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UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: CONFLICT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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Introduction

The principal jobs of the university are teaching, research, dissemination of existing and new information, and service to the community. Currently, the activities of the Ivory Tower are at the center stage among the concerns of the society. This is because the universities are in turmoil and the changes that are overwhelming them are outrunning our ability to understand them. A single university country of yesteryear has become a contemporary multi-university nation, and academic decision-making structures, once relatively simple, have mushroomed into complex bureaucracies. In the process, the Nigerian academic community has become a complex political tangle, with forces inside and outside struggling to gain control over its destiny.

Internally, the universities are being torn by dissent/conflict, including students' activism, faculty activism, new forms of collective bargaining, which have made the burdened bureaucracies more and more difficult to govern. Indeed, many of such internal forces are on the move to change the shape of the universities' governance and decision-making procedures. Incidentally, some see such university conflict, which is endemic and benign, as necessary in the pursuit of truth, "the push of inquiry, the dialogue of persons, the accusing testimony of scholarship" (Goodman, 1964:172). Commenting further on such "a little treatise in anarchist theory," Embling (1974) had opined that "dissent is essential to democratic life, and at the basis of a university; it generates, propagates or criticizes new ideas and evaluates new frontiers; it should be protected on the campus as in society." This, according to Caston (1977), is what makes the governance of a university community such a very special and complex task — the fact that at the heart of the university purpose are dissent, disagreement, dissonance, however much many of us may lapse comfortably into conformity. However, the university administrator has a special responsibility for maintaining an institution which can preserve these dangerously discordant relationships of individuals and groups of a kind

which both satisfies their personal aspirations and is also conducive to the purposes of the institution itself. In order words, the problem, as we see it, is to find ways of converting our conflicts from destructive interest group warfare for partisan ends to constructive argument for educational ends — a rational means of governance.

In addition to the internal changes, new pressures are building in the outside world such that the larger society has turned its attention to the Ivory Tower for many reasons: incessant industrial actions that continue to paralyze smooth academic work in the campuses, campus radicalism, and the recognition of the critical importance of university knowledge. As the turmoil engulfs the universities, their decision-making structures are increasingly cross-examined and scrutinized by an aroused public, albeit informally and unsystematically. While the strife increases on the inside, the public on the outside peers into the academic halls, with intense concern. Indeed, at this critical moment in the life of our universities there is a deep-rooted crisis of confidence about their ability to govern themselves and manage their affairs.

At such a time of crisis it becomes important to know how decisions are made, how policies are constructed, and how university "governance" processes operate. Such governance is the process by which the university's destiny is shaped; it is the complex of structures and processes that determines the critical decisions and sets the long-range policies (Baldridge, 1971). Further, Baldrige's (1971) conceptualized university governance on a grand scale as a political process in which different power blocks — outside pressure groups, trustees, administrators, faculty, and students — struggle for some control over the university's destiny. This is akin to Cowen's (1975) and Neave's (1985) view that governance in higher eduction involves the triple elements of participation, power and control. Also, Alele-Williams (1988) saw university governance as how binding decisions or authoritative allocation of values are made.

Thus, the phrase "university governance" conjures up a Kaleidoscope of images of a Governing Council, a President/Visitor, a chancellor, vice-chancellors, a senate, special assistants, deans, heads of department, chairmen, a student government; it suggests congeries of intricate relationships dotted by crucial points of authority and decision-

making (Foote et al, 1968). Such a complexity nullifies the common assumption that a system of university governance is a simple instrument or tool designed to serve the institution's goal of education. Therefore, it is more enlightening to see university governance as a complex set of relations, powers, and influences embedded in a broader, more general campus "culture." University governance, then, is not simply a method for arriving at decisions about educational policies; it is itself a method of educating those who participate in it or who are affected by it.

From the foregoing, it becomes imperative that one of the core elements to such good university governance and destructive conflict avoidance is accountability. Unfortunately, the perception of unabashed and mounting corruption/lack of accountability in the Nigerian Ivory Tower is a growing source of internal conflict and public discontent. Indeed, recognition of the problem had spread to the government itself, hence its increased worry about the weaknesses in various sectors of the economy.

This paper discusses accountability in university governance given that its absence is a key source of conflict in academia. In order to understand the problems of establishing accountability in Nigerian university governance and to propose appropriate remedies, it is necessary to consider the conceptual framework of accountability in university governance, the manifestations of lack of accountability in Nigerian universities, and its consequences.

Accountability in University Governance: A Conceptual Framework

Accountability is taken to be the enforcement of responsiveness through procedures that affect the value premises of administrators' decisions (Linder, 1978). The most familiar procedures for the accountability of public officials are elections. However, given that so few administrators are elected, accountability to the public is promoted by other institutions such as internal audit and the Nigerian universities Commission. Legislatures and courts rely upon formal controls and administrative discretion to enforce responsiveness to certain values. Other measures exist for ensuring accountability, including reliance on informal relationships or upon internal controls (Gilbert, 1959); but these are supplementary to the formal controls associated with the separation of powers. This means that accountability, a derivative of

authority, is the quality of being answerable for one's actions and conduct, implying that aspect of political responsibility by which administrators are held answerable for general notions of democracy and morality, as well as for specific legal mandates (Shafritz, 1988; Chappel and Keech, 1985). Thus, accountability has two dimensions: management control which ensures that resources are used effectively and efficiently, and operational control which ensures that detailed tasks or operations are properly carried out (Hally, 1980).

According to Smith (1971) one way of classifying accountability is to view it as involving "fiscal", "process", and "programme" accountability. In this sense fiscal accountability poses the question: was the money spent in accord with proper accounting practices for the purposes authorized by law? On the other hand, process accountability asks: did the agency/institution implement the policy in a way that should produce results? That is, were buildings erected, lecturers hired, teaching materials purchased, and students in attendance the required number of days? Here, measures of effort serve as proxies for the quality of the result. Recently, process accountability has come to include whether the process is open to non-nationals, women, minority groups, the aged, and the handicapped. Programme accountability presents the question: did the policy produce the intended results? Here, policy impact measures are required (Gray, 1978).

More specifically, there exists political, bureaucratic/ administrative, legal and fiscal accountability. Political accountability involves responsiveness to popular demands, with political officers submitting themselves periodically to some transparent process of popular choice (Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1991). Thus public officials periodically have their records reviewed by those to whom they are responsible (Rieselbach, 1975).

Bureaucratic or administrative accountability implies stewardship and custodianship such that administrators make available for public scrutiny all public accounts and audit reports as well as engaging in rigorous systems of financial management and procurement, accompanied with swift and tough penalties for

malfeasance (Inanga, 1991; Chen, 1975; Landell-Mills and Serageldin, 1991).

Legal accountability pertains to fairness not only in the administration of established laws but also of the laws themselves, thus attaining the rule of law. In addition, there can be no legal accountability (a pre-requisite for effective political and administrative accountability) without a sound judicial system (Paul, 1990). Thus, legal accountability includes judges' socialization to lawyer and judge roles, the constraints which precedent and reversal impose on judges, and the judiciary's organizational needs. Here, the key elements are socialization of the judicial system, its precedent and openness, reversal, independence, and organizational needs (Wasby, 1978).

On the other hand, fiscal accountability traditionally means that administrators responsible for public funds are required to maintain accurate accounts of expenditures that could be investigated by independent agents (Stoner, 1978). This implies an investigation of administrators' compliance with laws and regulations, their efficient and economical management of resources, and their programmes' performance (Staats, 1975). In other words, this involves determining to what extent the institution administrators have discharged their financial responsibilities which imply equally the expenditure of public funds and the utilization of materials and personnel, within the limit of their programmes and activities and their execution in an effective, efficient and economical fashion (Normanton, 1966; Martin et al, 1977; Omotoso, 1985).

Unfortunately, virtually all of these forms of accountability have suffered damage from corruption in the Ivory Tower in Nigeria. Indeed, the absence of accountability is linked to the central problem of corruption — bribery, extortion, influence peddling, kickbacks, fraud, and other illicit activities. Such corruption involves the mis-appropriation of public resources (Onoge, 1986), and the perversion of integrity of state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity (Diamond, 1991). This implies the injection of additional but improper transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events and altering judgements and positions of trust (Otite, 1986).

The Manifestations of Lack of Accountability In Nigerian University Governance

The university is one of the most complex of modern organizations and therefore one of the most difficult to govern (see Ross, 1976; Smith, 1986). But in the SAP (structural adjustment program) period of great megatrends characterized by increased demand for participation, democratization, academic freedom, better conditions of service and remuneration, university autonomy, and increased university funding; how to govern efficiently, operate fairly, and govern wisely became acute. As these are happening, Nigerian universities are going through a period of transition — a state when they encounter increasing internal and/or external difficulties in reproducing the relations on which they are based and which give a specific logic to the manner in which they operate and evolve (Godelier, 1987) — strategically ranging from unilateral (forceful) to revolutionary and then to compromise (pact and multilateral) (see also Karl and Schmitter, 1991). At the same time, some contend that Nigerian universities internally are attempting a dual transition thus engaging in an immensely difficult balancing act. They often tend to veer either too far in response to political pressures at the expense of accountability (the trap of populism), or too far in support of economy at the expense of consolidating popular participation and democracy (the trap of repression). In fact, the climate of current public and government opinion in Nigeria is critical of what is seen as a lack of accountability of the universities to the society which (albeit indirectly) provides the resources to fund them by way of taxation. As high cost institutions, which also appear to have excessively high unit costs by comparison with primary schools, or national per capita incomes, or other countries' unit costs (comparisons frequently made by the World Bank's researchers), the Nigerian universities have been easy prey in recent years to radical critiques of their cost structures. Thus, Nigerian university managers should have an increasingly sharp awareness of the need for pro-active measures in cost reduction and revenue enhancement, especially in the face of new official policies on university financing.

However, some of the universities appear to be guilty of financial mismanagement which has largely been responsible for their financial woes and tribulations (NUC Secretariat, 1988). They are also being accused of violating NUC's "formula budgeting system."

Indeed, as Apeji (1986) echoed, Nigerian universities have a tendency towards squandemania while there is a growing suspicion that the university is an expensive institution maintained by society, but little responsive to society's practical needs. It is no wonder that the term "Ivory Tower" has become a sarcastic epithet signifying an institution with no sense of overall responsibility but insists on public funds being provided for its grand life style. This is similar to what Fadahunsi (1985) labeled as maladministration and financial irregularity. We, therefore, follow Deniozos et al (1976) to opine that the existence of dysfunctions in the resource allocation system of our universities, which are now developing under the constraint of declining financial growth, calls for a more rational management. As Sadlak (1978) and Dunworth and Cook (1976) argue, this amounts to asking for improved fiscal "performance" of the universities, involving greater "effectiveness" (the extent to which the level of output has been produced at least cost [internal or allocative price efficiency], the level of productivity and the extent of preference/utility or external efficiency). This has become urgent since the present methods of financing the universities and allocating funds are far from containing any incentives to efficient action and tend to lead to increased expenditure, rising costs, and to inefficient patterns of resource use.

Thus, while government subventions have steadily decreased in real terms due to inflationary pressures, the problems of scarcity of resources is further worsened by real controls and leakages in the system. Some universities spend as much as 80 per cent of their funds on personal emolument, and in fact, a visit to any of the universities (especially the older ones like the university of Ibadan) will reveal a multitude of non-academic staff of every cadre whose presence on the payroll constitute the biggest financial burden to the institutions but who contribute little or nothing to the existence and development of the institutions. To this extent, the Nigerian university system has failed to adjust to contemporary budgetary techniques and infuse acceptable cost-control measures.

Today, in many Nigerian universities, there abound "partisan-dominated" or "policy-influencing" cliques, and "associational interest groups" (policy-influencing and authority-influencing). These adopt the tactics of coercion, persuasion and/or inducements to university administrators/authorities by "paying" them off in some way to secure favourable decisions. Such moves thwart the natural and legal course of actions and events, thereby resulting in corruption and lack of accountability since authorities most often yield to such tactics for personal gain.

Administrative/bureaucratic resources are also used to undermine accountability in the Ivory Tower today. The first is the use of "sanctions" (rewards and punishments) such that with financial or budgetary control, certain key university administrators support those that support them and "starve" those that do not.

The second is the use of the power of personnel appointment and removal. This powerful administrative weapon is being used not only to employ unqualified staff but also to engage in irregular appointment and hasty promotion of some favoured academic and non-academic staff. Evidence abounds regarding unilateral appointment and promotion of some senior academic staff by some Vice-Chancellors while others wait for many years after being due both in time and publications. There are also occasions where some heads of departments overstay in office while in others they are appointed over and above their senior colleagues.

The third use of administrative resource pertains to the control of information. Given that legitimate access and the authority to command information are critical weapons for any group or individual, we discovered that some university administrators deliberately starve some groups and individuals in the institutions of some vital information. Since the official has his hand on the information pulse of the institution, the man of knowledge becomes almost always more powerful than the man of ignorance.

The last use of administrative resource relates to the control of legitimate access given that "access is power" and that the right of access to the decision-making process is a significant advantage for influencing policy. In fact, many conflicts in academia rage around the

question of access to decision-making. For this reason, structural reorganizations are not always innocent administrative moves, for in the process of changing the organizational set-up, the paths of access are opened to some and closed to others.

In addition, cases of admission irregularities are prevalent such that academic standards are "[c]ompromised and cheapened right from the point of entry into the university" (see also Hart, 1993). In some universities there are reports of irregularities in the admission procedures. Such irregularities are being attributed to the absence of ties between some admissions to the consideration of such factors as approved quota, available space, funding, lecturer-student ratio and facilities. This often results in the ballooning of the student population well beyond the universities' projected and approved size.

Recently, there developed what one may call "female influence resources" where some female head of universities used their gender and "connections" to peddle influence as ones who must be obeyed whether they are right or wrong. Through their influence, many students were rusticated, many top-ranking academics were sacked, a Pro-Chancellor was unceremoniously removed while at the same time incurring expenditures well above their authority. These mark a waning of moral credibility of university governance while representing government's tacit approval of financial and morale corruption in academia.

Consequences of Lack of Accountability in Nigerian University Governance

Lack of accountability (and the concomitant corruption) is poison to Nigerian university governance not only because it ravages the academia and shreds the moral fabric of the Ivory Tower, but because it distorts the character political competition and scars external financial and material aid to the university system. In a sense, university governance has become one of the vehicles for personal enrichment and upward class mobility in Nigeria. Consequently, the premium on acquiring administrative office has become high enough to justify a degree of rigging, bribery, thuggery, or political chicanery. University governance in Nigeria is threatened by a perverse and deeply embedded incentive structure, which offers easy riches through administrative office, and difficult, risky, and relatively scarce opportunities for

accumulation through honest enterprise. Until this changes, Nigerian university governance will continue to be riddled with fraud and conflicts.

The absence of accountability in academia results in social tensions and conflicts between and among the various groups in the system. In the main, it results in resentment against authorities as manifested in students' demonstrations/militancy, strike action by academic and non-academic staff and other forms of boycotts. This leads to huge losses of man-hours, output and productivity.

Another consequence is poor attitude to work. Since movement to the top is determined by other measures beneficial to the chief bosses, other than merit and hard work, the workers' (especially academic staff who must "publish or perish") morale degenerates and results in nonchalant attitude to their job. According to Myadze (1986), innocent bystanders who would normally be very productive and creative lose their enthusiasm as they realize that no one cares or that quality work does not necessarily guarantee promotion. Workers, therefore, take their jobs for granted, disrespect clientele, and feel they deserve to be paid a second time before performing their duties to their students and fellow staff/colleagues. It is no wonder that internal requests and memoranda take months to be replied to, if the sender was lucky enough that such letters and memoranda were not declared missing. Such is the agony of working in a perverse and corrupt Ivory Tower of the late twentieth century.

The resulting corruption, being contagious, generates corrupting influence on other members of the administrative setup and academia. Thus, corruption feeds upon itself and erodes the courage necessary to adhere to high standards of propriety, while at the same time, morale declines with each person asking himself or herself why he/she should be the sole custodian of morality.

In addition, the emerging competition in the Ivory Tower is alloyed with solidarity, producing unique struggles for power, communitarian mobilizations, and segmentary redistribution of the benefits of power. There emerges "moral pluralism" (various conceptions of "good" and "bad") allowing for the "cannibalization" of

academia, for "beat the system" strategies, and for the survival efforts potentially leading to conflicts.

The other adverse consequence of the lack of accountability in Nigerian university governance relates to irrational and inefficient allocation of scarce financial resources since investments or projects are not so much determined by their utility as to the amount of spoils that the officials would realize from the deals. This results in over-inflated contracts. This means few of such projects can be executed, thus denying the academic community of such basic amenities as running water, functioning electricity, good health services, good roads, library services, accommodation (classroom, hostels and staff quarters), efficient transport system, etc.

Another consequence of the absence of accountability in university governance is that of brain drain, involving the exodus of professionals and expert academics to America, the Middle East, and Europe in search of greener pastures where promotion is based on merit and where hard work is recognized and rewarded. Among other costs, this causes large sums of money to be constantly reappropriated for the recruiting, transporting and temporary housing (pending final settlement) of replacement staff, where they are available locally.

An Agenda for Action

In establishing accountability in university governance in Nigeria, a wise first step is to analyze the university system in order to assess where and how much lack of accountability (and corruption) occurs in each university. Experience and theory indicate that an organization is most vulnerable to the lack of accountability at points where administrators enjoy greater monopoly power over subordinates, have greater discretion over the provision of a licit or illicit service, and take actions that are more difficult to monitor. Thus, reducing monopoly power is crucial to the fight against rent seeking and lack of accountability.

The second step is to evaluate the various costs and benefits that different forms of the lack of accountability entails and to whom.

Thirdly, there should be an assessment of the various policies through which we can affect the calculations of potential deviators from accountability. Allocating our resources efficiently, we must choose the appropriate forms of the lack of accountability to attack and

the appropriate forms and levels and sequences of accountability promotion policies to employ. Initially, we should look for a form of the lack of accountability that is important but relatively cheap to address. This is because preventing, discovering, and prosecuting the lack of accountability are costly, hence the optimal campaign against such absence of accountability must balance promoting accountability against such considerations as cost, morale, red tape, and reducing official discretion.

It is important to observe here that theory and introspection alone cannot lead to optimal policy. This calls for vigorous research efforts at both the macro, meso, and micro levels in university governance and accountability analysis. Both governments, local and international donor agencies must sponsor such research given its importance in generating the ways and means for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of university governance.

Governance consists of two distinct but intimately intertwined dimensions: one is political (and relates to commitment to good governance), and the other is technical (and relates to issues of efficiency and management). Both must be addressed. Without political commitment little can be achieved, even with an efficient administration. And without an efficient administration, no university can be effective, however benevolent. Thus, the performance of a university depends on the role assigned to it, the competence of its administrators, and the extent to which there is an enabling environment that facilitates and encourages growth-promoting activities by its members and honest behaviour by its officials (Killick, 1990). These imply that university administrators should be held accountable to the campus community and the society for their actions through clearly formulated and transparent processes. Also, there has to be information available that will permit accountability and assure that laws will be correctly applied. These are in consonance with Leslie's (1975) two basic tests for stable and effective governance in the university system: whether the decisions actually made do or do not enhance the long-run welfare of higher eduction and of society, and the quality of the individual campus and whether the solutions are appropriate to and commensurate with the problems: and whether the

processes followed gain respect and a sense of legitimacy and trust (see also The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1973).

There is need, therefore, to establish a new performance evaluation system and link incentives to it. We also need to collect information about lack of accountability activities, fry some big fish, inflict swift and well-publicized punishment on high-level violators. This should be a signal to university administrators and the academic community that the rules of the game have changed.

Indeed, lack of accountability will persist unless the risks and costs of such action increase sharply. The venal character of university governance cannot be altered unless corrupt university administrators and exposed and punished in large numbers. Punishment must involve both substantial prison terms and massive seizure of ill-gotten assets, if it is to have the kind of serious impact desired.

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