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A HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NIGERIA'S FEDERAL BUDGET, 1954–2000

Adetunji Ojo Ogunyemi

Abstract: This study analyses the basic features that characterised the budget and budgeting processes of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1954 to 2000. The characteristics are discussed around the theme of public financial accountability and transparency in governance. The study establishes that the characteristics of Nigeria's budgetary processes during the period under review conditioned the fiscal behaviour of the country's federal finances and contained peculiar fiscal and legal dimensions worthy of emphasis. The study relies on a method of historical chronology and exegetical analysis of all identified features contained in the forty-seven Appropriation Acts passed and enforced during 1954–2000 in identifying common fiscal characters in them and arriving at its findings and conclusions. The study found that repetitive budgeting, extra-budgetary expenditure and the circumvention of the laws on public accountability especially after independence in 1960 were the most visible negative features of the Nigerian budget during the period studied.

Keywords: *Budget, Accountability, Federation Account, Consolidated Revenue Fund, Audit*

Introduction

The budget of a state is the financial document that charts the path to its fiscal operations in a defined fiscal year. In other words, the budget shows how revenue generation efforts and the application of public funds to approved expenditure plans are to be made in a financial year (Premchand 1989). Government budgets are, in effect, instruments of fiscal discipline that are enacted into law to compel financial prudence and accountability. Thus, issues that are germane to the budget process, especially its preparation, implementation and reporting are: accountability, economy and fiscal discipline. Fiscal accountability requires that a public officer demonstrates utmost honesty and candour in the use of public moneys which means that accountability is not only a moral burden that a public officer must successfully discharge but also a legal imperative compelling him to refrain from corrupt acts and to show utmost prudence in the use of public resources (Ijewere 1999: 21; FRA 2007; FCMA 1958). This is why it is customary for every sovereign state to protect public revenues and ensure that they are spent prudently on those public goods that have been clearly provided for in its budgets. In other words, the budget and budgeting system of a prudent state, especially a federal state, should be characterised by adequate accountability safety-nets that should make budget documents veritable bases on which to hold the central government accountable for the distribution of federally collected revenues to the federating units and for monitoring the application of such revenues strictly for the good of the citizenry.

However, a federal financial system such as Nigeria is usually characterised by multilevel systems of tax and revenue sharing powers between at least two levels of political authority (Oates 1972). It is therefore not unusual to have in the budget of a federal state, provisions for vertical and horizontal transfers of revenues between at least two levels of political authority and the enunciation of fiscal policies that seek to concede some clearly defined tax powers to local levels of authority. This is what some authors have referred to as “fiscal federalism” (Taiwo 1999; Oates 1972). Fiscal federalism was embodied in all the constitutions made for and by Nigeria from 1954, when the country first became a federal state, to 1999, when her current and extant constitution was made (NC 1954; CFN 1960; CFRN 1979; CFRN 1999: section 162). All these constitutions created what they called the “Federation Account” or the “Distributable Pool Account” into which all federally collected revenues were paid and from where they were also shared vertically, between the federal centre and the component states of Nigeria on the one hand and horizontally, among the various component states of Nigeria on the other. But even at that, federal budgets differ from one country to another in terms of their size, structure and components owing to the diversity of legal regimes, stage of political evolution and the level of socio-economic development.

Objective of Study

In this study, we discuss the essential characteristics peculiar to Nigeria's federal budgets from 1954 up to year 2000. The purpose is to show how the dynamics of such characteristics shaped the course of development of the budget and the budgeting processes of Nigeria and how they also, either engendered or endangered accountability during the fifty-five-year period of the country's financial history.

Review of Literature

Scholarly interest in the subject of public budgeting in Nigeria has not been lukewarm. Authors, especially from the social sciences, have delved into the issues of budgeting in Nigeria with great intellectual fervour, suggesting most often a list of remedial measures to what they perceived as the problems of resource application through the budget. But such scholarly interest has been tilted more to the problems of budgeting generally than to the character of the budget and the budgeting process of Nigeria. This explains why the work of authors such as Stolper (1966), Enodien (1984), Fapojuwo (1995) and Omolehinwa and Roe (1989) all focus on the problems of budgeting in Nigeria, namely: socio-economic constraints in resource allocation, inadequate data for planning, organisational and coordination problems as well as the disconnection between budgeting and planning in Nigeria.

Although Olaloku (1995) and Omolehinwa (2001) have tried to remedy the lopsidedness in the analysis of budgeting issues, that is, the over-concentration on budgeting problems to the almost total exclusion of the problems of character of the budget, which led to those problems when, in their separate studies, they espoused and discussed certain germane issues in budgeting in Nigeria during the Second Republic. But the fact that their works go no further back in time than the 1970s make them lack the historical depth that an analysis of Nigeria's budgetary systems from the inception of fiscal federalism in 1954 up to the year 2000 requires. The present study shows and discusses not only the character of the federal budget of Nigeria as a document of financial control but also analyses the historical factors that conditioned such features as the country evolved in the second half of the 20th century into a modern state of multiple political and financial jurisdictions.

Methodology and Structure of the Study

The historical method is adopted in this study. Data are employed from archival and secondary sources derived from the Nigerian National Archives in Ibadan, the Federal Ministry of Finance and the offices of the Accountant-General and Auditor-General for Federation, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), all in Abuja, the Federal capital territory, and from the National Library of Nigeria. The study identifies the period of study as 1954–2000 and gathers all 47 federal budget documents that were made and passed into law during this period. It subjects these document to historical analysis by drawing from them common features they manifest guided by the four universal budget cycle of: preparation, presentation to parliament, legitimation by parliament, and monitoring and evaluation. The study also looks into the financial year of the budget and the types of budget made during the study period by comparing every estimate in each of the 47 budget documents gathered. The data derived were subjected to exegetical analysis of all common features found in them. A discussion of the findings is conducted chronologically to reveal four different analytic framework for the study, namely: (i) the structure of the budget, (ii) the budget making process including legitimation, (iii) the budget duration and typology, and (iv) the budget monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

Budget Structure

Revenue

The revenue side of the Nigerian budget was usually divided into two broad categories: (i) current/ordinary revenue and (ii) extra-ordinary revenue. The current revenue section of the budget was made up of 14 clearly outlined revenue sources, namely: (1) customs and excise duties, (2) direct taxes, (3) licences, (4) mining (rents and royalties), (5) fees of courts and offices, (6) colliery, (7) marine and harbour, (8) posts and telegraphs, (9) electricity and water rates, (10) earnings of government departments, (11) rents of government property, (12) interests on savings and investment, (13) sale of land, and (14) miscellaneous income (AGF Report 1955: iii-v).

During the decolonisation period of 1954–1960 there were four revenue heads under the extraordinary revenue category and this comprised: (1) Colonial Development Fund, (2) Grants and Grants in-aid, (3) Gifts, and (4) Reimbursement (AGF Report 1956: 51–52). In all six years of decolonisation (1954–1960) and after, until 1970, revenue from the Customs and Excise Department brought into treasury the largest earnings of government. This source of revenue brought into the coffers of government at all times within the period more than half of the total government revenue (AGF Reports 1954, 1960). Petroleum (oil) revenue, on which Nigeria is now highly dependent, was never part of the revenue sources of government until 1958 (AGF Report 1959). Specifically, the first petroleum export left the Nigerian shores on 17 February 1958 (Okotie-Eboh 1963: 25). Thus, the government's first income from the petroleum sub-sector in the sum of £48,454 in the 1958/59 fiscal year was a very small proportion of the total revenue of £77,315,614 earned that year (AGF Report 1959: 2). In other words, the oil sub-sector contributed just 0.06 % of the total revenue that accrued to government in the 1958/59 fiscal year and less than 2 % by the time Nigeria secured her independence from Britain in 1960.

After 1958, revenue from the Customs and Excise Department still continued to lead throughout the rest of colonial rule and for more than a decade after the advent of oil revenue. In 1972, however, petroleum took over the leadership from the Customs and Excise revenue because, in that year, out of a total revenue of N1,405.1 million, the petroleum sub-sector alone accounted for N764.3 million or some 54 % of the total revenue in that year (CBN 2000: 92). The sub-sector continued after this to lead other revenue heads in terms of the amount it contributed to federal coffers up to 2000. Thus, the dominance of oil revenue was a most visible feature of Nigeria's federal revenue budget in the post 1972 period up untill 2000. In fact, in 1980, 1990 and 2000, earnings from petroleum exports brought into the federal treasury the sums of N12.353 billion, N71.887 million, and N1,591.7 respectively (CBN 2000: 93–94; CBN 2007: 109), which in proportional terms was 81.1 %, 84.3 % and 83.5 % of the total revenues, in the corresponding years.

Expenditure

As a feature of the Nigerian federal budget from 1954 to 2000, the expenditure side was the most dominant part of the government's budgetary structure. When citizens complained of the non-implementation of the budget, they actually were referring to the expenditure side of it, because, it was from the expenditure side of the budget that the performance of government in terms of its provision of social welfare goods and in arresting inflation could be gauged. Thus, in the period under review, government expenditure activities dominated the budget document. The expenditure side was divided into two parts: (i) recurrent expenditure and (ii) capital expenditure. Recurrent expenditure concerned all government payments for salaries, wages and overhead costs of governance, while capital expenditure dealt with the cost of capital goods acquisition such as the building of roads, bridges and other public utilities. Nevertheless, the constantly recurring items of government expenditure in all periods from 1954 up to 1986 either for the recurrent or capital expenditure were 52 in number and they are as shown in table 1 below.

Table 1: Expenditure Heads under Colonial Government, 1945–1960

1.	Public debt	2.	Governor	3.	Accountant-General
4.	Administrator-General	5.	Agriculture	6.	Audit
7.	Aviation	8.	Chemistry	9.	Colliery
10.	Commerce and Industry	11.	Co-operative Societies	12.	Customs and Excise
13.	Education	14.	Electricity	15.	Education
16.	Extra-Deptal Services	17.	Forestry	18.	Geological services
19.	Inland Revenue	20.	Judicial	21.	Labour
22.	Land	23.	Legal	24.	Legislature
25.	Marine	26.	Marketing and Exports	27.	Medical
28.	Medical (sleeping sickness)	29.	Meteorological services	30.	Military and Defence
31.	Mines	32.	Miscellaneous	33.	Pension and Gratuities

34.	Police	35.	Posts and Telegraphs	36.	Printing, stationery depot
37.	Prisons	38.	Provincial Administration	39.	Public Relations
40.	Public Works	41.	Re-settlement of ex-servicemen	42.	Secretariat
43.	Statistics	44.	Subventions	45.	Surveys
46.	Transport	47.	Veterinary	48.	Regional services and works
49.	Broadcasting	50.	Colonial Development and Welfare	51.	Railway
52.	Statutory Appropriation	53.	Special expenditure	54.	Extra-ordinary Expenditure
55.	Oil Mineral Producing Areas	56.	Liquefied Natural Gas Project		

Source: *Report of the Accountant-General of the Federation together with Financial Statements* (1954–1960, 1986 fiscal years)

It is instructive to note that the first expenditure item of government in the list above is public debt. It was not for nothing that this expenditure item was made the first in the list during the colonial period of 1954–1960. Government attached great importance to keeping its account books safely out of any deficit or debt-trap situations. Thus, great pain was taken to ensure that creditors were paid first or that debt servicing obligations were fulfilled before any other expenditure was made in the course of government business. It is important also to note that the Nigerian colonial government maintained a budget surplus account throughout the six-year period of 1954 to 1960. It is equally noteworthy that government even after the end of the colonial rule up to 2000 neither radically departed from nor added any significant number of expenditure items to those shown in table 1 except for the Oil Mineral Producing Areas (OMPADEC), the Petroleum Trust Fund Account (PTF) and the Niger Delta Development Commission, which were additions made under the regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993), General Sani Abacha (1993–1998) and President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999), respectively.

In the period 1954–1960, recurrent expenditure as opposed to capital expenditure dominated government expenditure activities (Ogunyemi 2008). The reason being that the overall expenditure policy of the government was not the development of the Nigerian economy but its maintenance in order to suit the pattern built for colonial exploitation in British dependent territories. After independence, however, capital expenditure began to lead on the expenditure profile. In fact, within the first six years of Nigeria's independence (1960–1966), the country's national leaders, being manifestly concerned with the poor state of the country's infrastructure and desirous of jump-starting the economy, aggressively sought and secured huge loans in addition to the country's growing revenues to build roads, bridges, dams and to acquire other social goods for the planned industrial "take-off" of the country (Okotie-Eboh 1963: 39). For example, the Niger Bridge and the Niger dam, the two greatest capital projects built in the period, were completed and put to use. On the Niger dam alone, the government spent a sum of £67 million (Okotie-Eboh 1963:82) for which it borrowed $13.1 million from the Italian government in 1964, which was Nigeria's first Paris Club bilateral debt (DMO 2005: 3).

Again, by 1970, the Federal Government expenditure had become so profound that it became very obvious that the government had been overspending its revenue in millions of Naira. This created a huge cumulative deficit expenditure of £199,702,159 from 1961 to 1969. The deficit spending laid the foundations in subsequent years for a culture of deficit financing, which pervaded Nigeria's federal finance from 1970 up to 2000. In fact, except for the six fiscal years of 1960/61, 1970/71, 1973/74, 1990, 1995 and 1996, there were no other years during the 40-year period between 1960 and 2000 in which the Nigerian government was able to balance its budget (CBN 1992: 93–95; CBN 2007: 102–104). In fact, from 1970 up to 2000, the Federal Government of Nigeria posted overall fiscal deficits throughout. For instance, in the years 1970, 1980, 1991 and 2000, the overall deficits incurred were in the sums of NGN455.1 million, NGN1,975.2 million, NGN35,755.2 million and NGN103,777.3 million respectively (CBN 2007: 102–104).

Public Debt

The natural consequence of the deficit financing of the budget soon dawned on the federal government. Huge domestic and external debts became the stark reality of the unbridled borrowing and the government had to begin to contend with servicing them at great costs to the development of the country. Although the larger proportion of the debt was owed to domestic creditors before 1990, during this date and subsequently after, external indebtedness grew faster than domestic indebtedness. For example, it rose from just about 18 % of the total debt in 1980 to 78 % in 1990. By the year 2000, external debt stood at 77.6 %. The largest chunk of this debt and certainly the most disturbing of the capacity of the budget to fund development were those owed to the Paris Club group of creditors which was about 80 % of the external debt of the country in the period under review.

Table 2 shows Nigeria's debt owed to both domestic and external sources in selected years. The point being made here is that external debt, which required huge foreign exchange to service, frustrated the capital budget beginning in 1990 up to 2000 because it increasingly diminished the quantum of foreign exchange that was available for the funding of Nigeria's imports and for the building of economic infrastructure and the creation of wealth through the budget. In fact, the external indebtedness was so negatively profound on the country's development that in fiscal years 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990, which were the years in which the austerity measures designed to reverse Nigeria's fiscal imbalance were most harshly implemented, external debts as percentages of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country were, in that order, 92.6 %, 92.2 %, 106.9 % and 114.6 %, respectively (CBN 2000: 100–101).

This meant that the burden of external indebtedness alone, discounting that of domestic debt and their servicing had, even by the middle of the 1980s, begun to wipe out any gains achieved from the GDP. The picture was never any significantly better in the subsequent years from 1991 to 2000 because debt to GDP ratio in all those years averaged no less than 60 % of the GDP, in fact, in 2000 specifically, the external debt to GDP ratio was a whopping 86.4 % (CBN 2000: 101)

Table 2: Nigeria's Domestic and External Debt (NGN 'million)

Year	Total debt	Domestic	Domestic as % of total	External	External as % of total
1960/61	65.6	43.5	66.32	22.1	33.68
1965	194.4	131.3	67.55	63.1	32.45
1970	1,286.9	1,111.9	86.40	175.0	13.60
1975	2,028.8	1,678.9	82.76	349.9	17.24
1980	10,098.3	8,231.5	81.52	1866.8	18.48
1985	45,252.6	27,952.0	61.77	17,300.6	38.23
1990	382,739.0	84,124.6	22.00	298,614.4	78.00
1995	1,057,947.9	341,082.3	32.30	716,865.6	67.70
2000	4,019,979.7	898,253.9	22.40	3,121,725.8	77.60

Sources: (i) Federal Government of Nigeria. *Report of the Accountant-General of the Federation Together with Financial Statements, 1961–1980*. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Finance; (ii) Central Bank of Nigeria, 2000, *Statistical Bulletin,* vol. 11, No. 12. Lagos: CBN.

Budget Initiation and Enactment

Prior to independence in 1960, it was a feature of the Nigerian budgetary process for the Governor of Nigeria (or Governor-General), acting in close consultation with the Lt. Governors of the Regions, to draft the budget document, making adjustments where necessary but ensuring at all times that expenditure items were kept significantly below revenue projections. The Governor would thereafter send the document to the Colonial Secretary of State for the Colonies in London for his approval (Lawal 1979: 5–6, Ogunyemi 2008: 5–9). But from 1960 up to 2000, responsibilities for budget making became the duties of either the Nigerian Council of Ministers or the President (CFN 1960: section 124; CFRN 1999: section 81(1)). Although input was sought at various times from the National Planning Commission and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the ultimate responsibility for the formulation, articulation and preparation of the budget document rested with the President and his Executive Council. In other words, the powers to initiate the budget belonged to the exclusive sphere of authority of the executive arm of government.

The Ministry of Finance was the flagship of the budget-making process and it did this by annually issuing circulars to the budget account officers of all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), requesting that they submit to it their expenditure needs and their estimates of revenue (if they were revenue generating bodies like the Department of Customs Service). All documents submitted in pursuance of such circulars were aggregated and articulated into a list of estimates, which were then submitted to the Executive Council for its consideration and approval. The concurrence of the President (under the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions) was, however, needed before a clean copy of the document could be produced and presented before the legislature as an Appropriation Bill for its legitimation processes to begin. The executive arm of the Nigerian federal government never failed to fulfil this constitutional duty during the period studied.

Budget Presentation

Nigeria's constitutional law from 1954 up to 2010 set no time limits for the presentation of the budget document to the legislature. The 1963 Constitution, for instance, only required the Minister responsible for finance to "cause to be prepared and laid before both Houses of the National Assembly in each financial year estimates of the revenue and expenditure of the Federation for the following financial year" (CFN 1963: section 130(1)). This constitutional provision had been made in the 1954 Constitution and in its amended versions of 1957 and 1958. It was also codified in the Finance (Control and Management) Act of 1958 (FRN 1958: section 13(1)). But after the promulgation of the 1979 Constitution and the institution of a Presidential System of Government in that year, the responsibility for laying the budget before the legislature was no longer that of the Minister responsible for finance but of the President of Nigeria (CFRN 1979: section 75(1)). Hence, from that time up to the year 2000 only the Nigerian President caused the budget to be prepared. He also, personally, laid it before the National Assembly (i.e., the national legislature, except during military rule), which had the power either to reject it or pass it into law as an Appropriation Act (CFRN 1979: 74(1–4)).

It was characteristic of the two Houses of the National Assembly – the Senate and the House of Representatives – to sit jointly in order to receive the budget. Although according to the strictest interpretation of the relevant portions of the law that required the President to lay the budget before the National Assembly, it was not clear that he needed to appear in person to lay it before the Assembly (CFRN 1979: section 75(1), CFRN 1999: section 81(1)), his personal appearance grew over the years to become an established convention that was routinely followed. No President elected under the 1979 and 1999 Constitutions and up until 2000 failed to personally appear before the legislature to present his budget proposals.

Thus, the budget was always embodied in an Appropriation Bill and transmitted to the legislature by the President for its approval. But one particularly queer constitutional provision also characterised the budget presentation process. This was the provision in respect of the specific time the President should cause it to be laid before the National Assembly. Under the 1979 Constitution, for instance, the President was only required to lay the budget "at any time in each financial year" (CFRN 1979: section 75(1)). The extant 1999 Constitution also retained this provision (CFRN 1999: section 81(1)). Yet, there existed a directly contradictory statutory provision contained in the Finance (Control and Management) Act of 1958, which provided for a specific time-frame within which the budget ought to be laid before the National Assembly. This law, which was amended in 1985, provided *inter alia,* that:

The Minister shall cause to be prepared in each financial year estimates of the revenues and expenditure of the Federation for the next following financial year, which shall be presented to the President for approval and when approved by him shall be laid before the House of Representatives at a meeting commencing before the 1st day of January of the financial year to which they relate (FRN 1958: section 13(1)).

The amended version of this law, as noted earlier, still retains this specific timing provision and it appears that the provision, among other things, delimited the discretionary powers of the President on the time he should lay the budget estimates before the legislature. However, the practice in the period under review was that the President or the Minister of Finance ignored the timing provision contained in the Act and, instead, laid the budget whenever the President deemed fit and expedient. For example, the budget for 1982 was laid on 12

December, 1981, while the one for year 2000 was laid on 24 November 1999 (Ogunyemi 2012).

It is important to note that the budget during the years of military rule (1966–1979 and 1984–1999) was not presented to any elected legislative assembly but directly to all Nigerian people via either radio or television broadcasts, because during the military regimes, except between 1992 and 1993, there was no question of a legislature that represented the Nigerian people before whom the budget should be laid existed. The military governments that governed Nigeria in these periods presented their budgets via broadcasts. They did so only for publicity reasons and not for any attempt at seeking the approval of the public for those budgets.

This explains why the degree of public accountability both in the making and in the implementation of the public budgets during 1966–1979 and 1984–1999 under the military regimes was very low. This was reflected in the degree of fiscal indiscipline shown during these periods, especially the use of extra-budgetary expenditure in sheer disregard of the Appropriation Decrees enacted for those years (FOS 1996). In the era of the military government headed by General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993), the rules of budgetary accountability were routinely broken. For example, the government did not just exceed its approved expenditure ceilings contained in the budget but wantonly disregarded even the rules of prudence made by it in the application of public revenues. The Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics (FOS), a body noted for its reticence in the release of information that could be critical of government, was forced to admit in its report on Nigeria's socio-economic situation in 1996 the high level of failure of non-accountability and contravention of extant laws guiding government fiscal operations:

Fiscal balance has been largely negative since 1987, even worse than what obtained between 1980–1984. As a point of emphasis, fiscal indiscipline has jeopardised the sustainability of the reform process and introduced uncertainty that has delayed the recovery of private investment. Increased off-budget spending and continued financing of unviable investment projects since 1990 has eroded fiscal and monetary discipline. The temporary revenue windfall resulting from the Gulf crisis facilitated the re-emergence of large-scale spending of oil revenues through means that are outside of the statutory budgetary and accounting framework (FOS 1996: 37).

The military governments of General Sani Abacha (1993–1998) and General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar (June 1998–May 1999), which succeeded those of General Babangida, were hardly ever better. They also significantly disregarded the rules of budgetary accountability. Extra-budgetary expenditure was rife during the very short rule of General Abubakar (June 1998–May 1999), while it is on good record that General Sani Abacha removed huge sums of money belonging to the federal government to his personal accounts abroad (Abimboye 2008: 18–23).

Budget Legitimation

If there was any law-making process that absolutely vested in the Nigerian legislature powers over the approval of financial plans made by the government, it was the law on the budget legitimation process. Copious constitutional provisions in the 1954, 1960, 1963 and 1979 Constitutions did not leave any doubt of the supremacy of the legislature over money bills and particularly public expenditure. The ultimate purposes were to ensure prudence in the use of public moneys and to make for accountable governance. For example, relevant sections in the 1963 Constitution provided that:

All revenues or other moneys raised or received by the Federation (not being revenues or other moneys payable under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament into some other public funds of the Federation established for a specific purpose) shall be paid into and form one Consolidated Revenue Fund (CFN 1963: section 129(1)).

Further still, the Constitution provided:

No moneys shall be withdrawn from the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the Federation except to meet expenditure that is charged upon the fund by this Constitution or any Act of Parliament or where the issue of those moneys has been authorised by an Appropriation Act or an Act passed in pursuance of section 131 of this constitution (CFN 1963: section 129(2)).

And, in addition, it stipulated:

No moneys shall be withdrawn from any public fund of the Federation other than the Consolidated Revenue Fund unless the issue of those moneys has been authorised by an Act of Parliament (CFN 1963: section 129(3)).

The three provisions cited above were repeated in similar provisions in all material particulars, by the 1979 Constitution (CFRN 1979: section 74(1–4)) and the extant 1999 Constitution (CFRN 1999: section 80(1–4)) with little changes. All the constitutions affirmed the pre-eminence of the legislature in the process of making all money bills become a law for the purposes of Nigeria's public finance. However, during the military regimes, the legitimation process of the budget was the exclusive preserve of the highest decision and law-making body of the respective military governments that ruled in the period. For example, the Supreme Military Council, which was the highest legislative organ under the military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo (1976–1979), approved his government's budgets while a similar body, the Armed Forces Ruling Council, passed and approved all government budgets under the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993).

Budget/Financial Year

Since budgets are temporary financial statements of intentions made under certain variables and conditions, they are timed and tied to some clearly defined fiscal periods within which these variables are expected to be relevant and applicable. Hence, laws are made to provide for the fiscal time-frame within which a budget should be extant and outside of which its provisions are expected to lapse. But there was the question of when to begin to count the twelve-calendar months for the budget year. Prior to that time, and especially under colonial rule, Nigeria's fiscal year always began on the 1st of April and ended on the 31st of March of the following year (Ogunyemi 2008). This was in 1914, after the Northern and the Southern Protectorates, into which the British colonial rulers had divided the country politically, were amalgamated. Before the amalgamation and, beginning in 1863 up to 1913, the Southern Protectorate's financial year was 1 January to 31 December of every calendar year (Ogunyemi 2008: 81).

The Northern Protectorate had had the period 1 April to 31 March of the following year as its own budgetary period. Single-year budgeting, calculated as twelve-calendar months, characterised the budgeting system of the Nigerian federal government. In fact, nowhere in the financial experience of the country from 1954 to 2000 was a multi-year budgeting technique used. Even in the early 1980s, when the Planning Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS) was adopted for a brief period under the administration of President Shehu Shagari (1979–1983) (Akinyele 1981; Enodien 1984), which could have made provisions for multi-year budgeting necessary, Nigeria still held on to the single year budgeting system. Hence, in all fiscal years covered by this study, Nigeria's Appropriation Acts had effect within only a single financial year for which they were made.

However, in 1980, a law was made which provided for Nigeria's financial and budget year (Financial Year Act 1980), ordering that the Nigerian financial year should begin on the 1st of January and end on the 31st of December of every calendar year (FRN 1980: section 1). This law was introduced under the presidency of Alhaji Shehu Shagari (1979–1983). President Shagari's government wanted to bring about a synergy in the fiscal operations of the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Ministry of Finance and thereby avoid a situation in which the two vital agencies of government, which controlled the revenue and expenditure input into the budget, would have different accounting years within the same economy. Prior to 1980, the CBN's accounting year was January-December but the Ministry of Finance's accounting year was April-March of the succeeding year. The 1980 Act was thus intended among other objectives to avoid the likely confusion, which the use of two different accounting years could have on the accountability process of financial reporting on government finances. The law was widely accepted and remained in force from 1980 up to 2000.

Repetitive Budgeting

Repetitive budgeting was also a major feature of the Nigerian federal budget. By repetitive budgeting, in the words of Aaron Wildavsky, means that, a "budget is not made once and for all when estimates are submitted and approved, rather, as the process of budgeting is repeated, it is made and remade over the course of the year"

(Wildavsky 1974: 71). It has been noted that repetitive budgeting is closely associated with underdeveloped or poor countries and "its most extreme manifestation" is that "changes may be made from day–to-day or even from one hour to the next" (Wildavsky 1974: 72). The Nigeria Federal government's budgeting history can be validly said to be a history of repetitive budgeting. This is because even from as early as 1965, in its immediate post-independence history, up to the late 1990s, the country's financial activities were characterised by utter instability in the drafting of expenditure proposals while estimates submitted as revenue expectations were far from accurate (Omolehinwa 2001; Ogunyemi 2008). Government made, unmade and remade its budget in such a way that instability in data reduced the predictive value of the documents, which made them cease to be veritable guides for fiscal planning of any sort.

In fact, budgets ceased to be instruments for accurately gauging the revenue and expenditure profiles of government. Most of the revenue and expenditure proposals contained in federal budgets were no more than an attempt at obeying the routine of budgeting (particularly during the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, 1985–1993), rather than an attempt at serious short-term fiscal planning that public budgets are known for in properly organised financial jurisdictions all over the world. During General Babangida's era, budgetary appropriations were observed more in the breach than in compliance (Ogunyemi 2008; FOS 1996). This explains why extra-budgetary spending characterised the fiscal operations of the government during the period (FOS 1996: 36–37).

Two major reasons can be identified as the causes of repetitive budgeting in Nigeria. First, there was the virtual total reliance on revenues from oil exports between 1972 and 2000 to the exclusion of other veritable sources. But the prices of oil were always dependent on the tempo of (political and economic) events on the world oil market, which were very volatile and unstable. Thus, the estimates of revenue based on oil price projections fluctuated either upwards or downwards, most often between 1981 and 1999. Evidence shows that at no time from 1972 (which was the year that revenues from petroleum export superseded those from Custom and Excise duties in Nigeria) to the mid-1980s, when oil revenues started to decline sharply, was the price of the commodity stable on the international market (Onoh

1983; Castro 1983; Ogwu and Olaniyan 1988). Hence, planners and bureaucrats constantly adjusted their revenue budgets as events on the world oil market dictated.

The cumulative effect of the instability in the revenue profile of Nigeria was that planners were faced with constantly changing income profiles. Thus, all projections which fell below the actual revenue accruals had to be re-made each time when there was either a positive or a negative variance in the estimates contained in the budget. Thus, a huge variance, which made for unstable revenue projections, characterised Nigeria's federal budgets both in the period of oil wealth and in that of its decline (Ogunyemi 1997; Olukoshi 1990). Expenditure patterns, too, were extremely unstable because the government always overspent its revenues (CBN 2000: 93–94). Even when unplanned but favourable increases in revenues were recorded, far above budget estimates, the government still went ahead to exhaust the unexpected income and incurred even greater deficits through its spending (Okigbo 1994). Therefore, the two debilities of unstable revenue and extra-budgetary expenditure combined to whittle down budget discipline and to ridicule the predictive value which the government budget was expected to have.

The second major reason for repetitive budgeting during the period under review was the shortage of financial resources needed to implement the projects planned. This may sound paradoxical since, many times during the review period, actual revenues that accrued to government coffers exceeded the set budget expectations. But the fact was, that as the income increased from the early 1970s to 1981, the government became over-ambitious with its expenditure plans. It built into its successive budgets in those years, particularly after 1972, too many huge and capital-intensive projects designed for implementation in too short a time-span without much thought as to the unstable nature of Nigeria's oil-dependent economy. Thus, capital-intensive projects such as the Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Mill, the Aladja Steel Plant, the Nigerian Newsprint and Paper Company at Oku-Iboku, the Aluminium Smelting Company at Ikot-Abasi, and the building of a new capital city at Abuja and other similar capital projects scattered round the country, became huge drains on the revenues of the country. Hence, when revenues began to shrink in the early 1980s, the projects became abandoned.

Apart from the fact that these capital projects cost Nigeria its fiscal stability, none of them was completed. Apart from the development of the federal capital city of Abuja, all other capital projects begun by the government during 1970 and 1990 became incalculable financial liabilities to the Nigerian economy. A commission installed on 4 March 2011 by President Goodluck Jonathan to review the extent of completion and the amount of money spent on the various capital-intensive projects that the government had embarked upon in the period 1970–1990, reported that a total of NGN7.78 trillion (about $51 billion) was spent on 11,888 on-going and abandoned projects without any significant or commensurate returns in value to the Nigerian economy (*The Punch*, (3 June) 2011: 1–2). The uncompleted Ajaokuta Steel Rolling Mill alone was reported to have cost the government a whooping NGN675 billion ($4.5 billion) without it being completed and made useful to the economy.

However, from the period of the decline in oil revenue (beginning in 1981) up to 1998, shortage in the financial resources of government led to constant changes in government financial plans. The changes were manifested in the government making and remaking of its budget through the re-negotiation of contracts, cancellations of some projects, the introduction of cost-saving measures like the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and the re-negotiation of the country's debt by way either of conversion or "debt buy-back" strategies (Olukoshi 1990: 135–160; Akinnifesi 1990: 176–194). From 1980 to 2000, for instance, external (foreign) debt was the most debilitating of all financial problems that bedevilled Nigeria.

Debt servicing and repayments obligations on debt were so destructive of budgetary plans, especially of capital expenditure plans and the attempts at alleviating the problems of poverty, that the country had to commit in most years sums of money equal to 40 % of government revenue to debt servicing (CBN 2000: 100–101). This affected the fiscal balance of the economy leading to the diminution of the allocation to infrastructural development in the budget (Ogunyemi 2008; Adubi and Odusola 1999). Worse still, capacity utilisation in the manufacturing industries declined to less than their 1979 levels (Anyanwu et al. 1997: 33–44). In addition, the retrenchment of public workers became an option in managing Nigeria's highly "traumatised" economy and a huge unemployment burden became foisted on the country (Okongwu 1987; Ikara 1989; NES 1994).

Budget Monitoring and Reporting Processes

Many laws existed about the proper process for fiscal accountability in Nigeria during the study period, which were expected to instil budget discipline and prudence. But the exploitation of loopholes in these laws and financial regulations became a feature of the implementation, monitoring and reporting processes of Nigeria's federal budgets, especially under military rule. This compromised to a large extent the accountability standards of the process. A notable instance of this was in the circumvention of the financial regulation which provided that all moneys left unspent within the vote of any Ministry or Agency and all bank balances at the end of each financial year should be returned to the Consolidated Revenue Fund through the office of the Accountant General of the Federation (FRN 1958: section 16). The reason was that it would be easy and more accountable to trace the moneys that were approved, but which for any reasons could not be spent within the financial year for which they were appropriated. The intent of the legislature in enacting such a regulation, obviously, was to ensure transparency and accountability and to prevent a situation in which indefensible expenditures were pushed to the end of a financial year when approvals would be hurriedly made to beat the 31 December deadline of the end of the financial year and to thus cleverly escape audit scrutiny for that year.

Evidence, however, shows that in spite of the financial regulation for the return of unspent balances at the end of the budget year, the actual practice in most Federal Ministries in the period under review was that the approval of sundry expenditure, especially furniture replacements, travels and maintenance of equipment were rushed through between November and December of each year in order to exhaust or, even at times, exceed their expenditure votes. This fact was reported by the Auditor-General for the Federation and shown in his reports for the fiscal years 1954, 1956, 1960, 1980, 1999 and 2000 (Audit Report 1954, 1956, 1980, 1999, 2000).

Again, Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) were in the habit of spending more than their approved expenditure ceilings and without the backing of a duly approved expenditure budget. This was done when cheques purportedly issued for payment pursuant to expenditures contained in an extant budget were delayed until the following budget year during which they were issued to creditors and contractors between January and April of that succeeding year (Ogunyemi 2008). And, when such cheques were presented to the bank, the banks honoured them based on the long-standing rule that a cheque was validly presented within six months of its issuance.

Thus, cheques, which were presented, for instance, in the second quarter of a succeeding year, were charged to the budget votes of the previous year rather than the financial year in which they were presented. In this way, bureaucrats ensured that the expenditure escaped the scrutiny of the Auditor-General for the year against which it was charged and, at the same time, encouraged the making of an expenditure decision that did not receive any legislative approval. No record exists yet, that this practice, which constituted a breach of the Finance (Control and Management) Act of 1958 and the Audit Act of 1956, was ever sanctioned in the period under review.

The Auditor-General for the Federation, at different times, raised alarm over this practice without the appropriate authorities taking any actions whatsoever to apprehend the culprits (Audit Report 1954: 5–7; Audit Report 1960: 1–2; Audit Report 2000: 16). Still another way with which financial rules were side-tracked was in the practice of senior bureaucrats in the Federal Ministries of transferring unspent moneys in the expenditure votes of their Ministries to deposit accounts or paying them into accounts of parastatals under their supervision. That way, the moneys could no longer be regarded as unspent since by law and convention the auditing of the accounts of parastatals fell outside the purview of the Auditor-General. The 1979 Constitution removed his powers to directly audit these accounts. The same queer provision has been followed in the current 1999 Constitution (cf. CFRN 1979: section79 (1–3) and CFRN 1999: section 85 (1–6).

However, the unspent moneys could only be detected by the Auditor-General of the Federation if the supervising Ministry made adequate "transcripts" and "returns" available to him at the end of each financial year. But in the history of oversight duties of the Auditor-General, especially after Nigeria's independence in 1960 up to 2000, adequate transcripts were hardly sent from the Ministries and agencies or even from the Accountant-General's office to the Auditor-General timely enough to permit any forensic auditing (Ogunyemi 2008: 199).

Even when audit queries were raised about this dereliction of duty, they were hardly ever satisfactorily answered (Audit Report, 1954: 3, Audit Report, 1962: 18). The major reason being that, and unlike in the comparable case of the Republic of Ghana, the Auditor-General had neither constitutional nor statutory powers to sanction corrupt acts or any infraction of the financial laws of the country (Ogunyemi 2011b: 36–39). He could not even surcharge an officer who wilfully or negligently caused the government to suffer losses to its treasury, let alone those who committed theft and outright embezzlement of public moneys and physical assets. The only option opened to the Auditor-General under Nigeria's laws in the period under review was to report to the Minister of Finance or the President of Nigeria or the legislature on infractions of the country's fiscal laws (FRN 1956: sections 9(3), 11). The problem with this provision of the law lay in those cases in which the audit report indicted either the President, or the Minister of Finance to whom the report was expected to be made.

However, records have shown that even when audit reports were made available to the appropriate authorities, they were sparingly attended to. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), for instance, was one of such authorities. It was a statutory body which had the legal responsibility of receiving and treating audit reports in the legislature (FRN 1987: sections 4–5). It was a grossly ineffective body lacking both in the political will and moral authority to sanction corrupt acts. Chief Olu Falae, a former Secretary to the Government of the Federation, dismissed the body as an utterly helpless instrument in the task of bringing corrupt public officials to justice. He said in 1989:

The report of the Public Accounts Committee is a frustrating tale of unanswered queries and embezzlers who had either left the government service or died without paying back what they corruptly acquired (*Daily Times* 1989: 14 Sept. pp. 1–4).

The Public Accounts Committee neither arraigned for prosecution nor sanctioned directly any public officers, who were indicted by several audit reports of acts of corruption and embezzlement. The result was that the level of accountable governance especially in the use of public moneys declined precipitously.

Summary

Nigeria Federal budgets showed some basic features common to public budgets elsewhere. These included: the division of the budget document into three main sections of revenue, expenditure, and public debt account. The expenditure section was further divided into recurrent and capital expenditure sides. The budget was also characterised by a dominance of the executive arm of government in its formulation and drafting as opposed to the input from the legislature. Again, the Nigeria federal budget duration was limited to only one calendar year. The country never had a multi-year budgeting system and, as such, the country's financial year, which was the same as the budget year before 1980, began on the 1st of April and ended on the 31st of March of the following year. This was changed in 1980 to run from 1st January to 31st December. Also, repetitive budgeting characterised the budget process in the period under review, because the budget oscillated with constantly changing revenue profiles while the government never really stuck to its expenditure plans. The result was that government embarked upon extra-budgetary spending at will, a practice that imperilled its fiscal stability.

Conclusion

Nigeria's budgetary processes during 1954–2000 were not without an adequate procedural and legal framework for ensuring prudence in the use of public resources. Diverse and numerous constitutional provisions from 1954 to 1999 codified very significant frameworks for accountability, the due process of resource application and the requirements of economy and transparency in the application of public funds. These were reflected in the characteristic features of Nigeria's federal budget and formed the platform for the construction of the rules for its financial administration. But the greatest problems of the budget process in the period were those of repetitive budgeting, lopsidedness in the allocation of the greater proportion of the country's financial assets to the funding of the recurrent budget than the capital budget, which stultified growth, and very weak monitoring and reporting frameworks for budget implementation and performance.

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