotal in translating developmental goals into tangible outcomes. National development, which encompasses economic growth, social progress, political stability, and improved living standards, is largely dependent on the effectiveness, efficiency, and integrity of the public service. One of the primary roles of the Nigerian public service is policy formulation and implementation. Public servants provide technical expertise, data, and advisory support necessary for crafting policies that address national challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and infrastructural deficits. Ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) are responsible for translating political decisions into actionable programmes and projects. Effective policy implementation ensures that development plans such as Nigeria's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) (2021–2025) achieve their intended outcomes (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2021). However, challenges such as bureaucratic bottlenecks, corruption, and weak institutional capacity often hinder effective implementation (Olaopa, 2022). Strengthening institutional frameworks and improving accountability mechanisms remain crucial for enhancing this role.

The Nigerian public service is responsible for the provision of essential public goods and services, including education, healthcare, security, transportation, and water supply. These services are fundamental to improving citizens' quality of life and fostering human development. For instance, public sector interventions in health and education significantly contribute to human capital development, which is a key driver of economic growth (World Bank, 2023). Efficient service delivery promotes inclusiveness and reduces inequality, thereby supporting sustainable development goals (SDGs). Nonetheless, service delivery in Nigeria is often constrained by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and weak governance systems (UNDP, 2022).

Another critical role of the Nigerian public service is economic management and regulation. Through institutions such as the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Ministry of Finance, and regulatory agencies, the public service ensures macroeconomic stability, fiscal discipline, and a conducive business environment. These functions include budgeting, taxation, public expenditure management, and regulation of industries. Effective economic management fosters investment, job creation, and economic diversification. Recent reforms aimed at improving the ease of doing business and digitalizing government processes highlight the public service's role in facilitating economic development (World Bank, 2023). The public service is instrumental in promoting transparency, accountability, and the rule of law, which are key pillars of good governance. Institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) are part of the broader public service framework that ensures accountability in public administration.

Good governance enhances public trust and encourages citizen participation in development processes. However, persistent issues of corruption and lack of transparency continue to undermine governance in Nigeria (Transparency International, 2023). Strengthening anti-corruption institutions and adopting digital governance tools can improve accountability. The public service contributes significantly to human capital development through policies and programmes in education, health, and social welfare. Investments in these sectors would enhance workforce productivity and national competitiveness. Programmes such as the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme and the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) are examples of public service initiatives aimed at improving human development outcomes. Despite these efforts, Nigeria continues to face challenges such as inadequate educational infrastructure and healthcare delivery gaps (UNESCO, 2022). Addressing these challenges is essential for maximizing the developmental impact of the public service.

Infrastructure development is another area where the Nigerian public service plays a vital role. Government agencies are responsible for planning, financing, and executing infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, power supply, and housing. These projects are essential for economic growth and national integration. Recent public-private partnerships (PPPs) have been adopted to bridge infrastructure gaps, demonstrating the evolving role of the public service in development (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2023). However, issues such as project delays, cost overruns, and mismanagement often limit effectiveness. The Nigerian public service also promotes national integration and political stability by ensuring equitable distribution of resources and representation across diverse ethnic and regional groups. The Federal character principles in recruitment and resource allocation aim to foster unity and inclusiveness.

Furthermore, political stability is a prerequisite for development, and the public service plays a mediating role in managing conflicts and implementing government policies that promote peace and cohesion (Olaopa, 2022). Despite its critical roles, the Nigerian public service faces several challenges that hinder its contribution to national development. These include corruption, inefficiency, political interference, inadequate funding, and lack of capacity. Additionally, resistance to change and slow adoption of digital technologies limit modernization efforts. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive public service reforms and institutional rehabilitation which would include capacity building, performance management systems, and the adoption of e-governance initiatives among others.

CONCLUSION

Institutional rehabilitation of the Nigerian public service remains a central pillar in the pursuit of sustainable national development. The effectiveness of any state is largely determined by the capacity, integrity and responsiveness of its public institutions. Where the public service is characterized by professionalism, accountability and efficiency, it becomes powerful instrument for policy implementation, service delivery and socio-economic transformation. Conversely, a weak and politicized bureaucracy undermines development efforts, erodes public trust, and perpetuates inefficiency. This study underscores that meaningful institutional rehabilitation of the Nigerian public service must embrace a comprehensive institutional approach. It should prioritize merit-based recruitment, continuous capacity building, digital transformation, performance management systems, and strong accountability mechanisms. Political will and leadership commitment are indispensible in driving and sustaining these rehabilitation especially in the Nigerian public service where entrenched interests and systemic challenges often impede progress. Institutional rehabilitation would provide a pragmatic pathway for transforming the public service into a responsive, efficient, and development-oriented institution capable of driving national progress.

SUGGESTED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Governments should institutionalize merit-based recruitment and promotion systems anchored on competence, transparency, and equal opportunity. This involves strengthening independent civil service commissions, deploying standardized testing and assessment frameworks, and minimizing political interference in personnel decisions.
ii. Sustained investment in capacity building and human capital development. Regular training, leadership development programmes, and exposure to global best practices should be prioritized to equip public servants with the technical and managerial skills required. This should be complemented by the integration of digital literacy to support e-governance initiatives.
iii. There should be an expanded digital public infrastructure that would ensure interoperability across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs) in the Nigerian public service. Embracing digital transformation as a core strategy for improving service delivery by the adoption of e-governance platforms can reduce bureaucratic bottlenecks, enhance transparency, and limit opportunities for corruption.
iv. Strengthening accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms is essential. This includes reinforcing the roles of oversight institutions, such as anti-corruption agencies and audit bodies, while also promoting open government practices like public expenditure tracking and citizen feedback systems. Whistleblower protection policies should be effectively implemented to encourage the reporting of misconduct.
v. Performance management systems should be redesigned to link individual and institutional outputs with national development goals. Clear key performance indicators (KPIs), regular appraisal systems, and performance-based incentives can motivate productivity and align public service delivery with developmental priorities.
vi. Political will and leadership commitment must underpin all institutional rehabilitation efforts. The initiatives should be insulated from frequent policy reversals by embedding them in legislation and long-term national development plans. Inclusive stakeholder engagement which includes the civil society, the private sector, and development partners, will also enhance legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability of reforms.

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