

Performance Appraisal and Public Sector Performance in Nigeria: Implications for Service Delivery and Rural Development

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ABSTRACT: Performance appraisal is a formal systematic assessment of an employee to determine the degree to which the employee is performing his/her job effectively. It is important in assessing the capacity of public institutions, especially institutions responsible for the design and implementation of rural development projects in Nigeria. The objective of the study is to examine the impact of performance appraisal of public institutions on service delivery and rural areas in Nigeria. The research adopted an *expo facto* research design. This was necessary because the data for the study were obtained mainly from secondary sources. Extant literature was assessed to explain the variables of the study. The literature was evaluated with content analysis. The issues raised provided the basis for suggestions to improve the Nigerian public sector appraisal system so as to effectiveness in the rural development process.

KEYWORDS: Performance appraisal, public sector performance, service delivery, rural development

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I. INTRODUCTION

Effective service delivery in the public sector, either at the federal, state or local level is a function of strong institutions. Institutionalisation is a process of creating functional units within the public sector to carry out certain responsibilities. These institutions must be evaluated from time to time to ensure that their performance is optimal and within the interest of the state. It is all about the management and evaluation of human resources. The appraisal of employees has the advantage of helping an organization to position the workforce in the jobs for which they are best suited. This leads to improved and increased productivity.

In the Nigerian Public Service, when workers are engaged in the performance of a different task, it is essential to appraise their actual performance on the Job to ensure that their effort is positively contributing to the achievement of the public service objectives. It is no longer fashionable to deploy employees to tasks without determining their suitability for each job. Performance appraisal defines the methods and processes used by organizations to enhance work design, process, and feedback.

Performance appraisal has also been looked at as the method by which the performance and productivity of each worker are measured in order to determine his or her contributions to the effort of the organization towards the achievement of the set goals and objectives. The method used in the measurement and evaluation of a workers performance differ from one establishment to another. The objective is to estimate the job performance of each employee towards the achievement of organizational objectives. Performance appraisal is also carried out for the purpose of promotion and transfer to new job tasks and positions within an organization or (regarding this context) government establishments (Eldman, 2009).

This process and its outcome can be used for both developmental and administrative purposes. The former provides a feedback on administrative effort and strategies in the implementation of projects. This is directed at the responsibility of certain institutional agencies within the public service responsible for implementing projects geared towards rural development in Nigeria. The administrative input and performance of human resources in these institutions are significant in improving and determining public service performance and by extension, in service delivery in rural areas in Nigeria.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted an *expo facto* research design. This was necessary because the data for the study were obtained mainly from secondary sources. Extant literature was assessed to explain the variables of the study. The literature was evaluated with content analysis. The issues raised provided the basis for suggestions to improve the Nigerian public sector appraisal system so as to effectiveness in the rural development process.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of performance appraisal

According to Beach, performance appraisal is the systematic evaluation of the individual with regard to his or her performance on the job and their potential for development. Young (1996) defines performance appraisal as an evaluation and grading exercise undertaken by an organization on all its employees either periodically or annually, on the outcomes of performance based on the job content, job requirement and personal behavior in the position. Performance appraisal is a formal systematic assessment of an employee to determine the degree to which the employee is performing his/her job effectively (Banjoko, 1990).

According to Nwachukwu (1985) the focus essence of performance appraisal is to give information for the promotion, demotion, transfer, pay increase, training and development and discharge of an employee. Equally, the process provides public servants with contractive on how they are performing in their jobs as viewed by their managers, thus leading to increased productivity. The primary objective of the process is to assess the employee's job performance over a specific period of time. It examines the contribution of an individual worker and general performance of the organization as a whole. The process also jobs motivation; aids promotion, additional pay, and rewards that employees receive base on their job performance.

The historicity of performance appraisal

There are varying opinions on the history of performance appraisal. The history of performance appraisal is said to be as old as mankind. In a formal sense, performance appraisal of an individual began as early as the third century in the Wei dynasty in China where an Imperial Rater appraised the performance of members of the official family (Locher 1997). Furthermore, in 1648, it was reported that Dublin (Ireland) evaluated legislators by using a rating scale based on personal qualities (Jamieson, 1999).

Wren (1994) disclosed that performance appraisal as a mechanism for assessing workers performance began with Robert Owen. Owen used a wooden colored block to measure the achievement of employees working in the cotton Mills in Scotland at the close of work hours. During that era, it was utilized as a disciplinary mechanism for punishing poor performance (Kennedy & Dresser 2001). This resulted in the negative notation of the appraisal system which turned out to be despised by both the appraiser and the appraisee. As confirmed by Robert and Pregitzer (2007) "performance appraisal is a yearly rite of passage in organizations that triggers dread and apprehension in the most experienced, battle-hardened manager". This clearly shows the negative implication of the concept to workers and their disgruntled feeling towards it.

With time, organizations tried to define the methods linking it to other administrative matters including reward, promotion, training and so forth, arguing that employees achievements should not only be measured but evaluated and managed (Kennedy & Dresser 2001). Appraisal has evolved as an inevitable and universal tool in examining workers performance and sustaining organizational effectiveness. Through appraisal, the system receives feedback on the input of each worker and further provides the basis for modifying or changing behavior towards more effective working habits both in private and the Nigerian Public Service.

There are several methods used in performance appraisal. Some of these include the secret appraisal, essay method, graphic rating scale, ranking method, forced choice rating and management by objectives. Performance appraisal is a strategic tool necessary for the growth, survival, and success of any organization.

Performance appraisal and public service performance in Nigeria

The paper examines the Nigerian public service, otherwise referred to as the civil service. Section 277 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines the Civil Service as the "Service of the Federation in a civil capacity, as staff of the office of the President, the Vice President, a ministry or department of the Government of the Federation assigned with the responsibility for any business of the Government of the Federation" (FRN, 1999).

The Nigerian civil service comprises of all Nigerian government employees excluding the military. Employees are mainly careered civil servants, progressing through the ranks on the basis of qualifications and seniority. The Nigerian civil service has five basic functions, namely

- i. policy implementation;
- ii. provision of inputs for policy formulation;
- iii. investigative and regulatory functions;
- iv. ensuring continuity of public administration; and
- v. informative function (Office of Head of Service of the Federation, 2009).

It is an important institution of the state which occupies an essential and unique position in the formulation and implementation of National development plans.

The civil service was set up as a machinery of government responsible for the initiation and implementation of public policy. The successes and failure of the public sector is a function of the public service. Performance appraisal in the public sector is a system of setting employees individual targets, monitoring those targets, measuring the results through evaluation and either correcting or rewarding the employee's performance. In other words, an appraisal is the evaluation of employees work (Obisi, 2011).

In appraising workers performance, the Nigerian public service sector currently uses the Annual Performance Evaluation System (APER). This is based on the overall evaluation of employee's contribution to the organization on yearly basis. The yearly APER is divided into five sections.

1. Part 1 contains an employee's personal record and leaves records;
2. Part 2 contains tasks and targets set, job description, key achievements, training/course attended in the year under review and job performance; in this part, the employee fills his tasks and targets based on his job description for the year to measure whether he has performed to expectation.
3. Part 3 evaluates character traits, assessment of performance by superior, work ethics, leadership qualities, training needs and teamwork;
4. Part 4 specifies next year's tasks and targets, comments by the employee on the assessment, declaration/signature by the employee and the reporting officer;
5. Part 5 is the countersigning officer's report, who is normally the immediate superior of the reporting officer. The countersigning officer makes the process more transparent and creates room for feedback mechanism and monitoring which can control supervisors and reviewers from being subjective to some extent.

In addition, The APER form is well structured and comprehensive. It captures all the relevant aspects of what is to be measured in the appraisal process in terms of job descriptions and character traits; hence it is more of a developmental approach format. The form makes it possible for employees to specify their future training needs which will further boost their careers and make them more efficient thereby also reduce the tasked placed on the human resource department of determining the kind of training an employee needs. Declaration section is also a sign of objectivity because an employee can express his/her opinion about the appraisal process and one is not liable to sign the form if he/she feels the process is subjective.

In response to questions on the comprehensiveness of the APER form, interviewees commended the existing format and stated that the problem does not lay with the design of the form but rather on the evaluation process and how the appraisal is conducted. However, Gilbert (2006) observes that by the use of APER forms, marks are so generously awarded to the extent that in a given group of employees to be assessed no one scores less than ninety-five percent with some exception scoring up to hundred percent which is impractical and impossible in objective appraisal, yet no evidence of high performance or excellence exist in Nigeria's public sector.

Implications of performance appraisal for service delivery and rural development in Nigeria

One of the primary objectives of establishing the Civil Service as an institution of government is for the execution of public policies and social service delivery. The civil is the institution of the state responsible for the implementation of programmes design to impact on the wellbeing of citizens. However, the administrative structure and performance of the civil service in a state determine the outcome of these programmes. Thus, civil service has prominent roles to play in service delivery. An operative and effective system of performance appraisal in the civil service will impact on the capacity of the workforce in quality service delivery and rural development.

The concept of rural development defines the process of improving the quality of life and economic well-being of people living in rural areas, often relatively isolated and sparsely populated areas. Rural development is an inclusive and integrated process, which includes the social, economic, political and spiritual development of the vulnerable groups in the society. Increase in rural value-added products is one of the objectives of rural development (Anam, 2014). It is a comprehensive term which involves problem identification, policy initiation, design and strategies for implementation. It essentially focuses on the action for the development of rural areas. The civil service plays a key role as the actor of government responsible for the process of rural development. Through specialized agencies and institutions of the civil service, they are involved in the design and implementation of rural development programmes in the country. The effectiveness of the civil service in terms of service delivery is a key factor in achieving the goals of the civil service. Thus, performance appraisal is a significant instrument in enhancing public service performance, vis-a-vis rural development in Nigeria.

According to Gazali (2007), below is a checklist for appraising and measuring workers effectiveness in other to achieve the goals of the rural development in the country.

- a) Demonstrable good and service to the people of Nigeria in cost-effective, efficient and timely manner,
- b) The existence of state institutions that are guided by high ideals of public service in carrying out their mandates in a fair, equitable, transparent and accountable manner,
- c) Perception by the citizens that state institutions are respectful of citizens' rights, interests and generally demonstrate respect for the laws of the land,
- d) Professionalizing the service with skilled and knowledgeable technocrats with appropriate motivation to assist in upgrading the operations of Government;
- e) Reducing waste and inefficiency by monetizing fringe benefits within an incentive structure that supports private sector development by out-sourcing services which are considered to be unnecessary and only tangential to effective government and operation of the service;
- f) Instituting fiscal and budgetary reforms within the context of a Medium-Term Public Expenditure framework in order to sanitize budgeting and funding of government programmes;
- g) Harmonizing organizational structures and objectives to reduce duplication and promote systematic reporting and evaluation of performance and programme implementation;
- h) Re-engineering administrative rules, procedures, and work processes by making them faster, and adapting them to existing operational and technological realities (ICT);
- i) Changing the mindset of officers so that they are disciplined, courteous and are guided by a professional code of ethical conduct etc. (Yayale, 2007).

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The thrust of performance appraisal in civil service and rural development is on effective service delivery, such that could impact on the wellbeing of the rural dwellers. This can be achieved through the display of professionalism and competence by the institutions of the public service in project design and implementation. To achieve this, therefore, it is important that the performance appraisal system of the Nigerian public service must be improved upon through the following suggestions,

1. The employees should be educated on what is expected of them to do and how their actions will positively or negatively affect their evaluation.
2. The employees should also be aware of the goals and mission of the organization and how they will contribute to achieving these said goals and objectives.
3. There should be participatory workforce attitude; whereby communication is carried out with dual categories of employees in getting their opinions on the current appraisal system and how to improve it.

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