

Towards Developing a Sound Public Enterprise Management That Suits Global Best Practices in Nigeria

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Abstract: There exists no state in the contemporary world where government to an extent does not associate with entrepreneurial ventures by manner of a regulator, enabler or as a participator. Government assumes socio-economic and entrepreneurial role by establishing and investing in public enterprises. This paper examined the Nigerian public enterprises with a view to developing a sound enterprise management that suits global best practices in Nigeria. The methodology adopted in the study was the descriptive analysis of qualitative data from secondary sources such as articles from reputable journals, conference papers, official publications, etc. The New Public Management theory was utilized as the theoretical framework to explain the dynamism of Nigerian Public Enterprise Management. There is no gainsaying the fact that the Nigerian enterprise management have long been criticized for their inefficiency, politicization, corruption and absence of productivity attributable to failure of their managers to identify and appropriately implement an enterprise management formula that meets the tripartite purpose required for productivity, conformity to universal best practices as well as concomitancy with the peculiarity of the Nigerian environment enmeshed in abject poverty, insurgency/insecurity, threats of secession, corruption, favoritism, nepotism ethnic conflicts, etc. The study identified Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) as a veritable formula for the attainment of an improved and sustainable Nigerian economy through an efficient, result-oriented enterprise management. If appropriately tailored and administered (taking into cognizance the complex heterogeneous Nigeria environment) Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) serves as a sound global practice of best-fit to reposition Public Enterprises in Nigeria.

Key words: Global Best Practice • Management • Public Enterprise • Public-private-partnership

INTRODUCTION

Globally, public enterprises are established to act as the pivot to propel economic and social development in areas of need. The implication here is that the government assumes an entrepreneurial role by investing her resources in business ventures for social and economic reasons [1]. However, public enterprise in Nigeria over the years has been a spectacle for debate by social and economic critics as expectations for efficient management of Nigerian public enterprises have been usually dashed. The reasons are comprehensible especially judging from the perspective that the nation's public enterprises basically have no stimulus to efficiency [2]. According to Barnabas [3], Nigerian public enterprises have long been criticized for their inefficiency, politicization, corruption and absence of productivity. This is because,

past and current political leaders have used these enterprises to favor their supporters through excessive employment, regionally targeted investments and deliberate under-pricing of products or overpricing of inputs from politically connected suppliers. Evidence abounds that the government has not performed well as a manager of resources. For instance, the failure of public enterprises such as Nigeria Airways, NITEL, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), Nigeria Railways, etc. indicates that most public enterprises have failed woefully to live up to the expectations of the Nigerian public. At the state level, most government owned corporations have been liquidated as a result of high operating losses while those still afloat depend on government subsidies and grants to survive. Therefore it can be safely argued that public enterprises constitute a financial burden to any government if they are not self-sustaining. These

hurdles led to the clamor for the outright sale, liquidation or transfer of these enterprises to private sector management in order to direct government resources to other productive uses [1]. In the quest to proffer a solution to this economic problem, the Nigerian government, with the influence of international agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided to engage in the privatization of its public enterprises to ensure increased efficiency of the utilities. However, in spite of the privatization of most public enterprises in the country, the cases of inefficiency, political interference and corruption still persist [3]. It is worthy to note that privatization has been a controversial reform programme in Nigeria. It has received so many criticisms from organized labor, scholars, civil society organizations, etc. In fact, there have been numerous strikes against proposed sell-offs by unions fearing loss of jobs [4]. The critics argue that privatization inflicts damage on the poor through loss of employment; hence with its negative impact on labor especially the pauperization of the working class through mass retrenchment and increase in the cost of living due to increases in prices, it has more or less rendered its application in Nigeria an effort in futility [5].

Thus, the unending search for a better solution that will reposition Nigerian public enterprises to operate in the interest of the public; to be accountable through responsible administration/management; financially self-supporting and free from political interference; effective and efficient to reverse the poverty level of the people by first reducing unemployment and then ensuring national development by averting the erstwhile wasted resources invested in them (public enterprises).

Statement of the Problem: Nigerian public enterprises were established for the purpose of precipitating and facilitating economic growth and development. However, most public enterprises in Nigeria are beleaguered by horde of problems which inhibit their efficiency and effectiveness to deliver on their core mandates. In fact, many of them have performed abysmally below expectations. The core problem lies in the failure of the management to develop and appropriately implement a management formula that meets the tripartite purpose of required productivity, conformity to universal best practices as well as concomitancy with the peculiarity of the Nigerian environment muddled in abject poverty, insurgency/insecurity, corruption, favoritism, nepotism ethnic conflicts, threats of secession, etc.

The management of these enterprises has been inefficient and ineffective particularly those whose establishments are hinged on regulatory philosophy. They have not lived up to standard due to endemic corruption in these enterprises as officials collect bribes and truncate their primary reasons for establishment. Nigerian Ex-president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, in his assessment of the decline in Nigeria's public enterprises emphasized that "these enterprises suffer from fundamental problems of defective capital structure, excessive bureaucratic control or intervention in appropriate technology, gross incompetence and mismanagement, blatant corruption and crippling complacency which monopoly engenders" [2]. Hence public enterprises in Nigeria have been deemed as drain pipes to the nation's resources since a lot of human and material resources have been invested in them without commensurate financial returns. Also disappointing is that fact that most of them have continued to post financial losses while their services and relevance to the polity are in contest [1].

Financial incapacitation is a major challenge inhibiting the performance of public enterprises in Nigeria. Inadequate funding of public enterprises by government make their operation onerous, if not impossible and considering the limitation that government also determine the tariff structure of these public enterprises, which would have been an avenue to raise more funds to improve their performance.

Public enterprises in Nigeria suffer from excessive ministerial control and political interference; they have served as avenues for political patronage and the promotion of political objectives of government in power. To attest to this fact, Ezeani in Nnamdi and Nkwede [6], asserted that there is excessive political interference in the operation of public enterprises in Nigeria. This results in overstaffing, poor choice of products and location, as well as enthronelement of mediocrity.

Also, there is wide spread assertion that Public Enterprises have limited autonomy in areas of personnel management and authority to spend their funds without obtaining approval from the chief executive or the supervising ministry and because the government provides most of their funds, they have not been enjoying appropriate autonomy to function as a viable entity. Obadan [7], asserted that public enterprises managers suffer excessive control in their daily operations by the supervising government departments. This often stifles managerial initiatives with the resultant effect of costly operational inefficiencies of public enterprises.

Another inhibiting factor is that of political instability in Nigeria which brings about unstable management/boards in Nigerian public enterprises as any new government is likely to dissolve and appoint its own board members and general managers once they take over state power. The most detrimental effect of this challenge is that these appointments are not even based on merit as they see it as a way of compensating their cronies and allies thereby enthroning incompetency [6].

The performance of Nigeria public enterprises is also inhibited by poor and wrong technology as most of the facilities and machineries are either obsolete or mismatched [3].

Objectives of the Study: The broad objective of this study is to analyze public enterprise management in Nigeria and identify a sound enterprise management that suits global best practices in Nigeria.

Other Specific Objectives Include:

- To explicate the meaning, nature, history, rationale and management of Public Enterprises in Nigeria.
- To identify the challenges that constrain the efficiency and effectiveness of Nigerian Public Enterprises to deliver on their core mandates.
- To proffer some solutions towards ameliorating the identified problems.

Conceptual Analysis

Global Best Practice: A best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result. A commitment to using the best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and technology at one's disposal to ensure success. The term global best practice is therefore a universally recognized formula/method, used frequently in various spheres of life or fields such as health care, government administration, corporate management, the education system, project management, hardware and software product development, etc. [8].

Management: According to Theo Heimann, management has (3) three different meanings viz: as a noun, it refers to a group of managers; as a process, it implies functions of management which is better described by Gullick's acronym 'PODSORB' which stands for Planning, organizing, directing, staffing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting; and as a discipline, it refers to the subject of management.

Defining management, Ezeani [9], opined that it is "the organization and co-ordination of men and materials within an organization in the most rational and efficient manner to achieve desired goals or objectives". Relating aforementioned meaning and definitions of management to the context of this study, the management of public enterprises is therefore a group of individuals vested with the responsibilities to run Nigerian public enterprises. These individuals bring together all the six M'S i.e. men, money, machines, materials, methods and market to achieve the core mandates of the enterprises.

Public Enterprise: Conceptualization of the term 'public enterprise' is not susceptible or underpinned to any universally accepted definition since the definitions of public enterprise can vary between countries and change over time. Ademolekun [10], conceptualized public enterprise as an organization that is set up as a corporate body and as part of the governmental apparatus for entrepreneurial or entrepreneur-like objectives. Adeoti [11], depicted public enterprise as an agency of a predominantly industrial, commercial or financial character, entirely or partly owned and substantially controlled by the federal, state or local government. Oleku in Akhake [12], referred to public enterprises as statutory corporations that are established by specific statutes that contain provisions relating to finance and personnel among other things.

The United Nations cited in Anyadike [2], defined a public enterprise as an incorporated or large unincorporated enterprise in which public authorities hold a majority of the shares and/or can exercise control over management decisions. According to the assertions of Egwakhide and Terzungwe [13], public sector enterprises consist of government-owned enterprises whether at local, state or federal levels. The public sector as an economic agent is acting on behalf of everybody, with all its economic resources commonly owned, and all its activities carried on, on behalf of everybody. Also, Onwe cited in Anyadike [2], defined public enterprise as an artificial person who is authorized by law to carry on particular activities and functions.

Theoretical Framework: A theory is set of reasoned ideas intended to explain facts or events and it is theory that determines what we can observe [14]. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the New Public Management Theory is utilized.

The New Public Management Theory is an approach to running public service organizations, which encompasses a wide range of techniques and perspectives that are intended to overcome the inefficiencies inherent in the traditional model of public administration [15]. Tracing the origin and theoretical basis of New Public Management, Gernod [16], pointed out that the New Public Management Movement began in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Its first practitioners emerged in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher and in United States Municipalities. Later the theory/approach was developed by Scholars from Australia and the UK, who were working in the area of public administration [17]. The focal basis of the New Public Management approach is the shift in model from 'Administrator' model to 'Management' model. The management model represents an internal culture of making managers manage, as opposed to the administrator model which values compliance to rigid pre-determined rules and regulations (Bureaucracy). In other words, it is an attempt to empower managers, requiring them to take greater responsibility, granting them greater operational freedom and holds them accountable for results [18]. This theory argues that controlling behavior of workers from the top does not allow those closest to service delivery to react quickly enough. Thus, New Public Management approach favors decentralized administration, delegation of discretion, contracting for goods and services and the use of the market mechanisms of competition and customer service to improve performance. It aims to achieve accountability through the measurement of outcomes rather than accounting for inputs [15].

Relating the New Public Management theory to this study, over the years the management model is shifting from the traditional model of public administration that has reached a point of diminishing return to the New Public Management Model concomitant with the Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) enterprise management in retrospect to the observed inefficiencies beleaguering enterprise management in Nigeria evident in their limited ability (particularly the precarious fiscal incapacitation of these enterprises) to satisfy the rapidly growing needs for commercial and social services crucial for economic growth and for widespread participation in a globalizing economy.

Features of Public Enterprises in Nigeria: From afore conceptualization of public enterprise, it can be deduced that Nigerian public enterprises are the machineries or apparatus of the Nigerian government encompassing

state owned enterprises (SOEs), parastatals, public companies, public corporations, agencies, utilities, industries, etc. Public enterprises are managed by board of directors with a chairman appointed by the government; the administrative heads such as general manager or managing directors are recruited from the private sector most of the time. The board of directors of public enterprises is charged with the responsibility of appointment, discipline, training and dismissal of its employees where they are found wanting. Where Public enterprise functions as a national monopoly, it is not expected to make profit or run as profit making venture. However, it is expected that such enterprise should be able to break even in its operational cost. Public enterprises are not allowed to operate independently without government interference. As such, it is immune to regulation of market forces. Government intervenes in its operation mostly to stabilize prices of goods and services and sometimes to promote political patronage [18]. Public enterprises also has the features of several individuals who act in common as a corporate personality and legal entity that can sue and be sued, created by the legislature with defined powers and functions and independently having a clear-cut jurisdiction over a specified area or over a particular type of commercial activity hence can own its own properties and enter into contracts. It is also important to note that public enterprises as government apparatus denote (3) three implications: (a) Due to their circuitous relationship with government, public enterprise is a catalyst of public policy and its core mandate is streamlined with governmental plans, projects, programmes, goals and objectives. (b) Since public enterprise by its creation, is set up with public money and mostly manages public resources, hence, indicating that appropriate and efficient mechanism must be installed for compelling public accountability. (c) The complexity of its function considering the magnitude of its financial and economic objectives with social and political and even cultural undertones invariably makes it onerous to devise a suitable/working enterprise management practice [2]; [18].

Historical Background of Public Enterprises in Nigeria:

The origin of the involvement of the Nigerian government in the setting up of public enterprises can be placed within the context of Nigeria's colonial and postcolonial experiences. The Nigerian government in the postcolonial days had to intervene in the economic activities in reaction to the exploitation and social injustice of the colonially induced enterprises [1].

According to Oji, Nwachukwu and Eme [4], the two major factors that influenced the establishment of public enterprises in Nigeria are the political and economic factors. During the British colonial administration, Nigeria's economic posture at the international market was reckoned with in terms of agro-allied products; hence the colonial government then saw the need to develop infrastructural facilities to meet its economic ambitions. After independence there was an increasing demand in the establishment of public enterprises to ameliorate the industrial deficit orchestrated by the dark regime of colonialism. Thus, the second National Development plan (1970-1974) streamlined the role of public sector enterprise in Nigeria's march to economic development and prosperity. The reason for the assumption of this greater role in the development of Nigeria's economy after independence was to consolidate the political independence and to maintain control over national resources and foreign enterprises which tended to be monopolized. The fear of expatriate domination of our key entrepreneurial activities led to the promulgation of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1972, which introduced the indigenization policy designed to control the commanding heights of the economy by Nigerians not foreigners as was the case previously. The policy further accelerated the growth of public enterprises in Nigeria providing the much needed legal basis for extensive government participation in the ownership and control of significant sectors of the economy [18]; [1].

Rationale for Public Enterprises in Nigeria: The justifications for establishing public enterprises in Nigeria include the need for rapid economic development to alleviate economic stagnation and raise the general living standard of the populace. Government's determination to control certain strategic sectors of the economy regarded as very sensitive to the social and economic security of the nation. The desire to move enormous resources at government disposal to shoulder part of the entire capital formation process in areas where the private sector is seriously handicapped with insufficient funds for investment purposes. The pursuit of balanced economic development and filling observed gaps resulting from absence of clear private sector imagination in order to prevent sub-optimality. The need to break foreign domination (i.e. to reduce and/or reverse over dependence on certain imported items), prevention of monopolistic practices, under exploitation, stimulate retention of capital and subsequently accomplish the nation's primary

economic objective of promoting local production, by facilitating skills acquisition, employment generation through entrepreneurship [2]; [18].

Methodology: The content of this paper is solely on review of relevant literature on Nigerian public enterprises, aimed toward developing a sound enterprise management that suit global best practice in Nigeria. Thus, the methodology adopted is descriptive analysis of qualitative data obtained from secondary sources such as articles in reputable journals, conference papers, official publications.

Towards a Sound Public Enterprise Management That Meets Global Best Practices in Nigeria: Public Private Partnership (PPP) as the viable Option: A sound public enterprise management that suits global best practices in Nigeria is 'Public-Private-Partnership' as this practice holds universal recognition/acceptability and has proofed efficient and effective in other developing and multi-ethnic countries. Globally, the shift towards PPP has been necessitated by increasing dilapidation of public infrastructure, fiscal constraints as government seek alternative sources of investment funding, need to eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies in government projects, search for a viable alternative in the face of rising public debt and the rising demand for public services in the face of increasing population and strong economic growth. In Nigeria, it is unarguable that the country suffers from a huge deficit of infrastructure and the infrastructure which is available is grossly underutilized, and mismanaged. Thus, it is glaring that the government by itself even at its best and at the best of times cannot meet all the infrastructural requirements needed for the economic development of the country, hence, the call for partnership with the private sector in the provision of public infrastructure.

Public Private Partnerships is the improvement of the management of public enterprises through collaborations with corporations, small business, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations to provide socially beneficial goods and services. Public private partnerships allow or encourage domestic and foreign owned businesses, community group's cooperatives, private voluntary associations, small enterprises and other non – governmental organizations (NGOs) to offer social services. Thus, PPP provides the platform for Public enterprises and the private sector to cooperate in providing services and infrastructure

through a variety of mechanisms including: concessions, Build-Operate and Transfer (BOTs) arrangements, joint ventures and informal and voluntary cooperation. Joint ventures are veritable means by which public enterprises work with the private sector through mergers, partial acquisitions of state-owned enterprises (retaining some share of the stock in profitable or politically strategic enterprises) or joint ownership by government and private investors. For instance, China, a country which is an exemplary success story through PPP has used joint ventures between foreign investors and state enterprises to obtain foreign technology investors and capital, learn foreign management and marketing techniques, increase foreign exchange generating capacity and promote various joint research and development project. Also, government around the world uses turn-key projects with consortia of private companies to build efficient and effective telecommunications, transport, shipping, airport, utility and water and sewerage infrastructure. Governments in countries with both advanced and developing economies use Build Operate Transfer (BOT) agreements in which they buy or lease completed facilities constructed by private investors after the companies have recouped their investment and a reasonable return by operating the facilities for an agreed – upon period of time.

Public private partnership is unarguably a necessary and important instrument for the attainment of an improved and sustainable Nigerian economy through an efficient and result-oriented enterprise management because when properly tailored and administered (taking into cognizance the unique nature of the Nigeria socio-economic and political environment) by the new public management oriented managers, Public-Private-Partnership is a sound global practice of best-fit to reposition public enterprise management in Nigeria.

Challenges of Public Enterprises Management in Nigeria: It is a known fact that Organizations (Public Enterprises) do not function mechanically on its own rather they are manned by human/people referred to as management who are meant to efficiently and effectively coordinate the men, material, money, machines, methods and markets to accomplish set objectives. Therefore, the various challenges inhibiting enterprise management in Nigeria hinge on the inability of the management to come up with and appropriately implement a management formula that can accomplish its core mandates in accordance with the peculiarity of the Nigerian

environment as well as conform to intentionally best practices. These challenges are subsumed but not limited to the following:

Corruption and mismanagement of funds as there have been various cases of misappropriation and embezzlement of enterprises funds including gross misuse of material resources and lack of maintenance culture that has become a norm in Nigeria enterprises. For instance, it has been observed that the privatization exercise of most of Nigerian public enterprises amounted to selling of government properties for virtually nothing as the entire process were grossly politicized serving as a convenient vehicle for patronage distribution.

Political interference in the affairs of public enterprises has ruined many public enterprises in Nigeria and rendered them mere tool of political patronage, the excessive ministerial control and political interference defeat the primary objective of “living off” public corporations and therefore, are antithetical to effective performance.

Financial limitation/Infrastructural inadequacy: Lack of financial autonomy including technological limitations and lack of adequate infrastructure are among the factors that influence the extent to which management of the enterprises can perform.

Lack of specialized competent top-class personnel: The root causes of this particular challenge can be linked to poor funding and lack of operational autonomy which hinders competent professionals from being hired and engaged in such organizations. Professional experts would rather prefer to work in private organizations which are highly equipped with working tools and equipment, solidly funded and enjoying full operational autonomy and where their highly skilled labor would be well compensated for. Also, with the operation of the public enterprises, managers are poorly motivated, badly paid; Poor decision making and some factors have combined to reduce the cost of productive efficiency of public provision of goods and services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hitherto, this study has discussed public enterprise management in Nigeria, explicating its features, origin, and rationale for their establishment. The study identified certain challenges inhibiting the efficiency and effectiveness of Nigeria Public Enterprises in achieving its core mandates. The challenges are that of inadequate funding, the concentration of excessive powers in the

supervising ministry, the rate of political interference/influence, inadequacy of technical and professional personnel, widespread corruption, mismanagement and misappropriation of enterprise funds. These inhibitors to a large extent, hinge on the inability of the management to come up with and appropriately implement an enterprise management formula that meets the tripartite criteria of qualitative/quantitative goods and services delivery, while concomitant with the peculiarity of the Nigerian environment as well as conform to intentionally best practices. The study therefore x-rayed the Public Private Partnership as a sound enterprise management model of global best practice in Nigeria while proffering the following recommendations:

Government must ensure sustainable policy instrument such as the Public Private Partnership that will ensure result oriented and value creation which will in turn affect the state as a whole positively. There is a need to establish a single framework of action for clear understanding of purpose, direction and priorities of the policy process. Such arrangement will enhance the coming together of several stakeholders that include the federal, state, local, private sectors, transnational agencies, civil society groups as well other important community development associations that will work together to ensure sustainable development and poverty reduction within the three levels of government operations in Nigeria.

The Nigerian populace and her government must begin to see themselves as heterogeneous and not homogenous entity. That is why many of these imported policies and programmes crafted and designed towards achieving economic growth and development have not worked because they are not tailored to fit into Nigeria system. However for the public enterprises reform in Nigeria to bring the dividends already being enjoyed by other countries that have applied and implemented the (PPP) formula based on the understanding of their own environmental context, then it is imperative for government of Nigeria to do the same, in order to take advantage of the (PPP) policy instrument.

Nigeria Government and the entire populace must continue to fight corruption; there should be zero tolerance to the illicit activities and this can only be achieved through proper accountability. Officials must be responsible for their actions and adequate punitive measures should be meted on culprits.

Government should allocate more resources in the annual budget to some crucial and sensitive public sectors like power, health, water, etc. that render these

social services to the public in order to ensure effective and smooth operation. There should be upgrading of facilities in terms of renovation and over hauling of structures and equipment in these public enterprises in Nigeria.

The welfare and wellbeing of the employees should be adequately addressed to enable them be on the same salary scale with their counterparts in the same line of duty in the private enterprises. Recruitment and selection process into these public corporations should not be based on political patronage, thus merit should not be sacrificed on the altar of mediocrity.

Ultimately, these ongoing reforms exercise in the Nigerian enterprise management, if well pursued by the government will not only result in improved efficiency and profitability but to large extent reduce the high level of corrupt and illicit practices by and among public authorities in Nigeria.

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