

Public Complaints Commission and the Challenges of Administration of Justice in Nigeria: Awka, Anambra State Experience

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Received: 15 July 2024

Accepted: 22 July 2024

Published: 29 July 2024

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Abstract

The establishment of the Public Complaint Commission system was intended to fulfil its designated duties, but the interference in the operations and activities of the Public Complaint Commission in Nigeria, particularly the Awka chapter, indicates that it is not fully carrying out its responsibilities, as it has gradually come under the influence of the government. However, researchers from allied literatures have analysed the formations, functions, and shortcomings of the Public Complaint Commission system in Nigeria using theoretical frameworks. There has been a lack of empirical examination of the Ombudsman's operations, particularly in relation to administrative unfairness in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. The research investigated the role of the public complaints commission in resolving the issues of administering justice in Nigeria, specifically focussing on the experience in Awka, Anambra State. The study formulated four research questions and accompanying goals, while using the Structural Functionalism theory as a guiding framework. The researcher used secondary sources for data collecting, including textbooks, journals, and periodicals. The study's findings indicate that the Public Complaint Commission functions as a means of seeking redress against arbitrary government or administrative measures. However, the effectiveness of the commission relies on the public's complete awareness of its free and expedient services. The research suggested, among other things, that there should be sufficient promotion and public awareness campaign on the activities, powers, and jurisdiction of the commission. This would help ensure that the public is informed of the existence of the Public Complaint Commission and its operational scope.

Keywords

Public Complaint Commission, Administration of Justice, Justice, Human Rights

Introduction

The Public Complaints Commission is globally recognised as the Ombudsman. The role of the Ombudsman is recognised and fulfilled by several organisations worldwide. The PCC serves as a political mechanism to safeguard citizens against the capricious, suppressive, and tyrannical use of governmental executive authority.

Over time, the role of the Ombudsman has expanded and become more specialised and influenced by political factors. Although selected by the government, the Ombudsman strives to preserve their independence and their accessible and well-established past. This lack of bureaucratic constraints has made the Ombudsman popular among the general public (Ishaq, 2011, p.20). In Nigeria, before the establishment of the Public Service Review Commission in 1972 by the federal military government to examine the working conditions of public workers in the country (known as the Udoji report in 1974), there were suggestions to introduce a public Ombudsman in Nigeria. Upon assuming office as the military head of state in 1975, General Murtala Mohammed formed a committee to examine the concept of an Ombudsman in other nations, with the intention of establishing a unique Ombudsman system in Nigeria. The team's findings resulted in the enactment of the Public Complaints Commission Decree, which is today known as the Public Complaints Commission Act. The Commission was comprised of a Chief Commissioner and twelve other Commissioners who were selected by the Supreme Military Council and were accountable to the Council. The Commission has the authority to commence an inquiry either independently or in response to a complaint on administrative actions taken by federal or state agencies, statutory corporations, local government authorities, public institutions, and both public and private sector individuals.

In addition, the legislation was modified in 1979 by the Public Complaints Commission (Amendment) Decree 21. This amendment altered the Public Complaints Commission Decree 31 of 1975 and, among other things, granted the PCC legal protection while carrying out their official responsibilities. The Public Complaints Commissioner (PCC) is a government-appointed officer responsible for ensuring accountability and transparency in government operations. Their role includes investigating and addressing complaints related to misconduct or inappropriate actions

by government officials. It is well recognised that Nigerian people were formerly subjected to widespread oppression and victimisation by the governing authorities. Intervention by an impartial entity or "history ears" is necessary to address people' grievances against the government (Kunle, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The performance and operations of the PCC differ greatly among the African countries affected by the bug. However, in each case, the presence of the PCC office demonstrates a commitment to helping citizens who wish to address issues of mismanagement and find a satisfactory resolution (Ademolekun, 2010). This communication aims to convey a message to public authorities in Africa on the need of treating individuals with equity and neutrality. An analysis of this issue reveals that several African governments have recognised the need of implementing PCC strategies and anticorruption agencies inside their bureaucracies. Despite the implementation of these measures, has corruption among public officials in Nigeria really been effectively addressed?

However, it is a basic truth that institutions like the PCC, which were established to address issues of accountability and good governance in Nigeria, have not been successful in improving the situation (Olowu, 2012, p.23). Akpomuvire (2014, p.65) said that the Nigerian system, whether in administration or the functioning of the public sector, still exhibits indications of flaws. The reason for this is twofold: firstly, there exists a significant disparity between the government and the general population; secondly, there is the issue of insufficient and ineffective dissemination of information, which directly impacts the functioning of PCC. Moreover, leadership exhibits blatant contempt for the rule of law and engages in the misuse of authority. For him, when the state becomes disconnected from society and is seen as an antagonistic entity, it is reasonable to expect a decline in trust in the PCC system.

According to Osakede and Ijimakinwa (2014, p.20), the PCC System in Nigeria was established with good intentions to fulfil its designated functions. However, the government's interference in the operations and activities of the PCC has resulted in a loss of its effectiveness, as it has become increasingly influenced by the government. However, scientists from allied literatures have analysed the structures, functioning, and shortcomings of the PCC system in Nigeria using theoretical X-ray techniques. There has been a lack of empirical examination of the Ombudsman's operations, particularly in relation to administrative unfairness in Nigeria. The need for doing this research is evident due to the constant protests of the Nigerian population against

the growing prevalence of misconduct, incompetence, and corrupt behaviour inside Nigeria's public and civil service at present.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study;

- i. How does poor and inadequate publicity affect the operations of PCC Awka?
- ii. Has PCC Awka been able to redress cases of violation of fundamental human rights?
- iii. Does undue government interference militate against the ability of PCC system to foster administration of justice in Nigeria?
- iv. What are the practical measures for addressing issues affecting the operations of PCC Awka?

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the role of PCC in addressing the challenges of administration of justice in Nigeria using PCC Awka as a case study. The specific objectives include;

- i. To find out how poor and inadequate publicity affects the operations of PCC Awka.
- ii. To determine whether PCC Awka has been able to redress cases of violation of fundamental human rights.
- iii. To ascertain whether undue government interference militate against the ability of the PCC system to foster administration of justice in Nigeria.
- iv. To recommend possible solutions for addressing issues hindering the operation of PCC.

Review of Related Literature

Public Complaints Commission

Ezeani (2005) defines the Public Complaints Commission as a legal representative chosen by a national parliament to oversee the operations of certain public services and bodies. His primary focus is on safeguarding the rights and freedoms of the citizenry. The major purpose of supervising the operations under his control is to ensure compliance with the laws, rather than focussing on the overall appropriateness of actions. Sultana (2017) defines the Public Complaints Commission (PCC) as an organisation created either by the constitution or by the legislature. Its purpose is to accept and examine complaints made by individual people against any government agency, and to propose appropriate measures to address the issues raised. The Public Complaints Commission (PCC) is an institution established either by constitutional provisions or legislative acts,

with the purpose of receiving complaints from individuals who feel wronged by government agencies, officials, or employers. It is an authoritative organisation that takes action based on its own initiative and has the authority to conduct investigations, suggest necessary actions for improvement, and publish reports (Haller, 2010 & Chijioke, 2012).

Birkinshaw (2014) asserts that the Public Complaints Commission is a newly established government institution tasked with safeguarding and promoting the rights of citizens in relation to their treatment by government officials. Its primary role is to investigate these complaints and, if deemed valid, recommend appropriate measures for resolution. If the establishment fails to take corrective measures, it may publicise the situation and bring it to the attention of parliament. Essentially, PCC operates under an inquisitorial system rather than an adversarial one. The PCC has the authority to conduct examinations and interviews with witnesses, and may also use the expertise of professional specialists where necessary. The process of conducting investigations may be customised to fit the specific circumstances of each case (British & Irish Ombudsman Association, 2009).

Based on the above information, one can straightforwardly characterise PCC as an established regulatory body that monitors and scrutinises the actions and methods of both the government and the citizens. It is crucial to acknowledge that the PCC has multiple duties. On one hand, they address individual complaints, while on the other side they focus on enhancing service delivery standards. Essentially, the PCC serves not only as a means of resolving complaints, but also as a mechanism for ensuring quality control.

Administration of Justice

Administration of justice refers to the discretionary administration of justice towards government personnel. Nwachukwu (2008) defined the administration of justice as the process of managing legal matters. According to Nwachukwu, the PCC institution in each jurisdiction is established by law, frequently legally mandated. The government has established an independent and influential agency that conducts investigations on behalf of the government, but it is not a government entity. This office is authorised to provide suggestions for a prompt settlement of complaints, without any cost to the complainant. Osikoya (1999) defines administration of injustice as any administrative activities that possess the elements of the following:

1. In violation of any law or regulation;
2. Error in interpreting the law or based on arbitrary determination of facts;
3. Unjust, unfair, oppressive, or not in line with the overall functions of administrative bodies;

4. Motivated by improper reasons or based on irrelevant factors;
5. Ambiguous or insufficiently justified termination of government employees, which is unlawful.

Aims and Objectives of the Public Complaints Commission

The Commission's objective is to promote social justice for individual people. Furthermore, it offers a practical alternative for Nigerians or anyone living in Nigeria who are seeking resolution for unfair treatment resulting from administrative bureaucratic mistakes, omissions, or misconduct by government officials or limited liability corporations in Nigeria (Osegbue & Madubueze, 2017, p.45).

The Major Objectives of the Commission

According to Ebiziem and Amadi (2015.p.60), the major objectives of the commission are:

1. Our primary focus is to provide services with a strong emphasis on exceptional customer care. We strive to promote awareness of our services and ensure they are easily available and user-friendly for everyone.
2. To provide exceptional complaints handling services, ensuring comprehensive and balanced evaluation of concerns, and effectively communicating judgements.
3. Our objective is to use the information acquired through our investigations to enhance public service and provide valuable insights for public policy.

How the Commission Functions

Akpomuvire (2014, p.70) averred that Public Complaints Commission functions in the following ways:

- The main purpose of the PCC is to conduct unbiased investigations on behalf of individuals who feel wronged by the actions or lack of action taken by government, local government, or private corporations.
- The Commission's investigative department is organised into four distinct departments, each responsible for a certain domain.
- The Commission operates autonomously from government bureaucracy and has significant authority in terms of secrecy and access to all government information, including the ability to request papers that assist in its inquiry. The Commission has the authority to ensure that compliance is followed in order to get the required information. This authority

is crucial for the commission to facilitate unbiased inquiry in order to reach a just and equitable conclusion.

- The investigation of all complaints is offered free of charge to both the complainant and the responder, regardless of their citizenship status inside the nation. The complaints are handled with the appropriate level of confidentiality. The commission has competent personnel capable of promptly addressing any issues.

Procedures for Lodging Complaints

Akpomuvire (2014) outlines the necessary steps for raising complaints with the PCC. This method encompasses the following:

1. The complainant personally types and signs the complaint before submitting it to the commission and addressing it to the esteemed chief commissioner.
2. The officials of the commission assist the illiterate complainant in writing his complaints, which are then read and interpreted to him in his native language. This process takes place in the presence of a witness, and all three individuals sign or provide a thumb impression on the complainant's letter.
3. The complaint letter is accompanied by copies of any pertinent documentation proof to address the issue.
4. If the complaint letter is presented in person, the registration acknowledges it immediately. If it is sent by mail, the acknowledgement is provided within a few hours.
5. Proximity to the closest state or regional office in the state where the activity occurred is necessary.
6. The letter will address the following issues:
 - a) Provide the full name, address, and telephone numbers of the person making the complaint.
 - b) Provide the name and address of the authority/organization/person against whom the complaint is being lodged.
 - c) Provide the name and address of the location where the incident of justice failure took place. Specifics of the complaint, contact information of witnesses, and essential documents related to the complaint.
 - d) The date on which the action took place and the date on which the complainant became aware of the grievance. The evidence indicates that the complainant has used all possible internal avenues for seeking resolution before turning to the commission.

Types of Complaints Entertained by the Commission

Ezeani (2005) averred that types of Complaints entertained by the Commission include the following:

- There is a delay in the payment of gratuity and land compensation.
- Goods acquired and services given to government departments and corporate organisations are not being paid for.
- Unjust termination of employment/dismissal.
- Challenges in obtaining reimbursement from insurance companies for claims.
- Loss of postal papers or shipments by courier firms.
- Failure to provide an appointment letter or failure to comply with the labour laws by private enterprises.
- The non-refund of donations by the national housing payment and other mortgage institutions.
- Unfair and indefinite suspension and prohibition.
- Failure to issue share certificates or dividend warrants, or deliberate fraudulent behaviour by financial institutions.
- The lack of issuance of results, certificates, or the mistreatment of examination boards, schools, and higher institutions.
- Cases that fall beyond the jurisdiction of the commission are directed to the appropriate authorities for resolution and subsequent monitoring of the results.

Theoretical Framework

Structural Functionalism Theory

This work is mostly based on the idea of structural functionalism. Structural functionalism, often known as functionalism, is a theoretical framework that views society as an intricate system in which its components collaborate to foster unity and stability. This method adopts a macro-level perspective, which entails a comprehensive examination of social systems that have developed in a manner similar to organisms. The method examines both the social organisation and the social roles and purposes. Functionalism examines society holistically by analysing the role and purpose of its individual components, such as norms, conventions, traditions, and institutions. Spencer popularised a frequent analogy that portrays various components of society as organs that collaborate harmoniously to ensure the optimal functioning of the whole body. Put simply, it highlights the effort to attribute, with utmost rigour, the impact of any characteristic, tradition, or behaviour on the operation of a presumed stable and unified system. This theory

focusses on explaining social reality by suggesting that organisations, units, components, and social forces should be analysed and evaluated based on their perspectives and functions.

The originators of this theory are Talcott Parson (1970), Merton (1968), Coleman (1973), and Spencer (1963). Spencer (1963), who is often regarded as the main advocate of the theory, developed the concept of survival in functional terms. Every function played a crucial role in the overall survival of the system. Spencer argued that unrestricted competition among entities was advantageous for society, since it promoted functional adaptation necessary for survival. However, he believed that efforts to protect the vulnerable hindered the overall functioning of society. The core argument of (Ngu.2002)'s theory is that governments or states carry out many responsibilities, such as maintaining law and order, providing education, health care, defence, foreign and diplomatic services, and more, via certain institutions, agencies, or governmental organs, which may be referred to as a structure. (Almond, 2000) suggests that there are six distinct kinds of political/administrative institutions inside the political system. These include political parties, interest groups, legislative, executive, bureaucracy, and courts.

Specialised agencies or structures, such as the legislative, executive, and judiciary, are responsible for carrying out governmental operations. These entities provide responsibilities that allow the government to develop, implement, and enforce its policies. The policies represent the objectives set by the government, while the agencies/structure serve as the mechanisms to achieve those objectives. The PCC is one of the specialised government agencies in Nigeria that is responsible for overseeing the proper implementation of government programs. This theory proved very relevant to the research due to its relevance in relation to existing literature, as it allowed for the recognition of the inherent challenges in implementing government programs. Significantly, the theory of structural-functionalism provides a concise framework for thoroughly analysing how the PCC uses its mechanisms to effectively achieve government objectives by supplying the necessary resources.

Ultimately, this theory, when used to analyse politics and administration, has been characterised as having a conservative methodology. Therefore, it delineates a collection of establishments at a certain period. However, as a model in administration, it aims to present the historical diversity of governments or political regimes at various points in time, enhancing accuracy and understanding of administrative organisations.

Materials and Methods

This part focusses on the researcher's examination of the techniques and protocols used to gather data. The researcher mostly gathered information from secondary sources of data, such as textbooks and academic publications. Sources such as the internet, newspapers, periodicals, seminar papers, government films, and others may be used for qualitative content analysis.

Data Analysis

How Poor and inadequate Publicity affect the Operations of PCC Awka, Anambra State

Hill (2017) highlighted the multitude of issues that the Nigerian system encounters, both in terms of governance and the functioning of the PCC. Essentially, government institutions in Nigeria, such as the PCC, are impacted by inefficient and dishonest political leadership. The PCC policies have been implemented poorly, with a lack of clearly defined goals and programs for successful execution. Additionally, there is an issue of poor and insufficient publicity, which also hampers the activities of the PCC. The individuals for whom the PCC was founded lack complete awareness of the commission's free and expedient services. Hill (2017) said that the primary function of the PCC is to act as a representative for seeking compensation in response to unjust governments or administrative measures. This can only be accomplished if the general public have complete awareness of the actions conducted by PCC. Currently, PCC has significant importance in the Nigerian public sector. The commission plays a crucial role in combating corruption and aiding individuals in seeking recourse for incidents of government maladministration.

How PCC Awka have been able to redress the Cases of Violation of fundamental Human Rights

The PCC has been ineffective in addressing the instances of basic human rights violations against public personnel in the Nigerian public sector. Ayo and Anthony (2011) noted that insufficient government funding, understaffing, staff inefficiency and ineffectiveness, unresolved cases of reported violations, and legal provisions have hindered the progress of PCC. The commission should be granted more authority and not be labelled as an ineffectual entity that can just vocalise its concerns without taking action. Furthermore, the PCC should be granted the authority to apprehend and punish offenders with great care and thoroughness.

Undue Government interference militate against the ability of PCC System to foster administration of Justice in Nigeria

Nwachukwu (2008) noted that a key issue hindering the efficiency of the PCC in Nigeria is the recurring nature of some complaints over time. It is evident that no meaningful measures were ever implemented to address the issue. It resembled a situation where the symptoms of a sickness were being addressed without really addressing the underlying condition. For instance, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) is often mentioned as one of the organisations that get frequent complaints. In order to ensure the complete and successful execution of the commission's recommendations, it is essential to bring significant adjustments or administrative reforms to the operational techniques of each business.

In a study on citizens' redress in Nigeria, Osakede (2014) discovered that the actions of the PCC are not completely free from government involvement. This suggests that the government has a significant influence on the actions of the commission, which has undoubtedly been the cause of its lack of success.

Results and Discussion

This area encompasses the examination, understanding, and discourse of the study results via data analysis and interpretation. The data were evaluated and interpreted in accordance with the study's objective, which is to investigate the role of PCC in resolving the difficulties of justice administration in Nigeria, specifically focussing on PCC Awka. The researcher aims to investigate the impact of insufficient and ineffective publicity on the functioning of PCC Awka in both research question one and objective one. The research revealed that the PCC functions as a mechanism for addressing grievances caused by arbitrary governments or administrative acts. However, this can only be accomplished if the public is well-informed about the commission's efficient and free services. Some members of the public who are intended to benefit from the services provided by the PCC are illiterate. Illiteracy can hinder the effectiveness of the PCC, particularly in a developing country like Nigeria. Unless there are comprehensive and effective awareness programs, these systems cannot truly claim to protect the rights of illiterate citizens. Therefore, Akpomuvire (2014), Emiola (2016), Osakede and Ijimakinwa (2014), Hill (2017), and Ugbe (2008) all recognised the significance of the PCC institution as an effective means of addressing injustice and seeking redress in administrative agencies, in order to prevent the breakdown of the social system in Nigeria.

The findings of research question two, in conjunction with objective two, indicate that the PCC has failed to uphold fundamental human rights. This is due to the fact that many individuals

who have experienced violations of justice do not seek redress from the PCC. Instead, they perceive the PCC as an institution involved in embezzlement of funds or corruption. As a result, these individuals prefer seeking justice from the police or the court system. These issues develop because the institution failed to adequately handle all the elements of its functioning.

The analysis conducted for research question three and objective three revealed that the establishment of PCC has faced challenges that have hindered its operation. These challenges include undue government interference, which hampers PCC's ability to address administrative injustice. One other obstacle that prevents PCC from effectively delivering justice is its limited ability to enforce its rulings with punitive measures. This provision is exclusive to Nigeria, namely in the third schedule of the 1999 Constitution. It grants the Presidential Criminal Court (PCC) the authority to legally require the presence of any anyone brought before it. This issue is of grave concern as it entails the lack of accountability for administrators who cannot be subjected to punishment by the PCC. This transforms the Commission into more of a consultant rather than a barrier against administrative unfairness. Furthermore, the fact that they are designated by the government might also hinder their complete autonomy from the government, which is seen as a drawback of the PCC in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The PCC, or Political Control Committee, serves as a mechanism to safeguard citizens against the arbitrary, repressive, and oppressive use of executive authority by the government. Its objective is to advance social fairness for each individual person. Considering the information presented, it offers a practical choice for Nigerians or anyone residing in Nigeria who are seeking resolution for unfair treatment resulting from administrative mistakes, omissions, or misuse of power by government officials or limited liability firms in Nigeria. Non-standard enquiries. Wrongful termination and related matters. The study so indicates that the PCC has not achieved its main goal, which is to safeguard Nigerian workers against administrative unfairness. This has resulted in a detrimental effect on the citizens, since a significant number of them lack awareness of the functioning and purpose of the commission. Individuals who possess knowledge and understanding have made the deliberate choice to seek justice via legal channels, such as the court or police station, since they believe that their viewpoints would be accorded more significance in these institutions compared to the commission.

Recommendations

According on the study's results, the researcher suggests the following:

1. There should be sufficient promotion and educational campaign on the functions, powers, and jurisdiction of the commission to ensure that the public is aware of the existence of PCC and its operational scope.
2. The PCC should have a sufficient number of personnel who possess strong moral principles and should receive ongoing training to improve their professional dedication and achieve the ambitious objectives of the commission, while also upholding international standards in its operations.
3. The government should strive to adjust the legislation that create the PCC in order to allow it to carry out its tasks with effectiveness and efficiency.
4. Additionally, adequate finance is crucial for the success of this organisation. The agency responsible for its operations would achieve optimal administrative efficiency when it is not deprived of financial resources.
5. Regarding the PCC's ability to handle instances involving the violation of basic human rights of public officials in Awka, it is necessary to empower the commission further. Our investigation revealed that the existing legal restrictions are also impeding the commission's development. The commission should be granted the authority to actively apprehend and punish any wrongdoer.
6. It is important to strongly discourage any government intrusion in the management of PCC. Based on all available evidence, excessive government intervention accounts for more than 50% of the difficulties now being encountered by the commission. As a regulatory organisation responsible for overseeing civil and public officials in the field of justice administration, the PCC should prioritise impartiality and guarantee the protection of the rights of Nigerian workers, without being influenced by primitive emotions.

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