



## ROLE OF THE ACCOUNTANT-GENERAL IN THE MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC FUNDS IN TARABA STATE- NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he aim of this paper is to assess the Role of the Accountant-General in the Management of Public Funds in Taraba State. The study is survey research type where cross-sectional design was used. The population of this study comprised of sixty (60) staff of the office of the Accountant-General of Taraba state and the sample size of forty two (42) respondents were obtained using convenient Non-probability sampling technique. Primary source of data was used through which questioner and interview methods were used in collection of collect data. Data collected were presented via tables, descriptive statistics – percentages, mean and standard deviation and data generated were analyzed using Chi-square. The study revealed that Checks and balances which is the primarily aim of enhancing transparency and accountability is not effective, as a consequence financial records are not been properly kept and updated. The study therefore recommends that:- the office of the Accountant General of Taraba State should ensure that each payment to be made is properly approved and authorize to ensure check and balances. This if done will enhance their level of productivity and also simplify their job schedules.

**KEY WORDS:** Public fund, Accountability, Accountant-General, Management of Fund

### INTRODUCTION

Public sector is mainly established to provide services to the general public; these services cannot be efficiently and effectively provided without government accounting. The focus of government accounting is the determination of how much money was received and the sources of such receipts, how much money was spent and for what purposes and what remains after meeting the financial obligations. In line with this statement, Public finance and particularly the financial management and accounting of government institutions have become fundamentally important:-

Public finance has been described as the collection and disbursement of funds for public use (Corbally, 1962, Osuntokun, 2003). It has also been regarded as the financial activities of public authorities in terms of taxing, spending, borrowing and lending and it involves the means of providing for the expenditure involved in the staffing, equipment and maintenance of educational institutions (Adesua, 1981, Charles, 2002).

Accountant-General of the Federation is referred to as the Chief Accounting Officer for the receipts and payments of the government of the federation (Financial Regulation 107(a) 2009), also at the state level,

the Accountant-General of a state is referred to as the “Chief Accounting Officer for the receipts and payments of the government of the state.

As a result of more interest in receipts and payments account, the government accounting practice that evolved over the years focused on cash receipts and disbursements on the basis of budgetary headings to reveal the balances available at a given time under various heads and sub-heads of votes. This therefore means that the basis of accounting in government is normally the cash basis (or modified cash) rather than the accrual basis of the private sector. Under the cash basis, the government revenue is recorded and accounted for when cash is received and expenditure is incurred when cash is paid irrespective of the accounting period in which the benefit is received or the service rendered.

The Accountant-General being the chief accounting officer of receipts and payments is also concerned with efficient management of public resources and to also give evidence of accountability of those resources. Okoh and Ohwoyibo (2009) opine that accountability reflects the need for government and its agencies to serve the public effectively in accordance with the laws of the land. Appah (2010) point out that with the number and monetary value of public sector activities has increased substantially. This increase in activities has brought with it an increased demand for accountability of public officers who manage these activities of the public.

The problems of this study include: One of the most prevalent problems facing the office of the Accountant General of Taraba state towards ensuring effective management of public funds is mediocre and unqualified personnel, hence giving loopholes for embezzlement and financial misappropriation. Secondly, keeping adequate records of collections and disbursements which is essential to management of public funds is very difficult. Thirdly, proper accountability is not ensured towards collection and disbursement of public funds and fourthly, Public officers saddled with the responsibility of managing and ensuring effective public funds are the same officers that misuse the advantage of their offices to misappropriate funds thereby eroding the confidence in the minds of tax payers. And as such, substantial development in the society will be hindered. Availability of adequate fund, coupled with efficient financial management constitutes the required catalyst necessary for timely execution and completion of development projects and other activities by the state.

It is in light of the above background that this study analysed the role of state Accountant-General

towards accountability and management of public funds, where the office of the Accountant-General of Taraba state was used as a case study to achieve the following set objectives:- To assess whether the accountant-general and other officers abuse the authority given to them with respect to management of public funds. To assess whether the staff of the accountant-general office is adequate and qualified to effectively collect and disburse public funds. To assess the contributions of state Accountant-general in ensuring proper accountability of public funds.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **CONCEPT OF PUBLIC FINANCE**

Public finance involves the government raising money or revenue and spending the money in the provision of services to the public at different arms of government. Public finance has been described as the collection and disbursement of funds for public use (Corbally, 1962, Osuntokun, 2003). It has also been regarded as the financial activities of public authorities in terms of taxing, spending, borrowing and lending and it involves the means of providing for the expenditure involved in the staffing, equipment and maintenance of educational institutions (Adesua, 1981, Charles, 2002).

### **NATURE OF PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

In public financial management, every decision is based on equity and efficiency back-up by public policy (not on sentiment and personal aggrandizement). This is so to ensure efficient employment of resources in production but also that both real and nominal benefits accruing to society in the form of income and wealth are equitably distributed. Thus public financial management deals with judicious use of funds and also ensures accountability and financial control

Ola and Offiong (2008) defined public financial management as “the measures put in place to control the people’s money or funds”. You will note that the word public means the people while finance means funds or money. The management of the public funds is known as public financial management.

Public financial management is defined by The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA 2010) as “*the system by which financial management resources are planned, directed and controlled to enable and influence the efficient and effective delivery of public service goals.*” CIPFA describes public financial management in terms of a “whole system approach.” IFAC supports a whole system approach to public sector financial management, and recognizes the

critical importance of the foundations of the system— stakeholder consultation, the demand for services and projects, and governance—which, along with the key process elements, aims to deliver public, community, and individual value as part of the overall objective to deliver sustainable social benefit.

Ekpung (2001), Public Financial Management is defined as the management of the flows of money or financial resources through an organization (public), whether it is a company, a school, bank, or government agency. The actual flow of money or financial resources as well as claims against money in a judicious way is its concern.

Public financial management is concerned with the planning, organizing, procurement and utilization of government financial resources as well as the formulation of appropriate policies in order to achieve the aspirations of members of that society. Premchand (1999) sees public financial management as the link between the community's aspirations with resources, and the present with future. It lies at the very heart of the operations and fiscal policy of government. The stages of public financial management include:

### **Policy formulation:-**

Policy formulation is one of the most important stages in public financial management structure. Premchand (1999), "the transformation of the society's aspirations into feasible policies with well-recognized financial implications is at the heart of financial management. Issues not addressed during policy formulation tend to grow in magnitude during implementation and may frequently contribute to major reversals in the pursuit of policies or major slippages that may lead to contrary results". Public financial management should be designed to achieve certain micro and macro-economic policies. It entails a clearly defined structured and articulated system that moves to promote cost-consciousness in the use of resources. The government needs to have an estimate of revenue and expenditure to achieve the policy objective of government.

### **Budget formulation:-**

The budget formulation is the step that involves the allocation of resources before the submission to the legislature for review and final approval. Appah (2009), in Nigeria the budget formulation involves the articulation of the fiscal, monetary, political, economic, social and welfare objectives of the government by the President; based on these, (i) the department issues policies and guidelines which form the basis of circulars to Ministries/ Departments requesting for inputs and their needs for

the ensuring fiscal periods; (ii) accounting officers of responsibility units are required to obtain and collate the needs of their units; and (iii) accounting officers of ministries, in this case the Permanent Secretaries, are required to collate these proposals which would be defended by unit heads before the supervising minister.

### **Budget structures:-**

Anyanwu (1997), budget structure addresses the question of how the budget is or should be composed. In Nigeria, budgets have revenues and expenditure sides. Prenchard (1999), many governments have yet to put in place cash management systems, which would pave way for coordinated domestic management. The practice of limiting outlays to collected revenues has exacerbated this problem. He, further argued that there is a massive underfunding of programs and projects provided for in the budget.

### **Payments system:-**

This involves the operational procedures for receiving monies for the public and for making payments to them. In Nigeria, governments make payments using a variety of procedures. These include book adjustments, issue of cheques, payment authorities and electronic payment systems.

### **Government accounting and financial reporting:-**

Government accounting and financial reporting is a very important component of the public sector financial management process in Nigeria. As Adams (2001) noted that government accounting entails the recording, communicating, summarizing, analyzing and interpreting financial statement in aggregate and in details. In the same vein, Prenchard (1999) argues that government accounts have the dual purpose of meeting internal management requirements while providing the public with a window on government operations. Government financial reports should be prepared with the objective in mind of providing full disclosure on a timely basis of all material facts relating to government financial position and operations (Achua, 2009). Financial reports on their own do not mean accountability but they are an indispensable part of accountability.

### **Audit:-**

One of the fundamental aspects of public sector financial management in Nigeria is the issue of audit of government financial reports. Audit is the process carried out by suitably qualified Auditors during the accounting records and the financial statements of enterprises are subjected to examination by the independent Auditors with the main purpose of expressing an opinion in

accordance with the terms of appointment. The high level of corruption in the public sector of Nigeria is basically as a result of the failure of auditing. As Prenchard (1999) puts it "many audit agencies are legally prevented from reviewing policies. Most of them cannot follow the trail of money, as they do not have the right to look into books of contractors, and autonomous agencies". One fundamental failure of audit is the absence of value for money in the Nigerian public sector.

### **Legislative control:-**

The legislature (House of Representative and Senate) in Nigeria is expected to perform this very important task of controlling and regulating the revenue and expenditure estimates in any fiscal year. It is the responsibility of the members of the National Assembly to ensure that the budget estimates are properly scrutinized to ensure accuracy, effectiveness and efficiency of government revenue and expenditure.

### **Treasury Control of Public Funds:-**

Treasury is an office headed by the Accountant-General and is usually part of the ministry of finance. Teriba and Oji (1973) explain that treasury control takes the form of overall supervision of the spending of ministries and departments. The objective is to ensure that they conform to the approved estimates and that adequate attention is paid to efficiency in the spending of funds allocated by Parliament. Where spending departments wish to deviate from the policies and programmes approved by Parliament or wish to exceed their votes, they need to secure the approval of finance for the new policies or changes. Treasury control is exercised by the office of the Accountant-General. The Accountant-General is vested with the duties of: receiving, keeping and disbursement of government funds; recording and reporting of government financial transactions; exercising supervisory powers over other ministries in terms of financial matters; managing government investments; organising the training of accounting and auditing personnel, investigating cases of fraud, loss of funds, assets and store items, and formulating the accounting policy of government. Other duties of the Accountant-General include posting of account staff; preparation of final accounts for submission to the Auditor-General, designing the accounting system and performing all other duties conferred on him by law.

The accounting system installed acts as a control mechanism for the receipt and disbursement of public funds. Oshisami (1992) states that accounting controls are the checks, balances and supervisory controls within and around the accounting system to ensure that all financial

transactions and events are accurately recorded in the system completely and promptly; that there are safeguards over the custody and use of assets held by the organisation; and the possibility of the occurrence of errors and improper or illegal financial transactions are reduced to the barest minimum. A series of checks and balances exist within the accounting system to ensure effective financial control. Teriba and Oji (1973) explain that there are checks and balances in the accounting system of ministries/ departments aimed at ensuring effective financial control. The essence of this financial control system is that book-keeping functions are so allocated that one book-keepers function provides a check on the function of some other book-keepers.

The design of the accounting system has in-built checks and balances- these include the requirement that all transactions must be duly authorised; transactions must be recorded in the appropriate books promptly; key duties and responsibility should be assigned to different individuals and adequate supervision must be maintained over the work performed by subordinates. Other prescribed financial controls require that all payments must be supported by a voucher while it is also required to pass through the process of prepayment auditing. Ministries/departments are also required to operate within the limits approved by the appropriation act. A vote book is required to ensure that expenditures do not exceed their approved limits. Practitioners hardly comply with this requirement as (Oshisami and Dean 1984) observe "overspending has become common place and has not attracted any notable penalties."

The ministry of finance also exercises another control through treasury- control by warrant. The Accountant-General may not allow an issue from the Consolidated Revenue Fund or Development Fund unless it is supported by a relevant warrant for expenditure issued by the Minister or Commissioner of finance. Warrants fall into two classes - warrants for recurrent expenditure and warrants for capital expenditure. Financial Regulations 2000, chapter 4. Recurrent expenditure is paid from the Consolidated Revenue Fund. For recurrent expenditure, the authority of the Minister or Commissioner of finance shall be conveyed in one of the following forms of warrants: The Annual General Warrant of Recurrent Expenditure, Provisional General Warrant, Supplementary General Warrant of Recurrent Expenditure, Supplementary (Contingencies) Warrant, Virement Warrant, supplementary (Statutory Expenditure) Warrant (Financial Regulations 2000).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design employed is survey type; the study used cross-sectional design. This is because the design is more suitable for the study of this nature. The population of this study comprised of all the staff of the office of the Accountant-General of Taraba state who are sixty(60) in no and the sample size of forty two (42) respondents were obtained using Non-probability sampling technique. The study adopted convenience sampling technique in order to give the study the ability to select those that can readily given response needed for the study. Sources of data were primary through which questioner method was used. Data collected were presented via tables, descriptive statistics – percentages, mean and standard deviation. The rationale behind the selection of this method was to simplify the presentation and analysis for readers to vividly appreciate the contributions of the study. In order to analyze the data generated for the study, the statistical tool utilized was Chi-square. The formula for the computation of chi-square test is given as:

$$X^2 = \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

Where;  $f_o$  = observed frequency.  
 $f_e$  = expected frequency

The decision rule: Reject  $H_0$  at 95 level of confidence ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) if the computed value of  $x^2$  is greater than the critical value (table value). Accept  $H_0$  at 95 level of confidence ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) if the computed value of  $x^2$  is less than the critical value (table value).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section deals with presentation and analysis of data with a view to analysing the role of the Accountant-General in the Accountability and management of public funds in Taraba state. Questionnaires were distributed to staff of accountant general office, Taraba State and they were returned, screened and sorted out for analysis. Data collected were analyzed using SPSS Version 20).

**Table 1: Summary of Responses on Adequacy and Qualification of Staff**

Descriptive Statistics:-					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Quality of Staff	42	2.00	4.00	3.2857	.59615
Adequacy of Staff	42	1.00	4.00	2.9524	.62283
adequacy of financial records	42	2.00	4.00	3.2143	.51965
frequent financial record update	42	2.00	4.00	3.2857	.59615
effectiveness of the check and balances on public fund	42	2.00	4.00	3.2143	.51965
Payment not supported by payment voucher	42	1.00	4.00	1.5000	.77302
Valid N (list wise)	42				

Source: Field Survey, 2012

from the above table, it can be seen that on the issue of quality of staff, 3 of the respondents representing 7.1% opined that the staff of the Accountant General's office were considered to be average, while 24 of the respondents viewed that staff were good and the remaining 15 (i.e. 35.7%) opined that the staff were very good. The mean score were 3.2857 with SD of 0.59615. Also, on the issue of adequacy of the staff 32 out of the 42 respondents representing 76.2 percent opined that there were adequate, 5 (11.9%) viewed the staff to be very adequate. However, 2 of the respondents representing 4.8% opined

that the staff strength was inadequate. The average score is 2.9524 and SD is 0.62283. This showed that the staff were adequate. On the issue of both financial record update and the effectiveness of check and balances on public fund the table have it that 69% and 26.2% opined that the records were adopted as at when due but 2 representing 4.8% the records and checks were not effective.

### Test of Hypothesis One:-

Staff of the Accountant-general office of Taraba state are not adequate and qualified to effectively manage public funds.

	<b>Quality of Staff</b>	<b>Adequacy of Staff</b>	<b>adequacy of financial records</b>	<b>frequent financial record update</b>	<b>effectiveness of the check and balances</b>
ChiSquare	15.857 <sup>a</sup>	59.143 <sup>a</sup>	27.000 <sup>a</sup>	15.857 <sup>a</sup>	27.000 <sup>a</sup>
Df	2	3	2	2	2
AsympSig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Source: Field Survey, 2012 (SPSS Output File)

Table 2: the table above showed that Staff of the Accountant-general office of Taraba State was adequate and qualified to effectively manage public funds. The result obtained from Chi-square analysis ( $\chi^2 = 15.857, 59.143, 27.000, 15.857$  and  $27.000$ ) were statistically significant at 5%. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected.

Therefore, it can be inferred that Accountant-general office in Taraba State have qualified and adequacy staff, adequacy of financial records, frequent financial records updates and effectiveness of the check and balances on public funds.

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Payment without authorization	42	1	4	1.7381	1.01356
Payment not supported by payment voucher	42	1	4	1.5000	.77302
Payment without support documents	42	1	4	1.8095	3.25530
Office of the Accountant general's compliance with rules and regulation governing the use of public fund	42	2	4	3.4286	.59028
Performance towards ensuring effective disbursement of public fund	42	2	4	3.4762	.55163
Valid N (listwise)	42				

Source: Field Survey, 2012

It could be seen from the above that on the issue of making payment without recourse to proper authorization 22 representing (59.2%) opined that payment are made based on proper procedures, 4 said is done but not frequent but 10 said is it done frequently and 6 said payment without appropriate procedures is done on frequent basis. This was further being complemented by the average score of 1.7381 and the SD of 1.011356. On the issue of making payment without providing supporting documents (voucher), respondents opined that the staff do not make payment without the support of a voucher. This was the view of 20 respondents

representing 64%, 15 said is done but not frequent while 7 (9.5) said is done frequently. Again, on the issue of compliance with basic rules, respondent opined that it been observed i.e. staff do complied with laid down procedures in making payment. This was opined by 52.6% respondents who viewed the rate of compliance to be good while another 47.4% said it was very good. The average score was 3.4286 and the SD was 0.5928.

### **Test of Hypothesis Two:-**

Accountant-general and his staff do abuse the authority given to them in ensuring effective management of public funds

	<b>Payment without authorization</b>	<b>Payment not supported by payment voucher</b>	<b>Payment without support documents</b>	<b>Compliance with rules governing the use of public fund</b>	<b>effective disbursement of public fund</b>
ChiSquare	27.905 <sup>a</sup>	38.571 <sup>a</sup>	80.381 <sup>a</sup>	15.429 <sup>a</sup>	18.143 <sup>a</sup>
Df	3	3	4	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Significant at 5%

Source: Field Survey, 2012 (SPSS Output File)



Table 4 showed that Accountant-general and his staff have never abused the authority given to them in ensuring effective management of public funds. The result obtained from Chi-square analysis ( $\chi^2 = 27.905, 38.571, 80.381, 15.429$  and  $18.143$ ) were statistically significant at 5%. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it can

be inferred that payment are not done without proper authorization, payment are fully supported with payment voucher, documents; accountant general's compliance with rules and regulation governing the use of public fund and ensuring effective disbursement of public fund.

**Table 5: Summary of the Contribution of State Accountant-General towards Ensuring Proper Accountability of Public Funds**

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Mechanism put in place in respect of public financial management	42	1	4	3.1905	.67130
Accountant General is charged if he or she default in the preparation of financial report	42	1	4	3.1667	.82393
Financial reports are a useful tool for discharge of accountability for public resources	42	2	4	3.3810	.62283
Valid N (listwise)	42				

Source: Field Survey, 2012

It could be seen from the above that on the issue of providing effective mechanism to ensure accountability 59.5% i.e. 25 respondents believed that the mechanisms put in place were effective, 31% i.e. 16 respondents strongly agreed that the mechanisms were very effective. However, 1 and 3 respondents (i.e. 2.4 percents and 7.1 percents respectively) opined that the mechanisms were very ineffective with the average score of 3.1905 and SD 0.67130. On the issue of charging Accountant General when there is a default responses showed that 16 (38.1%) opined that they agreed that Accountant General was charged. 17 (40.5%) strongly believed that the Accountant General was

duly charged. But 1 and 8 respondents believed that the Accountant General was not charged at all. The mean value was 3.1667 and the SD was 0.82393. Finally on the issue of using Financial report as a tool for accountability 19 respondents strongly believed that financial reports was use as tool for transparency and accountability. 47.6% agreed but 7.1 % disagreed. The mean score was 3.3810 with SD 0.62282.

**Test of Hypothesis Three:-**

The accountant-general does not ensure proper accountability in the management of public funds

**Table 6: Test Statistics**

	Mechanism put in place in respect of public financial management	Accountant General is charged if he or she default in the preparation of financial report	Financial reports are useful tool for discharge of accountability for public resources
Chi-Square	34.571 <sup>a</sup>	16.095 <sup>a</sup>	13.000 <sup>a</sup>
Df	3	3	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.001	.002

a. Significant at 5%.

Table 6 showed that accountant-general ensures proper accountability in the management of public funds. The result obtained from Chi-square analysis ( $\chi^2 = 34.571, 16.095$  and  $13.000$ ) were statistically significant at 5%. Thus, null hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, it can be inferred that mechanisms are put in place in respect of public financial management, accountant-general is charged in case of default in preparing financial report; that financial reports are useful tools for discharge of accountability for public resources.

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, the study posits that, if employees of the office of Accountant General in Taraba State fully complied with the provisions of financial memorandum, thus accountability and transparency in the public sector will be ensured.

Based on the analysis of responses generated from the questionnaires administered, the study revealed the following findings:-

1. Checks and balances which is the primarily aim of enhancing transparency and accountability is not effective.
2. Financial records is not properly kept and updated.
3. Training and retraining of the employees of the Accountant General's office was not done on regular basis and this has a serious effect on the performance of the employees
4. They employees were not adequately and religiously complying with the laid down rules and regulations of financial reporting and other financial memorandum and pronouncement.
5. There instances were payments are made without proper approval and authorization.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding above, the following recommendations are arrived at:

1. There should be division of labour so that those that prepare vouchers will not be the ones to approve and those that approved would not check it and those checking will not be the ones to keep it. And there should be regular checking by superior officers.
2. The management should take all measures in ensuring that records are being kept, sustained and maintained.
3. There is the absolute need to enhance the knowledge of all the finance officers in the office of the accountant general of Taraba with a view to making them appreciate the current happening in the accounting world. This if done will enhance their level of productivity and also simplify their job schedules. There should be regular seminars and symposiums to be organized in conjunction with sound consultants businesses at a regular interval
4. It is an ethical for an accountant to deliberately refuse to apply rules, regulations and other financial pronouncement, thus, it is compulsory upon all accounting officers to strictly apply the rules and whoever is found wanting should be dealt with squarely.
5. The office of the Accountant General of Taraba State should ensure that each payment to be made is properly approved and authorize.

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