AN ASSESSMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study is an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the confidence placed on public officers in the management of public offices and their stewardship accounting to the citizens. The study is a survey of two federal Ministries and Chartered Accountants in the Private and Public practice in Nigeria. The sample was selected randomly, secondary data contained in financial statements, and interviews were used for analysis. The finding/responses showed that accountability in the Nigerian public sector is poor and the present procedure for accountability needs critical review. The study recommends that every government Department, Ministry and Agency (MDA) should in every financial year, produce a financial statement that includes budgetary provision for the period together with a report of performance, variance analysis and factors inhibiting performance. Such accounts and reports should be published for public comment.

Keywords: Public Accountability; Corporate Governance; Financial Regulation; Answerability and Enforceability.

1.1 INTRODUCTION
Public Accountability is the hallmark of modern democratic governance. Democracy remains a paper procedure if those in power cannot be held accountable in the public for their acts and omissions, for their decisions, policies, and their expenditures. Public Accountability is the basic tenet of democracy (Cook, 1998).

Accountability in the public sector throughout the world is being given serious attention in view of the fact that the government is the highest spender of public fund. Those in authorities assume fiduciary status with the attendant responsibilities requiring them to render their stewardship accounts to those for whom the authority is held in trust. The general public is increasingly requiring public officers to be accountable by demonstrating effective use of public assets and funds in the delivery of services and pursuit of government objectives (Obazee, 2006).

It is the right of citizens to demand and know the activities of their elected public officers and the elected public officers ought to voluntarily give account of their stewardship to the public. It was on the basis of this that the Declaration of Rights and Man and of Citizens incorporated in the preamble of French Constitution as quoted in Turc (1997:1), thus: “Society has right to require of every public agent an account of his administration... All citizens have a right to decide either personally or through their representatives, as to the necessity of the public contribution.... and to know what uses it is put”
In Nigeria, public accountability is the requirement of the law. The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 through Section 47 established the National Assembly for the federation which consists of the Senate and the House of Representatives, while Section 90 of the 1999 Constitution established the House of Assembly for each of the 36 states of the federation. Both the National and State houses of Assembly consists of elected representatives of the people. The Constitution went further to establish the Executive (Chapter VI Sections 130-152) the Judiciary (Chapter VII, Sections 236-259); and the Legislature (Chapter V Sections 47-64); and also established three tiers of Government namely the Federal, the State and the Local Government. The activities of these bodies are referred to as public sector. The term ‘public service or sector has been defined as “the service of the federation in any capacity in respect of the government of the federation…” (Nigerian Constitution 1999). The public service can be sub-divided into three groups namely the core ministries, parastatals and the government agencies. Some of the second group is semi-autonomous while most of the agencies are autonomous, subject to the overall control of the government. These bodies are set up by law to satisfy ever-expanding needs and aspirations of the public. They are statutorily empowered to collect all moneys and harness all resources for the benefit of the generality of the citizens. The question is, has the Nigerian Public office holders adhere with the principle of public accountability and voluntarily account for their activities while in office?

There have been assumptions that the duties and trust reposed on these public officers were not efficiently and effectively performed. Onochie (2002) pointed out that “there has been total disregard for accountability on the part of public enterprises over the years and that a lot of public enterprises do not bother to produce promptly their annual reports and audited financial statements due to inefficiency, negligence, and maladministration”. Also, for Abisoye, (1994) “NNPC does not respect its own budgets. NNPC does not respect its own plans...... The unwritten code in NNPC style of management.... Would appear to be everyone to himself and God for us all....make hale while the sun shines and loot all the lootable” see (Abisoye: Newswatch October 21, 1994; 10-11)

Also, the responsible ministries have not themselves shown sufficient concern about this laxity. It is therefore, difficult to monitor performance and take corrective measures before things get to dead-ends. However, these assumptions together with various pronouncements have not been verified by scientific research. Hence this paper seeks to fill this lacuna by evaluating, through scientific research method, the extent of the practice of effective Public Accountability in the public sector, identifying factors inhibiting proper Accountability and proffering probable solution.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
The objectives of this research include:

i. To examine the duty of trust placed on the public officers in Nigeria.
ii. To examine the extent to which these officers render their stewardship to the citizenry.
iii. To examine the legal framework for the performance, policies and Monitoring of public accountability in Nigeria
iv. To review the extent of the application of this policies vis-à-vis the public expectation on public accountability.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS
This research seek to provide probable solutions to the following research questions

i. To what extent is Public Accountability effectively, practice in Nigeria?
ii. In what way can effective practice of public accountability lead to good corporate governance?
iii. What are the changes executed in the system of practicing public Accountability in Nigeria since the last 10 years?

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES
Ho: Effective Public Accountability cannot lead to good corporate governance.

H1: Effective Public Accountability can lead to good corporate governance.

2.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Accountability is not just another political catchword; it is an institutionalized practice of accounts giving. Accountability refers to a specific set of social relations that can be studied empirically. Accountability has been defined from this perspective as a social relationship in which an actor feels an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct to some significant other (Day and Klein 1987:5; Romzek and Dubnick, 1998:6).

The notion of accountability is an amorphous concept that is difficult to define in precise terms. However, broadly speaking, accountability exists when there is a relationship where an individual or body, and the performance of tasks or functions by that individual or body, are subject to another’s oversight, direction or request that they provide information or justification for their actions. Asobie (1991), in his own contribution sees accountability as the obligation owned by anyone occupying a position of trust or responsibility to provide appropriate response to all stakeholders, for action carried out and/or performance achieved in the discharge of his duties. Accountability is also an obligation because it goes as a corollary to the responsibility and authority to perform assigned duties.

The concept of accountability involves two stages: answerability and enforceability. Answerability refers to the obligation of the government, its agencies and public officials to provide information about their decisions and actions and to justify them to the public and those institutions of accountability tasked with providing oversight. Enforcement on the other hand suggests that the public or the institution responsible for accountability can sanction the offending party or remedy the contravening behaviour. As such, different institutions of accountability might be responsible for either or both of these stages.

The term accountability has been variously explained by different authorities such as Adebayo (1981); Olowokere (1996); Onochie (2001); Kalu (2002). Romzek and Dubnick (1987), Romzek (1996), Sinlair (1996) and Behn (2001:59) for instance, Adebayo (1981) defines accountability as “A requirement which subjects public officers to detailed scrutiny by the legislature over objectives, use of resources and manner of performance”; Also, it is a process whereby one renders an account of his activities to someone who has the power to ask for it and also evaluate and reward ones performance” (Olowo-okere, (1986). While for Onochie (2001) it is seen as “the duty to truthfully and transparently do ones duty and the obligation to allow assess to information by which the quality of such services can be evaluated and being responsible and answerable to someone for some action.

Overtime, different researchers (Oshisami, 1989; Asobie (1991); Olson 1993; Bovens, 2006; Achua, 2009.) have considered in their research work the nature of Accountability. However, Bovens (2006) is of the opinion that Accountability takes the following form

i. Organisational Accountability: This is a situation where superior officers ask the subordinate to account for their assignments or activities.

ii. Political Accountability: This is the focus of this paper. This type of accountability is concerned with the elected representative, political parties and Public office holders. This
is the situation where elected representatives or appointed ministers are required to give account of their activities during their tenure in office. Political Accountability usually manifests itself in the concept of individual ministerial responsibility, which is the cornerstone of the notion of responsible government. In parliamentary system with ministerial responsibility and a general civil service, for instance, as in Britain and the Netherlands, Political Accountability is usually exercised indirectly through the minister. Public office holders and heads of agencies also appear before parliamentary committees to account for some of their activities. In the Presidential settings such as in the United State of America or Nigeria, Public officers and head of agencies are responsible to the public and the National Assembly.

Iii  **Legal Accountability:** Under this, the Public officers can also be summoned by courts to account for their acts, or on behalf of the agency as a whole. The Parliament and the judiciary act as legal accountability. The Parliament holds the executive politically accountable, while the judiciary holds the executive legally accountable.

Iv  **Professional Accountability:** Professionals also take appointment as public servants; such Professionals include: Chartered Accountants, Doctors and Engineers. These professionals belong to one association or the other and they are to act in compliance with their ethics and code of conduct. They are also accountable to both the public and their professional body.

Olson (1993) on his part gave four criteria regarded as basic to public service accountability. This include: Fiscal accountability; Managerial accountability; programme accountability; and individual accountability. But for Asobie (1991) accountability is purely an external control on public office holder. He postulated four criteria that must be satisfied for accountability to be effective and these are:

i. There must be timely, honest, accurate, complete, adequate and relevant information on the actions of those entrusted with public fund;

ii. There must be external auditor’s independence of the organization/ ministry / departments being entrusted;

iii. There must be arrangement which will enable recourse on the basis of such information to correct deficiencies, reward honourable performance, penalize fraudulent dealings, call to question all forms of abuses and redress illegal acts; and

iv. A system must exist which makes all the three elements above intact.

Furthermore, Omolehinwa (2001) in his Research work during the military regime in Nigeria discovered that the practice of public accountability is at the lowest ebb. He further concluded that the public officers have no regard for public accountability. Public money were disbursed without the knowledge of the Minister of Finance, he cited (Ani, 2000:48) that “the Minister alleged that it was only after the death of the then military leader in June 1998 that he discovered that about US$450 Million had been withdrawn from the Central Bank between January and May 1998 without the knowledge of the Minister of Finance.”

He substantiated the infectivity of public accountability during the Military era by saying that: “Not only were the accounts of the last five years of Military rule not available as at end of the last millennium, the accounts that were rendered cannot be regarded as reliable because there is no relationship between the figures given by the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance.”
2.2 Conceptual Framework of the Practice of Public Accountability in Nigeria

The practice of Public Accountability in Nigeria is conceptually depicted in Figure 1 below:

**Fig. 1 : Public Accountability Model adapted for Nigeria**

From figure 1 above, The **Public Officers** consists of elected officers who include the parliamentarians, the executives, the judiciary officers, Ministers and Heads of Agencies, departments and Parastatals. For instance, the Parliament and the Judiciary acts as a horizontal check on the Executive. The Parliament/ Legislature perform oversight functions on the activities of Public Officers. The Parliament has power to summon any Public Officer to give account of his activities or answer some questions; example of such function is the current probe on BPE going on at the National Assembly, which has revealed many misdeeds. The Parliament holds the Executive politically accountable while the Judiciary holds the Executive legally accountable.

The **general public** consists of all the citizens of Nigeria or the electorate to whom the public officers render their stewardship.

**Public Assessment:** The public assess the performance of public institutions or public office holders and make their assessment public through various comments in electronic media, daily newspaper and magazines. They can also do so through their various calls on the appropriate government arm to investigate the matter. They can pass their assessment to their representatives to be tabled at the floor of the National Assembly.

**Judgment:** Appropriate judgment will be passed by the body that evaluates the public officers. **Sanctions:** Sanctions can be formal or informal. It is formal where it involves sanctions such as imprisonment, removal from office, freeze of bank accounts to confiscation or forfeiture of their personal property and forfeiture of Passport. It is informal where the public officer concern was
adversely criticized in the public which may affect his image and integrity. The public officer may voluntarily resign his appointment.

**Fig 2 : ACCOUNTABILITY TRIANGLE MODEL**

**RESPONSIVENESS**
- Effective communication channel
- Sympathy and empathy for the public.
- Quick reaction to both positive and negative signals.
- Ability and willingness to learn from mistakes

**RESPONSIBILITY**
- Knowledge of expected role
- Performance of what is expected
- Owing up to lapse & failure
- Prudence and timely documentations and progress reports

**TRANSPARENCY**
- Openness to public scrutiny.
- Timely release of reliable information.
- Involvement of beneficiaries in decision making.
- Proper and timely documentations and

3.1 DATA AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY
The design adopted for this study is survey method. The study made use of both primary and secondary data. The research instrument used to collect data is the questionnaire. The questionnaire was a 5-point rating scale (likert scale) The questionnaire was designed to elicit relevant information from the respondents. The population was the staff of Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Justice and Chartered Accountants in public practice. One hundred and thirty (130) copies of the questionnaire were administered. One hundred and twenty six (126) copies were returned and six (6) was wrongly completed and rejected. The information gathered was analyzed using percentages and chi-square statistical method to test the hypothesis.

3.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

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<tr>
<td>3.2.1 Public Accountability is all about rendering of stewardship</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11.67</td>
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<td>3.2.2 Resources and development are equitably distributed in Nigeria as a result of effective public accountability</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>63</td>
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Table 1: Data Analysis

| 3.2.3 | Government budget are fully implemented in Nigeria by public officers. | 26 | 21.7 | 18 | 15 | 67 | 55.8 | 9 | 7.5 | - | - | 120 |
| 3.2.4 | The Public officers do publish their budget performance at the end of financial year for public assessment and comment. | 5 | 4.17 | 5 | 4.17 | 95 | 79.17 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 7.5 | 120 |
| 3.2.5 | There is little or no fraud perpetrated in public offices in Nigeria | 45 | 37.5 | 10 | 8.3 | 65 | 54.17 | - | - | - | - | 120 |
| 3.2.6 | Financial statements are prepared and audited as and when due public offices in Nigeria | 52 | 43.3 | 8 | 6.67 | 50 | 41.67 | 8 | 6.67 | 2 | 1.67 | 120 |
| 3.2.7 | The bodies responsible to ensure effective public accountability are very efficient and effective. | 38 | 31.67 | 12 | 10 | 65 | 54.17 | 5 | 4.17 | - | - | 120 |
| 3.2.8 | Internal control in the public service is very strong | 49 | 40.8 | 25 | 20.8 | 45 | 37.5 | 1 | 0.8 | - | - | 120 |
| 3.2.9 | Public Accountability in Nigeria needs to be reformed | 82 | 68.3 | 25 | 20.8 | 13 | 10.8 | - | - | - | - | 120 |
| 3.2.10 | Effective Public Accountability will enhance corporate governance in Nigeria | 93 | 77.5 | 6 | 5 | 15 | 12.5 | 6 | 5 | - | - | 120 |

Table 2: Field survey 2013

<p>| Table 2: CALCULATION OF CHI-SQUARE |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| O | E | O-E | (O-E)^2 | (O-E)/E |
| 27 | 43 | -16 | 2.56 | 5.95 |
| 11 | 8.4 | 2.6 | 6.76 | 0.80 |
| 63 | 57.6 | 5.4 | 29.16 | 0.51 |
| 19 | 8.8 | 10.2 | 104.04 | 11.82 |
| - | 2.2 | -2.2 | 4.89 | 2.2 |
| 5 | 43 | -38 | 1444 | 33.58 |
| 5 | 8.4 | -3.4 | 11.56 | 1.38 |
| 95 | 57.6 | 37.4 | 1398.76 | 24.28 |
| 6 | 8.8 | -2.8 | 7.84 | 0.89 |
| 9 | 2. | 6.8 | 46.24 | 21.01 |
| 52 | 43 | 9 | 81 | 1.88 |
| 8 | 8.4 | -0.4 | 0.16 | 0.02 |
| 50 | 57.6 | -7.6 | 57.76 | 0.1 |
| 8 | 8.8 | -0.8 | 0.64 | 0.07 |
| 2 | 2. | -0.2 | 0.04 | 0.02 |
| 38 | 43 | -5 | 2.5 | 0.58 |
| 12 | 8.4 | 3.6 | 12.96 | 1.54 |
| 65 | 57.6 | 7.4 | 54.76 | 0.95 |
| 5 | 8.8 | -3.8 | 14.44 | 1.64 |
| - | 2. | -2.2 | 4.84 | 2.2 |</p>
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<td>93</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>205.75</td>
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Source: Researcher’s Computation 2013

\[ X^2 \text{ Cal.} = \frac{(O-E)}{E} = 205.75 \]

Level of significance = 5%

Degree of freedom:

\[ DF = (x-1)(c-1) \]
\[ DF = (5-1)(5-1) \]
\[ = (4)(4) = 16 \]

The tabulated value at 0.05 level of significance is \( (X \ 0.05, 16) = 26.2962 \)

Decision rule: since the calculated chi-square is greater than the tabulated, then the hypothesis should be rejected while the alternative hypothesis should be accepted hence we reject \( H_0 \) and accept \( H_1 \).

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results from the analyzed data showed that 3.2.1 in table 1 shows that 83% of the respondents agreed that Public Accountability is a situation where public officers are required to give accounts of their stewardship to the public while they are holding public offices. Also 68% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion in 3.2.2 that resources and development are equitably distributed in Nigeria as a result of effective public accountability. This implies that poor accountability adversely affect the development and allocation of resources in Nigeria.

It is the view of the respondents in 3.2.3 that government Ministries, Agencies and Departments in Nigeria do prepare annual budget and 63% believed that the budget are not fully implemented at the end of the budget year. 3.2.4 shows that 84% of the respondents these Ministries do not publish their budget performance at the end of the financial year for public comment, thereby inhibiting public Accountability.

About 50% of the respondents is of the opinion as shown in 3.2.6 that the government Ministries and departments do prepare financial statements while others equally believe that they are not prepared and audited as and when due.

It has been widely alleged that that there are fraud and corruptions in public offices. 3.2.5 confirmed by 54% that there are fraud in public offices. It was observed that various alleged corruptions that were prosecuted by law enforcement agents are either delayed in justice system or are not concluded or are swept under the carpet and did not see the light of the day; Over 58% of the respondents disagreed in 3.2.7 that the bodies responsible to ensure effective public accountability are very efficient and effective. This implies that agencies put in place to ensure public accountability are weak and ineffective, hence public accountability in Nigeria is at the lowest ebb. Also over 61% as shown in 3.2.8 are of the opinion that internal control in the
public sector is very weak thereby making public accountability in Nigeria ineffective. In addition, it was the view of over 83% of the respondent that Effective Public Accountability will enhance corporate governance in Nigeria.

From the foregoing it save to infer that the analysis and the interpretation of table1 and the chi-square calculation revealed that public accountability in Nigeria is still poor and has not improved in recent time. The agencies responsible to monitor public accountability appear very weak and needs to rise to their responsibilities and be empowered legally. It is also save to infer that both the statistical analysis and the result of the hypothesis tested support the statement that effective public accountability will lead to good corporate governance in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION
There are legal instruments that require public officers to account to the public while they are in office in Nigeria. The rate of adherence to these principles by public officers is very low. The effect of this is that Public Accountability in Nigeria has not significantly improved since the research work of Omolehinwa in 2001. Most Public Officers are corrupt and failed to render accounts of their stewardship, some of the government agencies established to enhance public accountability were not effective and their performances are not satisfactory, hence, they failed to meet the public expectation.

Finally, effective Public Accountability is an essential ingredient for good governance. The present procedures for Public Accountability in Nigeria need to be reviewed.

RECOMMENDATIONS
i. The government should consider the establishment of a commission charged specifically to monitor every government Ministry, Departments and Agencies and ensure that Accountability is effectively carried out. The present procedure whereby the members of PAC have their primary function, as legislation does not allow total commitment to Public Accountability.
ii. There must be time frame for the commission to submit report on each organization.
iii. The report must be implemented to the last letter and appropriate sanction must be imposed and effect execution.
iv. The 1999 Constitution should be amended to give time frame for the Public Accounts Committee of each house of the National Assembly to consider and report back to the whole house matters arising from the audit reports. Also that the National Assembly should table the report of the PAC within 30 days of its submission.
v. The findings of the PAC and the conclusion of the National Assembly should be made public for comments.
vi. The Nigerian Press should have access to all information relating to Public accounts and should be free to make public information relating to the accounts.
vii. The Civil Servants or Public office holders should be motivated to have sense of belonging and national interest at heart contrary to existing procedure where the Civil Servant agitates for a minimum wage of N18,000 per month which translates to N600 or $4 per day. This put the Civil Servant in a tempting position to defraud or fail to properly accounts for their activities.
viii. Qualified professional officers should be employed to hold sensitive professional offices such that Medical Doctor hold the position of Minister for health, Chartered Accountant as Accountant-General of the federation, Auditor-General for the Federation and Minister of Finance. Also, Electrical Engineer appointed as Minister for Mines and Power contrary to the present situation where round pegs are put in a square hold. These
professionals have their names, integrity and the profession they belong at stake; hence, they will do everything possible to render effectively their stewardship.

REFERENCES


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