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Institutionalising Integrity in the Nigerian Public Service

*Emmanuel Remi Aiyede**

Studies on corruption and ethics in Nigeria were initially dominated by a theory of cultural determinism. A new orthodoxy underlined by neo-liberal ideas regarding the role of the state in resource allocation has gradually become dominant since the 1990s. But the latter feeds on the basic premises of cultural determinism. Rejecting both perspectives, this paper argues that corruption as a universal phenomenon, straddling both public and private sector organisations, is better addressed from the view point of the competing sources of ethical decision making for individuals in the public service. This provides direction for a realistic ethics programme towards institutionalising integrity in the Nigerian public service.

INTRODUCTION

Economic failures in Nigeria have perpetually placed the public service under the scrutiny of scholars and development practitioners alike. This is the case because the public service is the bedrock of development administration. The public servant has been described as corrupt, ineffective, inefficient, unresponsive and dishonest. Successive governments have expended substantial efforts in improving the public service. Phillips (1992:3) observes that, at least, nine reform programmes have been effected in the service before 1988. In 1988, a comprehensive reform package was introduced to reposition the service to enable it play an effective role in a presidential setting and within an increasingly liberalized and deregulated economy. The underlying principles of the reforms were professionalism, accountability and responsiveness. The reforms seemed to have achieved the very opposite. Thus, under the current fourth republic, the national government has embarked on incremental reforms such as introducing new procurement procedures, revising the financial rules, holding regular retreats for senior civil servants and introducing an anti-corruption commission to deal with problems of misdemeanour.

Internationally, integrity in public administration has continued to receive serious and renewed focus. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on January 28, 1997 requesting that the Secretary General assist Member States in designing strategies to prevent and control corruption. Transparency International of Berlin has constructed a corruption index using seven surveys to rank 41 countries according to informed opinion (Gilman & Lewis 1996:523). The frustrations of international donor agencies have manifested in their current campaign for good governance. Issues of freedom and justice are now tied to efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and integrity in government. Corruption is viewed as the major culprit for the failure of

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economic reform measures in developing countries of Africa.

To be sure, corruption in forms such as bribery and conflict of interest is a problem that is as common and wide spread as opportunism, greed or ego. Yet discussions of the widespread of corruption in Nigeria have been for a long time dominated by the theory of "cultural determinism. This theory perceives Nigeria as characterised by certain features which make it a haven for corrupt practices. These features are said either to be culturally determined or the result of her stage of development. It appeared that the view, that extremely few administrators wilfully break the law, violate public interest, damage their organizations, transgress professional norms or wantonly intrude personal interest such as greed, does not apply to Nigerian public servants.

More recently a new perspective is gradually becoming orthodoxy. This perspective links corruption to the expansion of state activities that has multiplied the resources that fall under the control and discretion of public servants. As the World Bank, the chief proponent of this view puts it:

The dynamics of corruption in the public sector can be depicted in a simple model, the opportunity for corruption is a function of the size of the rents under a public officials control; the discretion that official has in allocating those rents, and the accountability that official faces for his or her decisions" (World Bank 1998 as cited by Szeftel; 1998:225).

This paper argues that this new perspective is constructed on the old orthodoxy of cultural determinism and is essentially heavily influenced by the effort at market programming. It insists, that corruption, as a universal phenomenon from which not even the most democratically mature and economically advanced countries can feel safe, must be addressed from the view point of competing sources of ethical decision making for individuals in the public service. This perspective enables a realistic understanding of the phenomenon, whether in the north or south. Drawing on insights from the global conference on Ethics in government 1994 and views of scholars on sources of individual ethical decision making, it attempts to define a basis for an ethics programme that realistically balance both the normative and structural approaches to institutionalising integrity in the Nigerian public service.

The Nigerian Public Service

The Nigerian public services have their origin in the British colonial administration that was established to maintain law and order in the colony. It was essentially fashioned after the Weberian model characterised by values of permanence, anonymity, political neutrality and competence. The public servant enjoyed security of office so long as he abides by the rules and regulations guiding the administration and management of government policies. He was expected to be honest, non-partisan and impartial in his dealings with the public and political leaders. He therefore stood for continuity. He constituted a point in a hierarchical structure of positions and offices in which officers were enlisted on the basis of technical skill, and strict discipline enforced.

The public service as the core institution of public administration was to be

the centre of development administration in the post-colonial era. Thus, the move towards independence necessitated two processes in the colonial administration. The first was the Nigerianisation of the services, and the second was the regionalisation of the service. The latter followed the introduction of regional self-government in 1957. Nigerianisation involved the replacement of outgoing expatriates with trained and competent Nigerians. This was pursued with an intensification of training for Nigerians who were to take over such positions when expatriates finally left. In order to ensure that public service values were maintained in the post independence era, the 1957 Constitutional Conference provided for a Public Service Commission which should be insulated from politics and provision for its appointment should not only make its independence a reality, but also be clearly understood to do so Kirk-Greene, (1965). What is underscored is the importance of the recruitment policy for a public bureaucracy.

The process of Nigerianisation witnessed various degrees of successes in the different regions. By 1962, the Western region, which was obviously the most successful, had achieved 89.3 per cent Nigerianisation (Kirk-Greene Ibid). The success of the process in the West was such that Adebayo (1985) remarked that:

Pessimists, who some years earlier had predicted the collapse of public administration on the exodus of the expatriate officials, found that they were completely wrong and had not reckoned with the impetus and inspiration generated on the threshold of independence by Nigerian rulers and administrators (1985:49)

But Nigerianisation was followed by rapid expansion of government activities that put pressure on the experiences and skills of public servants. The political crisis in the Western region, due to a split in the Action Group party (AG), created problems for the regions public service as it engendered division between loyalists to the AG and loyalist to the head of the break-away faction who was then the premier of the region. The crisis itself exploded and engulfed the entire nation culminating in the seizure of power by the military.

The emergence of the military marked the systematic erosion of public service values. The soldiers had lacked experience in civil governance. Having expelled the politicians, they resorted to the experience and expertise of civil bureaucrats to carry on with the business of governance. During this period, bureaucrats, especially the higher civil servants, enjoyed tremendous growth in power and influence. Under the Yakubu Gowon Administration, for instance, Permanent Secretaries and other senior officials attended cabinet meeting and took part in the discussions. They were appointed into the board of public corporations and performed social functions reserved for politicians such as attending cocktail parties, receiving overseas interests and making press statements (Adamolekun 1986).

The in flow of petrol dollars facilitated further expansion of state activities. The expansion of state activities in turn increased the pre-eminence of the public service. Of course, the expansion of the functions and powers of the public service naturally widened the opportunity for irresponsible and unresponsive behaviour as

well.

Furthermore, the enhanced visibility of the public servant also exposed him to public scrutiny. The shortcomings of the public servant soon became sources of complaints by the public. Public servants were accused of inefficiency and corruption. Commenting on the civil service in 1975, the Chief of Staff under the military administration of the period, noted:

One of the most unfortunate and strongest images of the civil service created in the mind of the public is one of irresponsible, inefficient and yet powerful organisation (Adamolekun 1985:310).

Although several measures have been taken since then to address the issues, the Nigerian public service seemed perpetually immersed in an ethical crisis. It remains an institution where graft, mediocrity and acts of dishonesty hold sway. The Political Bureaus description of the problem of corruption in Nigeria gives a graphical picture of the dimensions of the fall in integrity in the public service and the entire society in this way.

Manifestation (of corruption) include the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks; frauds and falsification of accounts in the public service; examination malpractice in our educational institutions including universities, taking of bribes and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other organs for administering justice; and various heinous crimes, against the state in the business and industrial sectors of our economy, in collusion with multi-national companies such as over-invoicing goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling.

With regard to the recruitment of staff into the public service, Adebayo's experience as consultant to a public service commission is instructive. He reports:

I was once appointed as a consultant to a public service commission to interview candidates for appointment as administrative officers in the civil service. At the end of the interview of each candidate, the members of the commission and I compared notes on each assessed candidate. At the end of it all, we agreed on assessments. The commission thanked me for my assistance and I left. About a month later, I saw in the Gazette the names of newly appointed administrative officers. As a matter of curiosity, I fetched the notes containing assessments of candidates during the interviews and to my profound astonishment, some of those who were graded as totally unsuitable at the interviews were those appointed. It was later I gathered that members of the commission threw aside the assessments, confided in one another as to individual interests, and the result was a list containing the appointment of unsuitable candidates (Adebayo 1992:170).

Shagari himself laments the lack of integrity in public service this way:

What worries me more than anything among our problems is that of moral decadence in our country. There is the problem of bribery and corruption, lack of dedication to duty, dishonesty and such vices (Brownsberger 1983:225).

Several measures have been taken to return integrity into the service. The Udoji Public Service Review Commission recommended management techniques to enhance the performance of the public service. But these were indifferently adopted and eventually abandoned. In 1975, the Murtala/Obasanjo regime carried out a purge of the civil service. About 10,000 civil servants lost their jobs in the process. In the same year, a national network of Ombudsman (Public Complaints Commission) was established. The 1979 Constitution provided a code for public servants. It also provided for a Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal to deal with matters relating to the conduct of public officers.

President Shagari launched an Ethical Revolution in 1980. The Buhari's government, which took over government in a coup *d'etat* on the eve of 1983, declared a War Against Indiscipline (WAI) on assumption of office but was soon overthrown in a palace coup. President Babangida reformed the civil service and introduced the Directorate of Mass Mobilisation for Social Justice, Self-reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). Babangida implemented civil service reforms in 1988 to enhance performance and align the civil service with the presidential system. The normative bases of those reforms were accountability, responsibility, responsiveness and professionalism. Even the ribaldry predatory regime of General Sani Abacha embarked on a War Against Indiscipline And Corruption (WAI-C), and threatened to set up a Failed Parastatal Tribunal. The regime reviewed the Babangida reforms and reversed aspects of it.

Yet the popular perception of the public service when the Obasanjo regime came on board in 1999 was that it was still characterised by all forms of venality, namely: outright laziness, lack of commitment and vision, debilitating nepotism and tribalism, [an organization] where appointments were made without recourse to laid down procedures; [where] relatives, friends and concubines of executive officers were employed against the ban on employment and into positions they were sometimes not qualified for [as] the Federal Civil Service Commission functioned only in name" (*The Guardian*, August 15, 1999).

Like the preceding military regimes, the Obasanjo government has carried out a series of reforms in the public service. Individuals who have attained the age of 60 or have put in 35 years of work in the public service were removed. The embargo on employment, which had been on since 1994, was lifted to enable the government inject new hands into the system. Public service pay was reviewed upwards to provide a base for honesty and accountability. A reviewed and reissued civil service rules and financial instructions imposed spending limits on public officers. The spending powers of ministries/extra ministerial departments have been limited to 50, 000 naira without tendering, while contracts not exceeding one million naira can only be awarded by the Departmental Tenders Boards. Contract with values in excess of 20 million naira are to

be referred to the Federal Tenders Board or the Federal Executive Council (FGN, 2000).

A team has been set up to supervise the ministries to ensure that rules and regulations are observed in the award of contracts by senior public servants. Training courses and seminars are being conducted at every level of the system. An advisory body on the civil service reforms has been put in place while many public enterprises have been pencilled down for privatisation. What chances does Nigeria have of ensuring that these measures are effective in improving integrity in the public service? Certainly a good understanding of the uses, and nature of the crisis of integrity in the public service will be useful in resolving it.

Explaining the Crisis of Integrity in the Nigerian Public Service: The Pitfalls of Bias

Concern over corruption in the public service has generated a lot of ideas on causes. However, much of these ideas have been influenced by Eurocentric bias. Thus, they have had very limited value for practical concerns in a country like Nigeria. This bias may appear even at the level of definition. Brownsberger (1983) in confronting this issue defines corruption as misapplication of public goods - bribery, nepotism, political favouritism - in violation of the western legal and regulatory codes that have been inherited by many developing countries, along with western state structures from their colonial governments. The expressed differences between the north and south cannot be missed here. Brownsberger eventually concluded that there are two reasons for the widespread corruption in Nigeria: (i) many in the civil service have been corrupted inwardly - weakened by dazzling inequality, divided loyalties, and disorienting urban life, and (ii) the fragmentation of political life in Nigeria continues to channel loyalty away from the policy process and the abstract state back to self and tribe (1983:231).

Brownsberger's conclusions borrows from the literature on corruption in Africa generally. Among the prevalent views on corruption, is that, which perceives corruption as the result of the conflict between traditional African values and modern state structures. For instance, the African custom of gift giving which is an expression of goodwill and respect towards partners or consensual leaders, it is said, translates into corruption in a modern bureaucracy. A more positive assessment considers the crisis of integrity as apart of the stresses associated with developing civic thrust in an environment in which family, community or tribal loyalties supersede a more inclusive definition of the public Gilman and Lewis (1996:519)

Yet, another view attributes corruption to attitudes and habits either in the culture at large or only among an elite or clique. This may take the form of a materialist religion where divine favour is purchased by offerings or may be the result of lack of rational/scientific education. In its more ridiculous presentation, the lack of integrity is attributed to a pervasive materialism that exists among Nigerian public officials and elites. Corruption has also been attributed to the pressures arising from the demands made on public servants by their kinsmen or from expectations that make them feel compelled to maintain a high standard of living. They may also come under pressure from private businessmen who need help from administrators as the economy expands.

The preceding view on the cause of corruption may be reformulated in this way. Because Nigerian elites are materialistic in outlook they easily give in to pressures to misappropriate public goods in violation of their code of office for personal gain. Thus, the greater the opportunities available for rents, the more pervasive corrupt practices would be. We arrive at the assumption underlying the new orthodoxy. Perhaps it may be closer to the picture to assert that forces, which deter corruption are not just weak, officials have also been able to deliberately increase opportunities for rent by expanding state activities.

These views obviously justify the irresistible calls for privatisation and other forms of state retrenchment. As it is usually argued, the retrenchment of the state will reduce avenues for corruption and rent seeking. However, experience has shown that far from reducing corruption and rent-seeking, market programming in the 1990s in Nigeria created a situation where corruption became more widespread especially among the rank-and-file. As salaries fall below subsistence level in the absence of alternative source of employment, moonlighting and corruption became survival techniques. What is more, corruption as few often emphasise, is not only limited to public organisations. It straddles both public and private sector organisations. The point, is that, viewing the cause of corruption within this biased and parochial standpoint is one of the problems that have bedevilled measures so far advanced by successive governments in Nigeria to improve on the performance of the public service.

Experience suggests, that, there are usually several sources of ethical decision-making by individual public servants. This experience provides a more correct point of departure for any ethics programme for the public service.

Those who still consider the African custom of gift-giving as conflicting with the disinterested rational ethos of the Weberian bureaucracy, should be apprised of the fact that corruption repudiates traditional African values of hospitality, solidarity and the duty to share just as much as it repudiates values of accuracy, honesty, impartiality obedience, and confidentiality as well as political neutrality, accountability and competence (Wart 1996:519).

Furthermore, there is no doubt that the creation of states and the subsequent multiplication of bureaucracies in Nigeria have both given rise to undue advancement and widened opportunity for rents. Although, undue advancement creates a problem of competence, the widened opportunities for rents need not deepen corruption. It deepens corruption because the dominant source of decision-making is the personal interest or narrow group interest of public officials.

The crisis of market reform arises from the failure to acknowledge that public servants are not public slaves. They have a right like all other citizens in a democrat state to a decent living. It is legitimate for them to strive for adequate income, job stability and job advancement. Public employees cannot be expected to forego interest in their own needs. Good pay, low job turnover, and job advancement possibilities produce the conditions for excellence Van Wart, (1996:529) in Africa as elsewhere. Even if good pay does not guarantee integrity, it is the only justification for the demand for observance of reasonable codes and punishment for their breach.

Sources of Ethical Decision Making: Distilling the forces at play

From the foregoing, it is obvious that there are several forces behind the ethical behaviour of public servants. A clear grasp of these sources and their relative competitive strength in different contexts/organisations can form the basis for a successful ethics programme. Existential factors may account for the pre-eminence of one source over the other. The character of the state and its relationship with civil society and citizens are also very crucial.

Wart in appraising the value in changing the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) code of ethics in 1996, elaborates on five major sources of ethical decision making which compete for both the prohibitions and aspirations of public sector officials:

The first of these sources is legal interest: laws, rules and regulations that define the modern state. The laws are supposed to be symbols of politically agreed upon values which are important for those who are saddled with responsibility of defining, upholding and implementing the law through the public service.

Ordinarily laws are baselines beyond which criminal or civil proceedings may be instituted. They do not stand in equal grounds with morality. Yet it must be conceded that an administrator would have cultivated a terrible habit of lawlessness or be in very desperate circumstance for him to completely close his mind to thoughts about the legal implications of his actions. Indeed as Wart notes (1996: 528) At a minimum, the law, regulations to support laws, and due process procedures constitute a lease line for other compelling values. In Nigeria, legal interest plays little or no role because the society has been exposed to an authoritarian state worsened by prolonged military misrule with its attendant disregard for laws, procedures and due process. The judiciary has been battered and rendered a lame duck by the military's penchant for disregarding court orders. So, law as a source of ethical decision making for individuals in Nigeria is very weak. Thus, there is need to strengthen the judicial system and renew confidence in the due process for this factor to become significant for the purpose of ethical decision-making in Nigeria.

The second factor considered by Wart is personal interest. Public servants are not disinterested robots. They are human beings with their own individual aspirations and expectations from government and the society at large. For them to be honest, they have to be encouraged. Indeed, it should pay, in both economic and social sense, to be honest. It is worth restating here, that public servants are not public slaves. It is quite legitimate for public servants to demand a good pay, job stability and job advancement. A good pay, low job turnover and job advancement possibilities are factors that produce excellence in any organisation. Where organisations have poorly funded mandates and unpleasant working conditions, high turnover is often the result. When wages, in the public sector, fall below market value or subsistence level workers may quit to more rewarding employment. This is the origin of the problem of brain drain in Nigeria. Even so, openings in the private sector or outside the country are limited. Those who cannot find job elsewhere find ways of coping with survival needs. Where low wages are supported by criminalisation of strikes and repression as in Nigeria in the past decades, workers resort to largely individualised strategies. These have remarkable impact on efficiency and work culture. Ultimately, the state pays in

informal ways.

Indeed the Babangida reforms were marred by the wage freeze imposed for many years to reduce the cost burden of the service. By the early 1990s, the erosion of incentives to bureaucratic officials had deprived the sector of the ability to attract and retain qualified people. Indeed, the public service lost its soul to "brain drain, inefficiency, moonlighting, widespread demoralisation and corruption" during this period (Klitgaard, 1989).

Again, for people to be honest they must be encouraged to speak their minds. They must feel a sense of commitment to the state. This can be attained through consensus building and compromise within the organisation. Importantly too, there should be room for dissent. In any case dissent is inevitable and it is usually manifested in various ways. Thompson (1985) identifies four levels of dissent: (i) protest and possibly request for reassignment, (ii) carrying the protest outside the organisation while otherwise performing duties, (iii) open obstruction to the policy, and (iv) covert obstruction to the policy such as leaks to the press. Experience in Nigeria has demonstrated that disallowance of dissent can be very stultifying and may be the beginning of up turning the spirit of public service. Thus, issues of freedom of speech, personal conviction as well as civil disobedience are crucial to the effort at institutionalising integrity in the public service.

The third source of ethical decision-making discussed by Wart is organisational interest. Cooper (1990) identifies two of four factors inducing responsible conduct as relating to organisation. These are: the structure of an organisation and its culture. As an organisation matures, it develops a corporate interest of its own which influences the behaviour of individual members. Sometimes organisational values and interests overwhelm public interest. When this happens we have a case of bureaupathology. Many totalitarian states came to exist for the purpose of the administrative state rather than to serve the people. (Wart 1990: 530). This point is well captured by Caiden (1951:490) when he notes that "When bureaupathologies grip systems, the problems caused are not the individual failings of individuals who compose organisations but the systemic shortcomings of organisations that cause individuals within them to be guilty of malpractices". Experts may be caught up in the 'we know best' trap so that public interests are relegated to trifles. The reputation of the bureaucracy must also be considered. Agencies that lack good reputation may have a hard time recruiting highly qualified personnel and just as hard a time in retaining them.

The fourth factor is professional interests. Citing Pugh (1991:9), he states that a profession is characterised by (i) a cast of mind or self-awareness, a corpus of theory and knowledge; a social ideal, a formal organisation to promote its interests, a national academy to revere and celebrate its leading practitioners and ethical standards. Professionals often strive for higher levels of education as the profession matures. They usually have clear and specific ideas about the education and training required for these. The public service as a whole may not easily fall into the category of a profession, *strictu sensu*, because of its heterogeneity. Nevertheless, it constitutes a profession quite distinct from the individual professions within it. It may also be vulnerable to the problems of the professions generally at the individual profession level or in terms of the public-sector-as-a-profession, which relates to the conduct of individual members.

One of these problems is unrealistic standard. Another is the self-serving tendency of the professions. Professions may set so high a standard of education for admission to the field and practice that they come to have little sympathy for the practical realities facing public sector organisations. Secondly, they often act as interest groups with self-interested behaviours. At a point their self-interested political influence quashed any values that do not advance their interests. They may argue that they are standard bearers when they are actually promoting their self-interest.

The fifth source of ethical decision-making identified is public interest. Public servants often lay claim to acting in the public interest. There is no doubt that values such as fairness, justice and equity are more important in the public sectors than in business. Yet public interest is difficult to define. It may be viewed as social equity. Or be related to the notion of disinterest. The latter refers to impartiality as opposed to self-interest. The public servant is expected to serve the public beyond serving one's self (Wart *ibid*: 527-8). To what extent does this influence the conduct of public servants in Nigeria?

These interests discussed by Van Wart are by no means exhaustive. In fact, he enumerated other sources of ethical decision-making that have been identified by various scholars. These included: regime accountability, personal responsibility and prudence (Dobel, 1990); honour, benevolence and justice, (Denhart 1991); individual attributes, organisation structure, organisation culture and societal expectations (Cooper 1990); public interest, constituency interests, bureaucratic interests, and personal interest (Warwick 1981).

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that ethical behaviour is underlined by the dynamics of values competition. The pre-eminence or dominance of one source over the other may be affected by the training of the officials, his experiences as well as the character of the state and its relation with citizens. Any programme of ethics must reckon with these forces. The dynamism of these forces also implies that there is nothing final about ethics programmes. Such programmes should be periodically evaluated and reviewed in the light of developments within and outside organisations. Besides such programmes must depart from the acceptance that public servants do face ethical dilemmas.

The Nigerian challenge

Political leaders who have very poor records in terms of honesty and performance have largely engineered ethics programmes in Nigeria. Ethics programmes have lost their values to the perceived hypocrisy of their initiators. This is why the power of example cannot be taken lightly in the promotion of integrity in public service in Nigeria. Integrity in public service can only be fostered where top-level officers model ethical behaviour and require it from all others in the organisation. Leaders must possess integrity and practice ethics if the entire public service is to operate at a reasonable level of morality.

But top-level officers usually take a cue from their political masters in their conduct. After all, public services are only instruments for achieving goals set by politicians whether civilian or military. Therefore, ethics in the public service cannot be divorced from the type of politics and levels of political corruption associated with the power elite. It is therefore not surprising that public service ethics reached its ebb

under Babangida and Abacha military regimes that used corruption and repression as the carrot and stick of ensuring support and retention of political power. We can also link failures of the Obasanjo's Independent Corruption and Allied Offences Commission to the money politics and corruption in high places of the current dispensation. Witness the effort of the National Assembly to repeal the Anti-corruption law because they are afraid it might catch up with some of them once out of office.

There are therefore two possible ways out of the crisis of integrity in the Nigerian public service. The first is that the power elite should have a change of heart and build a consensus around national development that would provide a basis for discipline among politicians. The second is for civil society organisations to mobilise against corruption in high places. They can act as whistle-blowers, ensure that anti-corruption organisations are effective by engaging them. These two processes amount to calling for political reforms that would render transparency and accountability critical factors in governance. The state should also be restructured in ways that broaden democratic participation. The alienating character of the state has propped up personal and group interest in ethical decision-making.

Furthermore, ethics programmes should be proactive rather than reactive for them to be positively received. This implies that ethics programmes should be integrated into the training of public servants and those who may aspire to public office.

The civil service must be highly valued. The condition of work in the public service should be brought to competitive level with best practices in the private sector. The application of the Federal Character principle in the recruitment process into the public service must be reviewed so that it does not go against morale, merit and creativity in the sector.

Finally, Nigeria stands to benefit from increased global dialogue on ethics programmes. Cross national synergy will not only enhance our understanding of ethical problems, it will eventually pave the way for international cooperation that would help handle international structures that protect individuals who steal from the public purse. Above all, it will help eliminate the bias that has shot through the discourse on ethics in African public services.

Conclusions

Corruption and ethical misdemeanour are a worldwide phenomenon. They are not culturally determined. Indeed, they are the outcome of interplay of several factors. Hence, all over the world failures of governments to successfully prosecute certain public policies and the scandals that have trailed such failures have served to strengthen the pre-occupation with public service ethics. Efforts have been made to write codes to govern the conduct of public officials. Legal regulations and enforcements and safeguards have also been put in place to prevent unethical conduct. Beyond these, institutional and management reforms have also been embarked upon to improve behaviour of public officials. Today, ethics programmes have become integral to governance (Sherman 1998). Countries continue to learn from the experiences of others.

However, the character of a country's ethical programme is often determined by its historical experiences and traditions of public administration. These change over time. In the words of Rohr (1991:294), "administrative systems cannot be divorced from national histories and administrative ethical standards are necessarily grounded in the specific administrative systems." The challenge for Nigeria is to examine the problem of public service ethics in the light of its history of public administration and see how to promote law and public interests as critical factors in ethical decision making for public officials. This is in fact a challenge of leadership both in the state and non-state arena to raise citizen's stake in national development.

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