



## **Relative interface between economic recovery and administrative reform in the post COVID-19 Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Economy was said to be the super-structure of every society upon which other structures such as political and administrative derives their respective prowess and viability. However, the viability of the economy also depend to a large extent upon the strength and potency of both the political and administrative structures. Within this parlance, this paper argued that effective Public Administration is a key component in achieving the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan in the post Covid-19 Nigerian state. An efficient, responsive, transparent and accountable Public Administration is a central part of democratic governance; it is also the basic means through which government should strategized to achieve the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan in the country. Especially in the aftermath of covid-19 crisis and the colossal damage inflicted on the country's economic by the chaos, violence and looting that accompanied the #ENDSARS# social movement. Therefore, the devastated consequences on private sectors require the public administration to play a major role in the delivery of services and the provision of much needed economic infrastructure. Relying heavily on secondary data through qualitative content analysis this paper therefore, posit that an efficient, responsive, transparent and accountable public administration is not only of paramount importance for the proper functioning of a nation; it is also the basic means through which government strategies to achieve the Economic Recovery and Growth can be implemented.*

**Keywords:** Public Administration, Administrative Reform, Economic Recovery, Nigeria

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Successive Nigerian governments have initiated different economic renewal or recovery strategies over the past decades aimed at improving or reforming the economy. For instance, in 2007 the 7-point Plan and subsequently the Vision 20-20-20 were introduced by the Umar Musa Yar'Ádua administration. The National Industrial Revolution Plan and the Nigeria Integrated Infrastructure Master Plan were

launched by the Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2014. Similarly, another economic initiative, called the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP), was initiated by the Muhammadu Buhari administration. The ERGP was launched shortly after the economic recession in Nigeria slumped in the second half of 2016 (Mbum & Ederewhevbe, 2019).



The Nigerian government's desire to bring the nation out of recession and put it on the road of sustainable growth. However, there is this premonition that the conditions that thwarted many previous policies by different governments do not seem to be clearly defined and solutions to resolve them have been discovered (Kehinde, 2019). Despite the comprehensiveness of the ERGP text, little or no attention is paid to administrative and structural encumbrances that are able to derail any prospect of success from the programme (Shobande, 2019).

The above explains why several government policies in Nigeria often fell short of expectations as most policymakers consider the programs as a sequential process rather than conceive them as a complex multidimensional problem. Olaopa (2013 ) identified this predicament as a "paradox of reform dynamism", which, in his opinion, is a "situation in which the public sector is locked into the necessity of reform initiatives without the appropriate enthusiasm to truly understand, adapt, and execute the intended reform in the pursuit of good governance and better service delivery" so in order to achieve the objectives of the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) there is therefore a need to deepen the pursuit of cost efficiency , innovation and delivery of services, as well as to provide an enabling climate for the private sector, among other things, to take over the role of service provision, employment and wealth creations.

This requires the restructuring of the administrative machinery in the country to make it efficient, responsive, transparent and accountable in the sense that the COVID-19 crisis has shown that the Nigerian political-administrative structure currently in place has easily been outpaced by an unexpected threat. The Covid-19 outbreak has

highlighted that turbulence might be a normal and enduring unrecognized feature of Public Administration within the contemporary global configuration. The time has therefore come for the Nigerian state to establish an efficient governance structure that can reflect the post-COVID-19 era context in which public administration will certainly face sporadic turbulence and slipping crises in the form of market failure and economic recession threats which, if they are to be manage and control affectively new administrative capabilities must be incorporated into the ERGP for the Nigerian governments to anticipate and manage these crises competently.

## **2. Conceptual Clarification**

### **2.1 The Concept of Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP)**

The ERGP is an economic plan initiated by the current Buhari administration and incorporates the projected annual budgets from 2017 to 2020. It is an expenditure framework and growth strategy for the medium term. After recognizing the socio-economic index issue in virtually all areas of Nigerian national welfare, the medium-term development plan was launched in 2016The plan is supposed to pull the economy out of the recession and position it on a course or stage of sustainable development (Mbum, & Ederewhevbe, 2019).

The Economic Recovery and Growth Plan was also identified as a merging of the stimulus package, the 2017 Budget and the Medium Term Economic Framework, partly in response to commodity shocks. The program is divided into two aspects of recovery: response to commodity shocks and development: a strategic growth plan (Garuba, & Raheem, 2020).

The ERGP is special and distinct from the numerous governments' past plans. The Government have introduced four (4) years



of budget on the ERGP; 2017 is just like an expansion of 2016; it is more like a recalibration of real value changes. The ERGP is an overall strategy, so it will not be difficult to generate subsequent budgets such as the 2020 and 2021 budgets because there is a structure now. In terms of taxation and tariffs, business entities will now analyze the current system and prepare and make decisions based on what will happen. This is useful for planning for both the private and public sectors because they can now make almost reliable predictions of their companies (Ata-Agboni & Beluchi, 2019).

## **2.2 The Concept of Administrative Reform**

Public administration refers to the *aggregate machinery* (policies, rules, procedures, systems, organizational structures, personnel, etc.) funded by the state budget and in charge of the management and direction of the affairs of the executive government, and its interaction with other stakeholders in the state, society and external environment. It covers the *management* and implementation of the whole set of government activities dealing with the implementation of laws, regulations and decisions of the government and the management related to the provision of public services (Samokhvalov & Strelkov, 2020).

Public Administration Reform can be very comprehensive and include process changes in areas such as organisational structures, decentralization, personnel management, public finance, results-based management, regulatory reforms etc. It can also refer to targeted reforms such as the revision of the civil service statute (Melo & Mota, 2020).

## **3. Economic Recovery Programmes of Buhari's Administration In Nigeria**

The ERGP is a plan for economic growth and the amalgamation of the planned annual budgets for the period 2017 to 2020. It is a medium-term spending framework in this situation. In 2016, the medium-term development plan was launched after finding certain socio-economic index problems in virtually all areas of Nigerian national welfare. The plan is expected to pull the economy out of the recession and position it on a course and stage for sustainable development. The strategy has clearly defined priorities and set targets (Ata-Agboni & Beluchi, 2019). The ERGP is new and distinct from the past development plans of the various administrations that have been under democratic rule in Nigeria since 1999. The Nigerian government has introduced four (4) years of budget on the ERGP; 2017 is just like an expansion of 2016; it is more like a reconfiguration of real value changes.

The ERGP is an overall strategy, so it was not and will not be difficult to generate subsequent budgets such as 2018, 2019, and 2020 budgets because there is a structure now. In terms of taxation and tariffs, business companies will now analyze the current system and prepare and make decisions based on what will happen. In making predictions for their companies, this is good for both private and public sector planning.

According to the ERGP document (2017), this economic plan varies from other past development plans that previous administrations have had in many ways in Nigeria. First and foremost, oriented execution over the next four years is at the heart of the Plan's delivery strategy. There is a clear political resolve, dedication and will at the highest level of government, more than ever before. Although all departments and agencies of ministries will have



different positions in executing the programme, a delivery unit is being set up in the presidency to push the implementation of main ERGP objectives. The Ministry of Budget and National Planning will manage the execution of the plan and will build up its capacity for rigorous monitoring and assessment for this purpose, among other things (Ata-Agboni & Beluchi, 2019).

Second, the strategy outlines ambitious new policies such as raising oil production to 2.5mbpd by 2020, privatizing selected public companies / assets, and upgrading local refineries to reduce imports of petroleum products by 60% by 2018. Other programs include ventures for environmental conservation in the Niger Delta, showing the commitment of the Federal Government to place environmental protection at the forefront of its policies. Oil revenues will be used as part of this strategy to expand and diversify the economy, not just to support demand, as has been done in the past. The economy would run on numerous revenue streams, not just a single big source of oil revenue. Not only for its own sake, but for the benefits it will bring to Nigerian people, the Plan focuses on development (Garuba & Raheem, 2020).

This initiative also places emphasis on new industries such as the artistic and entertainment sectors. Third, the ERGP builds on current sectoral strategies and plans, such as the Blueprint for the National Industrial Revolution and the Master Plan for Integrated Infrastructure in Nigeria. The ERGP would reinforce the effective components of these previous strategies and plans rather than re-inventing the wheel, thus resolving the issues that have been found in their execution. Fourth, the ERGP is creative and imaginative in that, on the basis of strong collaborations, it signals a shifting relationship between the public and

private sectors. The Government will work closely with businesses in the implementation of the Plan to enhance their investment in the agricultural, electricity, manufacturing, solid minerals and services sectors and to support the private sector as a driver of national growth and development. Science and technology can also be used successfully to improve national competitiveness, growth and economic activity in all industries (Ata-Agboni & Beluchi, 2019).

Fifth, to create a better and stronger link between annual budgets and the ERGP, the current Buhari Administration has consolidated the budget and planning functions into one ministry. This has encouraged the planning process of the ERGP and will hasten its adoption as well. The macro structure underpinning the ERGP is also improved, ensuring that budgets are adequately matched with planning, thus facilitating successful implementation.

Finally, to ensure that the Federal and State Governments work for the same objectives, the ERGP allows for successful cooperation and communication between the States. States have an important role to play in the success of the ERGP, and a number of the measures promoted in this Plan have already been implemented by others (Garuba & Raheem, 2020).

### **3.1 Objectives and Targets of the ERGP**

The ERGP has a three-fold objective.

First, the objective of the ERGP is to restore prosperity, macroeconomic stability and generate economic diversification. The Plan aims to raise fiscal stimulus (through increased government spending), ensure monetary stability, improve trade balance and concentrate on key sectors that drive and allow growth [such as agriculture and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), manufacturing and services] in



achieving this objective. The policy also aims at achieving the above by using information technology as well.

Second, the ERGP aims to invest in Nigerian citizens by raising their living standards by providing economically downtrodden people with support, job creation, improving accessibility and affordability of quality healthcare across the country, and ensuring improved human resources (capital) by ensuring that they have access to quality basic education for all.

The ERGP's third objective is to substantially increase investment in basic infrastructure through comprehensive Public Private Partnership agreements, simplify and strengthen the legal and regulatory system for doing business in Nigeria, and encourage digital development by expanding broadband coverage (Garuba & Raheem, 2020).

The plan identified ten concrete goals over the plan duration in order to achieve and ensure the actualization of those interesting and robust targets. However, these targets can be divided into four (1) crude, (2) FOREX and taxation (3) agricultural and (4) unemployment target classes. GDP is projected to grow by 2.19 percent in 2017 due to the combined impact of these goals, averaging 4.62 percent annually between 2018 and 2019 before reaching 7 percent by 2020 (Kyarem & Ogwuche 2017).

The oil-related expectations include a 1.4mbpd to 2.5mbpd rise in oil production. Nigeria is also a net exporter of refined oil as well. Nigeria is also expected to achieve significant sales of properties, especially in the oil sector. In a similar vein, the FOREX-related objective stipulates a review of the FOREX market by direct government action through the CBN to achieve a sustainable exchange rate decided by the market. The

inflation estimate of 15.74 percent in 2017 to 12.42 percent in 2018 and to an unspecified single digit by 2020 should be handled by this and other means. The tax-related goal is also aimed at strengthening tax policy and execution in order to increase revenue to N350 billion per year. It is hoped that all this would be possible through an overall rise to 15 percent in the tax to GDP ratio. Finally, by 2020, unemployment is projected to decrease from 13 percent (Q3 2016) to 11.23 percent. This will be done mainly by agricultural investment to improve tomato paste self-sufficiency in 2017, rice in 2018 and wheat in 2020. (Kyarem & Ogwuche, 2017).

#### **4. Economic Recovery Programmes Objectives and The Need for Public Administration Reform**

The above objectives are highly meritorious, clear and robust enough to place Nigeria on the road to economic growth in the sense that the objectives can be considered as essential blueprint for human capital development and sustainable macro-economic stabilization hence there could be a great deal of transformation in Nigerian society if well implemented. There will be job opportunities for the youth, improved infrastructure, a healthier climate and an improved economy.

However, taking into cognizance the second and third objectives of ERGP there is the need to restructure the administrative machineries in the country, this is because Public Administration is one of the main vehicles through which the relationship between the state and civil society and the private sector is realized (Demmke, 2019). Therefore, for ERGP to effectively serve as a means towards increasing the standard of living of the economically-downtrodden through provision of social supports and improving the quality of service delivery





and to significantly increase investment in basic infrastructure through robust Public Private Partnership arrangements a well-performing public administration becomes an important precondition in fact it is even a necessity.

This is because several scholars have recognized the value of an effective and ethical administrative structure in developing and enforcing sound development policies and programs in order to ensure the progress of economic development, as well as the need to reform the public sector to resolve many unethical and wasteful bureaucratic dysfunctions and issues (Demmke, 2019).

Similarly, the policy initiatives outlined in recent literature on administrative reforms have broadened the conventional concerns of enhancing public organization management and organizational problems to a new emphasis on good governance for sustainable growth (Zarychta, Grillos & Andersson, 2020). These new measures are therefore pivotal if Nigeria is to achieve ERGP objectives. Policy measures are needed to emphasize and to promote professional efficiency and ethical values and norms; to better arrange the involvement of government in the market economy and restructure public and private institutions accordingly; as well as to reduce bureaucratic corruption, social inequalities, and political influence during the development and transition process.

Recent surveys find that citizens want state institutions that are efficient in the use of public resources, effective in delivering public goods, but also strong and capable of standing up to powerful global forces (Hintea, 2020). People want the state and its Public Administration to act as a social and economic promoter, capable of ensuring equitable distribution of opportunities,

sustainable management of resources and equitable access to opportunities. An established public administration has been, arguably, far more vital to economic development in historical fact than either free elections or parliaments.

To this end, the post covid-19 Nigeria require the Public Administration to play a major role in the delivery of services and the provision of much needed economic infrastructure. This should come not just in modernizing state institutions and reducing civil service costs. It should encompass fostering a dynamic partnership with the civil society and the private sector, to improve the quality of service delivery, enhance social responsibilities and ensure the broad participation of citizens in decision-making and feedback on public service performance.

The purpose of this section is to recommend a reform strategy which can serve as an important catalyst for the realization of the ERGP objectives in the post covid-19 Nigerian state. Therefore, by examining the policy and theoretical issues related to the nexus between administrative reform and economic development across the globe the paper comes up with three important reforms recommendation which appears to work out fine in other context. These important reform strategies involve having an outcome-oriented and open Civil Service, a strong fiscal institutions and Public Administration as Policy Broker.

#### **4.1 An Outcome-Oriented and Open Civil Service**

From the perspective of New Public Management an outcome-oriented and open Civil Service connote a hybrid administrative framework which combines the values and methods employed in traditional Public Administration with those of the New Public Management. Politicians



and public managers in in this arrangement have always been open to the private sector, which helps explain the success of 'New Public Management' approach in places like Switzerland and Canada (Hintea, 2020). Under this administrative framework rather than privatizing the public sector, these new methods complement more conventional Public Administration principles which include legality and the equality of treatment (Roberts, 2020). These works perfectly well in most countries that are having similar ecology with Nigeria and have been joined to more entrepreneurial principles, including cost control, efficiency, attention to the quality of services provided to the population, and evaluating the effectiveness of administrative acts (Trein & Maggetti, 2020).

Similarly, human resource management under this administrative framework combines private sector practices such as performance-based pay and the facilitated termination of employment with traditional safeguards that include guarantees under public law for such work relationships (Beagles, Schnell, & Gerard, 2019). Such a marriage of public and private elements is badly needed within the purview of the ERGP especially in realizing the third objective which aimed at significantly increasing investment in basic infrastructure through robust Public Private Partnership arrangements, simplify and improve the legal and regulatory framework for doing business in Nigeria and promote digital-led growth through the expansion of broad band coverage.

#### **4.2 Strong Fiscal Institutions**

Nigerian fiscal institutions needed some distinctive features to enable the country achieve all the three objectives of ERGP. The legislative bodies, whether at federal or state levels, should be granted autonomy to

operate not under the thumb of their executive councils. For instance, Switzerland in many years now, the federal constitution and the constitutions of the cantons have set hard budget constraints on spendthrift governments.

Switzerland's instruments for direct democracy popular referenda and initiatives also apply to legislation involving tax and expenditures. These elements build systems of checks and balances that have led, particularly in the last two decades, to sound public budgets with relatively low debt levels (Trein & Maggetti, 2020).

There is therefore the need in Nigeria for a strongly decentralized and federalist structure which can replicate the Swiss model, as this can enable effective competition between state government in the area of tax. For instance, in Switzerland with direct taxes as the main source of financing for the cantons and the municipalities. Regional governments (both Cantons and local Governments) have also implemented high-quality financial and management accounting systems; these governmental levels are the main providers of public services which are financed according to a 'user-pays' principle (Trein & Maggetti, 2020).

To this end, the existence of tax competition in Nigeria with a highly decentralized fiscal context in which state and local governments are fiscally extremely autonomous can effectively raises the specter of a 'race to the bottom' which would exacerbate the inequalities between financially strong and weak governments. This could go a long way in achieving the tax related target of ERGP which aims at improving tax policy and implementation to raise revenue to N350 billion annually.



#### **4.3 Public Administration as Policy Broker**

The Nigerian political-economic arrangement notably federalism and liberalism, need reshaping and remolding in the course of policy formulation and implementation. These arrangements should be characterized both by great heterogeneity (involvement and responsibility of private actors) and high fragmentation (extent and complexity of policy networks), which would allow for competition among states, local government, and, in some cases, between private and public organizations. Both heterogeneity and fragmentation could be achieved by the substantial autonomy of both state and local government in designing politico-administrative arrangements. Private actors also may be rule-makers and rule-takers under this politico-administrative arrangement.

For instance, in places like Canada one often finds professional organizations strongly influencing policy decisions or even issuing guidelines, norms, and standards which can become part of the policy design (Trein & Maggetti, 2020). Under this politico-administrative arrangement in the areas of implementation, significant elements of functions under exclusive legislative list or state tasks may be delegated, through various contractual instruments, to private actors. Thus, a non-trivial part of public service delivery should be provided by professional, non-profit (NGOs, foundations, associations, cooperatives), or even for-profit (companies) organizations.

Policy brokering and coordination should therefore play a crucial role in limiting certain negative outcomes of federalism in Nigeria. State autonomy is an efficient way of adapting policy designs to regional specificities, but it can lead to negative side effects such as the unequal treatment of

citizens or an uncoordinated implementation (Trein & Maggetti, 2020). However, inter-state associations could play an important role in countering this by coordination efforts during the implementation stage (e.g., in health and social security policies), or in limiting (but not entirely removing) the unequal treatments of citizens (Acar, 2020). Policy brokering on the part of Public Administration units can also help find solutions to conflicts which arise in the policy formulation or implementation phases (Keuffer, & Horber-Papazian, 2020). Their high 'reputational power' allows them to substantially influence policy formulation in acting as a policy broker or as a member of an advocacy coalition. Still, nowadays public administrations need to share their power with private actors paradoxically, it appears, by renouncing their previous role as the dominant actor.

#### **5. Conclusion**

All said and done, the priorities of the ERGP are infrastructures, food security, good governance, employment, human development and industrialization are unassailable. The plan also makes it clear that a sound macroeconomic environment and efficient public sector are critical to long-term recovery and growth in Nigeria. It is therefore important for Nigeria to overhaul her administrative systems to make the system more competitive and democratic. The importance of a well-performing public administration in achieving economic and social development cannot be over-emphasize in the sense that an efficient, accountable, effective and transparent Public Administration, at both the federal and state levels, has a key role to play in the implementation macro-economic objectives in Nigeria.

In that context, for ERGP to become viable there is an inherent need to strengthen the





public sector administrative and managerial capacity in the country especially after the harsh repercussion of both covid-19 pandemic and the mob-action that accompanied the #ENSARS# social movement which has a strong tendency to halt the economic progress of the country. The paper has highlighted some key reform strategies which if properly infused into the Nigerian political-administrative arrangement can accelerate the achievement of the ERGP.

However, this must be done putting into consideration the cultural context of Nigeria, as perspective of public administrative systems which were developed along western prototypes may not work well in the country, so the above reform strategies need to be domesticated.

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