

# Human Approach to Road Safety Administration in Nigeria's Federal Road Safety Commission

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**Abstract:** *The centrality of road safety for road users forms the basis of this paper which examines the human approach to road safety administration in Nigeria's Federal Road Safety Commission. Anchored on the New Public Administration theory, the paper argues that the value content of public administration, which places emphasis on the people being administered, has been lost on traditional public administration, therefore necessitating the need for a new approach to the study of public administration that places less emphasis on administrative institutions and more emphasis on the people. With respect to road safety administration, the paper argues that administrative system and personnel must not be seen to be oppressive and as such, government officials should operate in the light of what they are called – public servants. Data for this paper were generated from secondary sources such as journals, books, internet publications, among others, which were analyzed based on their content. From the analysis in this paper, it was recommended that members of the federal road safety corps should endeavor to preach the gospel of safety to all and sundry in order to inculcate the values of safety consciousness at all times in the minds of road users. It was also recommended that in the administration of road safety rules and regulations, emphasis should be placed more on enlightenment than enforcement. Human safety on the road should override every other forms of administrative and procedural issues that relate to the enforcement of road traffic regulations on the roads.*

**Keywords:** Road Safety, Administration

## Introduction

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) in Section 14(2b) proclaims unequivocally that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. One important aspect of this security is the safety of road users. In Nigeria and many other countries of the world, movement of goods and people by road is an integral part of the social and economic lives of the people. Road transportation facilitates business transactions – movement of goods and services, social engagements and interactions, as well as enhances economic growth and development.

The road transport sector is even more important in view of the fact that other models of transportation – rail and sea transport – aside from air transport, are grossly underutilized. Transportation by air is exclusive and not affordable to the poor and majority of the middle class. Also, there is a limit to the amount of goods that can be transported by air. With over 195,500km of road network spread across the length and breadth of the country, a huge percentage of these roads are in bad state and requires extra care and caution in its usage to ensure maximum safety (FRN, cited in Uma, Obidike & Ihezukwu, 2014).

The overdependence on roads poses great challenges both to the government – in its onerous task of ensuring safety on the roads – and the citizens or road users whose lives are daily put at risk on account of the inevitability of human and vehicular movement on roads. A number of factors have been attributed to road crashes and accidents with its attendant consequences in terms of damages to properties and loss of lives to road users and bystanders. Aside from the poor state of roads in the country, most of the issues that affect the safety of road users are manmade and manifest in the forms of poor driving skills, poor knowledge of road signs, disobedience to traffic rules and regulations, drunk driving, over speeding, poorly maintained vehicles, among others.

On a global scale, the World Bank in 2018 reported that many nations in the world had experienced high rates of road traffic accidents. According to the World Bank, about 90 percent of these road traffic accidents happened in third world and developing countries of the world. With approximately 1.35 million deaths, and averagely 25 million people in critical conditions, road accident happens to be one of the main causes of death amongst young people between 5 and 29 years (World Bank, 2018).

It was also reported by the World Bank (2018) that a quarter of the road traffic accidents recorded in Africa occurred in Nigeria. According to the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC, 2019), the periods between January and June 2019 in Nigeria recorded approximately 2,699 deaths from road traffic accidents, 18,198 injured persons and 5,423 road crashes, making road transportation

one of the most unsafe means of transportation in Nigeria. In view of the importance and dangers of road transportation, it becomes evident that there is the need to reduce the dangers in order to enhance the gains of road transportation. To this end, the Federal Military Government in 1988 established the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) through Decree 45 (FRSC, 2019). The mandate of the FRSC is to create a safe motoring environment in Nigeria through the formulation and implementation of road safety policies and motor vehicle administration.

In carrying out its mandate, one of the core functions of the Federal Road Safety Corps is to educate members of the public in general and motorists in particular, on the importance of obeying traffic rules and regulations and maintaining discipline on the highway. The education and public enlightenment campaign is to ensure that road users and the public in general understands the importance of obeying the rules for their safety and the safety of other road users and the general public.

It has however, been observed by the researchers that members of the Federal Road Safety Corps seem to be more effective in the areas of enforcement of road traffic regulations than enlightenment to ensure compliance. A cursory survey of road users' attitude to compliance with safety regulations in Nigeria reveal that on the issue of wearing of seatbelts for instance, many motorists and their fellow travelers wear their seatbelt more as a preventive measure to avoid 'extortion' by officers and men of the Federal Road Safety Corps than to enhance their safety and reduce the chances of severe injury or death in the case of an accidents on the road. This shows a communication gap and in the absence of appropriate public enlightenment, the humanistic objectives of establishing the FRSC, and indeed several other government security agencies will be lost on the people. To this end, this paper assesses the potentials in the adoption of a human approach to the implementation of road safety regulations by the Nigeria's Federal Road Safety Commission.

### **Conceptual Review of Literature**

The major concepts in this discourse are road safety and administration. Safety on the roads, especially for road users, is an important aspect of the overall security and welfare of the people. As an administrative process, road safety measures entail all the strategies whose purposes are geared towards ensuring the elimination or reduction of dangers and risks of road users on the road. The elimination or reduction approach entails a preventive or curative approach. The best way to ensure safety of lives and properties on the road is to do all there is to be done to prevent road crashes from happening. Where that is not practicable, then the curative measure is to ensure that – as much as possible – damages are minimized and help is provided as much as possible.

According to the International Transport Forum (ITF, 2008), the goal of road safety is to ensure that if a road accident occur, the impact should be below the threshold that might likely produce devastating effects in the forms of permanent injuries or death to the different categories of road users. The different categories of road users include motorists and their passengers, pedestrians, bystanders, cyclists among others. A number of measure must be employed to improve safety on the roads. One of it is the ability of the government to provide a road infrastructure and environment that guarantees that the speed movement of vehicles will be within the human tolerance level to prevent serious injury and death in the event of road accident.

Also, there is the effective monitoring and patrol of the major road networks to ensure adequate and comprehensive checks on drivers, their vehicles and their level of adherence to safety processes. Again, there is the need for proper enlightenment of both drivers and their passengers on the importance of adhering to road signs and applying safety measures like wearing of seatbelts, driving at reasonable speed, ensuring that the vehicle is in good condition, among others. This goes to show that road safety administration is a collective responsibility of both the government and the citizens, particularly the road users. While the ultimate goal of road safety administration is the security of lives and properties on the road, this goal must be effectively communicated to the people to who their lives and properties are being protected. This is to ensure the needed participation and compliance, what the researchers in this paper call the human approach. But what does the human approach entails? The next section of our discussion will address this pertinent question.

### **Road Safety Administration in Nigeria: Embracing A Human Approach**

Administration generally is about accomplishing set targets or goals through the coordinated efforts of human beings. Administration joins groups of people who coordinate and cooperate in order to achieve stated organizational goals and objectives. In other words, for the achievement of organizational goals and objectives, we need to organize and direct the human and material resources towards specified ends. Also, administration is a universal process which can be seen in diverse institutional settings. Going by the various settings, administration can be subdivided into public administration and private administration. Public administration refers to the administration which functions in a governmental or public setting, while private administration refers to the administration, which runs in a business enterprise or non-governmental setting.

Within the context of our discussion, our focus is on public administration, which in its simplest form, is the management of public or government affairs. Woodrow Wilson, who is considered the father of Public Administration, has defined it as a detailed and systematic execution of law. Every particular application of law is an act of administration (Wilson, 1887).

Elaborating on the above definition by Wilson (1887), the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) is an agency of government established by law. Specifically, in February 1988, the Federal Government of Nigeria through Decree No. 45 of 1988 created the FRSC. The law establishing the Federal Road Safety Commission was amended by Decree 35 of 1992 mentioned in the statute book as the FRSC Act Cap 141 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (LFN). The law was subsequently passed by the Nigerian National Assembly as the Federal Road Safety Commission (establishment) Act 2007. By implication, there are statutory functions that the Commission is saddled with and it is for this purpose that the government employ and train Federal Road Safety Corps members to carry out this statutory functions. We can now see that Woodrow Wilson, was right when he averred that public administration is the detailed and systematic execution of law and that every particular application of law is an act of administration.

The Nigerian Federal Road Safety Corps, just like other government institutions, interact in various ways with the citizens in the discharge of their statutory functions and duties. However, in Nigeria, there seem to have been a growing discontent between the people and various security agencies, especially those in uniform. The complaints of the people are generally centered on harassment, extortion, intimidation and in extreme cases, extrajudicial killings of the people by men in uniform. It is not uncommon in the Nigerian public road system to see roadblocks and checkpoints of various security agencies – the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, the Nigerian Police Force, the Federal Road Safety Corps, the Nigerian Army, among others.

Ordinarily, the presence of these men in uniform on the roads is supposed to inspire confidence in the hearts and minds of law abiding citizens, ensure security and safety on the roads, prevent and intercept crime on the roads – like kidnapping, movement of stolen goods, etc., as well as provide assistance in cases of road accident emergencies and rescue; the situation, however, has been that some of these men in uniform constitute themselves to becoming threats to law abiding road users. There have been allegations of unlawful extortion, intimidation, harassment of road users, among others. These unwholesome attitudes have created a deep seated anger and hatred and has put a wedge between the government and the people. Some of these bottled up anger culminated in the mass protest that ensued in the latter parts of 2020 popularly referred to as the ENDSARS campaign. The ENDSARS campaign, which started as a protest against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force, soon became a rallying cry for all forms of brutality by security agencies in particular, and bad governance in general.

The Nigerian Federal Road Safety Corps, in the discharge of its functions, generate revenue from the government. This revenue comes in the forms of application for and renewal of driver's licenses, vehicle number plate registration and punitive fines for road traffic offenders. It must be stated clearly that the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) was not primarily established as a revenue generating agency of government, its primary responsibility is road safety administration in the areas of speed limit regulation, enforcement of road traffic laws, elimination of road crashes and accidents, public enlightenment on safety traffic rules and regulations, among others.

To this end, the monies generated from traffic offenders as fines should not be more important than the safety of the traffic offender, other road users and the public officials in the discharge of their duties on the road. There is no wisdom in chasing road traffic offenders to the point of endangering the life of both the offender and the official trying to enforce road traffic laws and regulations. A Daily Post publication of Friday April 19, 2019 reports that a van belonging to the FRSC crashed in Ibadan while chasing an alleged traffic offender. In 2016, there was also a report by the Nigerian Tribune Newspapers of Wednesday October 5, to the effect that officials of the Lagos State Transport Management Agency (LASTMA) narrowly escaped death as a result of an auto crash in the course of chasing alleged traffic offenders. These are aside other incidents that are reported in the media over time.

Administrative system and personnel must not be seen to be oppressive. In Nigeria, most people only feel the presence of the state or government when its officials are out to visit the 'iniquities' of the people. In situations where government officials operate in the light of what they are called – PUBLIC SERVANTS, it will be unreasonable for road users to flee from their 'servants' who are out to ensure their safety on the road. The lack of human face in the administration of safety on the roads have led to the noncooperation of road users, especially motorists, in the task of ensuring adherence to safety procedures and protocols. The need for administration to have a human face is not a recent phenomenon, the next segment of our discussion will discuss scholarly debate in this regard and the discussion will form the theoretical framework for the study.

### **The Human Angle to Administration: The New Public Administration theory**

The inhumanity of administrative structures and systems began to gain serious scholarly attention in the latter part of the twentieth century. The New Public Administration Theory, therefore, is one of the outcomes of this movement. As a school of thought in public administration, the New Public Administration was championed by scholars like Dwight Waldo (1980), whose work titled;

Enterprise of Public Administration identified three major areas in New Public Administration namely client- oriented bureaucracy, representative bureaucracy and people's participation. Other early proponents of the New Public Administration theory include Frank Marini, George Frederickson, Joseph Uvages, Charles Lindbloom, and Vincent Ostrom,

Promoters of the theory were strongly of the view that the value content of public administration, which places emphasis on the people being administered, has been missed. The focus had been on attaining a value-free administration. By value-free, it meant that administrative rules are employed in the same way across board, and no concession is given to the weakest of the weaker sections in the society. In a situation where an administrative system is blind to the peculiarities of human nature, it will inevitably favour the strong and oppress the weak. Hence, there arose a need to rethink the objectives and scope of public administration and the concept of New Public Administration emerged as a result thereof. In a nutshell therefore, the idea behind the formation of the New Public Administration is that there is the need for public administration to be responsive to the needs of the people in the society and effectively position and align itself to meeting those needs.

As a theory, the New Public Administration rests on four important pillars namely, change, relevance, equity and values.

**The concept of change in public administration:** Traditional public administration in Western societies was established to maintain status quo. After the first industrial revolution, there arose the need to set up an administrative machinery that will consolidate on the gains achieved. During colonialism when similar administrative systems were foisted on Africans, the major aim was to ensure political stability and maintain law and order, ostensibly to allow for the smooth exploitation of the local communities. To this end, the focus of administration in the colonies was on how best to help our colonial masters achieve their economic and socio-political objectives in the colonies. The local people were never considered under this arrangement and certainly were not part of the equation.

With the granting of independence, a new set of indigenous colonial masters emerged – the political elites. They did little or nothing to change the status quo. Just like their white colonial counterparts, they live in Government Residential Areas (GRAs), where the best of amenities are available. Public servants at the time became public masters and are served by the public instead of serving the public. This mentality is very much alive today albeit subtly and explains why public servants often place put interest second, behind their personal and pecuniary interest, in the discharge of their official duties.

The above assertion is further buttressed by the profligacy in the allocation and use of public finance by public office holders, which have led to the recurrent issues of huge personnel expenditure at all levels and strata of government where there are allowances for almost everything including, but not limited to, newspapers, wardrobe allowance (as if they came to office naked), utility allowance, sitting allowance etc.

In calling for a change in this paper as it relates to the Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC) in particular and other uniform personnel involved in traffic control in general, our emphasis is on a change of philosophy and change of methodology. By change of philosophy, we mean that the idea of public service should emphasize more on the public (the people) and less on the institution itself. This is because the institution exists to serve the people and not the other way round. In the private sector, the customer is always king and are treated with the utmost form of respect. In a perfectly competitive business environment, organisations maintain the loyalty of their customers by treating them well through excellent services.

Once this mindset is achieved, it will help lead to a change in methodology. As we have earlier emphasized, the call for change of methodology should focus less on enforcement of rules and more of safety of road users. The mindset of safety over enforcement will ensure that motorists and other road users are not put at risk in the course of 'enforcing' road traffic regulations and apprehending road traffic offenders. By this admonition, we are by no means, making any case for leniency, clemency or showing compassion for traffic offenders, however, human lives are more valuable than the traffic offences committed.

**Administrative Systems and their Relevance to changing Realities:** Every society has peculiar problems. It is therefore, not practicable that the same system that worked for a particular society at a particular time will succeed same way in another environmental setting with different set of challenges. To this end, administrative systems must be relevant to the particular societies they exist in and attune themselves to be capable of meeting the specific needs of the people. Earlier approaches to New Public Administration considered relevance and rationality from the view point of administrators alone and hence relevance and rationality of the people was neglected. New Public Administration suggests the inclusion of rationality of the people too in the process of policy formulation.

**Equity, social justice and fairness:** New Public Administration found social equity as the most common vehicle for guiding human development. Because of the traditional bureaucratic principle of official secrecy, rigidity and anonymity of public servants in the discharge of their duties, scholars have argued that government institutions provide a shield for unethical and unscrupulous public servants to perpetrate injustice against the public by working for a few individuals against overriding public interest. However, in

this era of increased accountability occasioned by increase in media attention on the activities of public servants, public officials ought to live above board and ensure that public interest overrides any form of personal or primordial inclinations. Therefore, the objective of public administration should focus on how to foster social equity, justice and fairness thus, encouraging peaceful coexistence, national integration and societal cohesion.

**Value free and value orientation in public administration:** One of the criticisms of traditional public administration is that it is value free. By being value free, the emphasis here is on the STRICT application of rules without fear or favour, consideration or ill will. Let us paint a typical scenario to aid our understanding. Assuming we are all to queue in a banking hall to conduct our various transaction or in a polling unit to cast our votes on the basis of first come, first served, the value free principle of traditional public administration suggests that under NO CIRCUMSTANCES must this rule be altered or breached. Even if we have in our midst, an elderly person or a heavily pregnant woman who might not be able to withstand long minutes or hours of standing on the queue. the truth however, is that if we fail to make concessions to these vulnerable persons, then, it implies that administration is not empathetic and lacks a human face.

Scholars who oppose the value free principle of traditional public administration argue that an administrative system that does not cater for the interest of the minorities, the weak and vulnerable groups in our societies, will ultimately exist to oppress them. To these set of scholars, value-neutrality in public administration is an impossibility. Archbishop Desmond Tutu aptly captures the views of these scholars when he averred that if you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have only chosen the side of the oppressor. How then do all these arguments concern the administration of safety on the road?

Let us explain from two perspectives. The first perspective is that there is the element of administrative discretionary powers in the discharge of official duties. Value centeredness ensures that administrative discretionary powers are employed for the greater good and that care is taken to ensure that the weak and vulnerable groups in the society are protected. Secondly, value centeredness ensures the people are given top priority in the discharge of official duties. In the administration of road safety, the willful commitment of the people to adhere to safety procedures is more important than enforcement and apprehension of offenders. Therefore, value for human lives becomes more important than enforcement in road safety administration.

### Recommendations and conclusion

Having examined the human approach to administration in the light of the New Public Administration theory, we recommend in this study that members of the federal road safety corps should endeavor to preach the gospel of safety to all and sundry in order to inculcate the values of safety consciousness at all times in the minds of road users. For when people think safety first at all times, half of all the issues bordering on road traffic offences like over speeding, drunk driving, not using seat belts etc. will not occur, hence, the saying prevention is better than cure.

Also, and flowing from the above recommendation, emphasis should be placed more on enlightenment than enforcement. Human safety on the road should override every other forms of administrative and procedural issues that relate to the enforcement of road traffic regulations on the roads.

On the bases of the above recommendations, we conclude that a more vigorous public enlightenment campaign is necessary to arouse and sustain public consciousness on the road. This is because when public consciousness is aroused and sustained on a particular course of action, it, over time, gets the needed public support to aid effective implementation of the policy in question.

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