

# Treasury Single Account, Fraud Detection and Prevention in the Nigerian Public Sector: An Empirical Review

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**Abstract:** Of the numerous challenges bewildering Nigeria's developmental efforts, the idea of fraud in terms of mismanagement, misappropriation and diversion of public fiscal resources remains particularly pronounced across different quarters. The incoherencies associated with public sector accounting has allowed for the perpetuation of sharp and fraudulent practices to the detriment of the nation. The public sector reforms that commenced in 2003 brought about considerable amount of changes as to the manner in which government conducts its businesses. Amongst which includes the introduction of Treasury Single Account, been a central revenue pooling system it has been lauded in different quarters since implementation in 2015 as cure all syndrome for public sector fraud. Against this backdrop, the underlying academic endeavor interrogates previous empirical literature with a view to ascertaining the existence of fraud prevention and control mechanisms inherent in the TSA. The study concludes, while a better part of the literature assent to abilities of the TSA to prevent and control fraud, beyond pooling revenue it has no control over appropriation of such revenue. Conclusively, it claims the overburdening emphasis on TSA as a cure all syndrome for fraud remains a popular misconception that is shared by a handful of studies.

**Keywords:** Treasury Single Account, Fraud, Detection and Prevention, Public Sector and New Public Management.

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## Introduction

While states in the developing world are known for their incoherent approach towards government revenue, in Nigeria for instance the government lacked the enforcing aptitude to exert effective fiscal oversight. As a result public funds either remains unaccounted for, or remitting agencies fail to credit due amount to government coffers. Amongst other resultant effects, the Nigerian state is unable to functionally carry out its statutory obligation of proficient public service delivery and improve the state of governance, resulting in the prevalence of mass poverty. Against the pernicious implications of fraud rocking the public sector, successive governments have implemented in-exhaustive fiscal measures, aimed at ridding the sector of fraud. Regrettably, they have remained unsuccessful in their numerous attempts at riding the public sector of fraud and other related vices.

In the face of a depleted foreign reserve and dipping oil revenue, government banking arrangements remains essential to the proficient management and control of public finance. Pre-existing banking arrangements prior to 2015 was marred with numerous irregularities ranging from financial fraud, misuse of public cash resources to lack of accountability and transparency. Under pre-existing banking structure, it was not uncommon for public officials to inflate contracts, doctor financial reports, connive with money deposit banks to defraud the government, amongst other illicit financial activities and misconducts aimed at defrauding the government. Hence, the need for an effective fiscal oversight mechanism, with regards to public finance management cannot be underscored. Notable implications of this arrangement are manifested in widespread financial fraud in the public sector and the inability of the government to know the exact amount in its coffers. It also affects efficiency of budget implementation, owing to inaccurate projections upon which budgets are prepared. Lastly, the underlying banking arrangement stunted growth and deters financial responsibility and limpidity in the public sector. As captured in the CBN Bulletin (2015) in 2012, the result of a pilot scheme conducted across two hundred and seventeen MDAs saved Nigeria the sum of 500 Naira (N) billion in frolicsome spending. Regrettably, despite the success recorded by the pilot scheme, the government of the day failed in its capacity to mandate full implementation across all MDAs and other tiers of government.

A lot has been said about the Treasury Single Account (TSA), taunted in certain quarters as the cure all medicine for fraud and other fiscal misappropriation related activities. In minimal terms the TSA refers to an integrated structuring of government bank account or linked accounts, aimed at facilitating optimal deployment of government cash revenue. Through this banking structure government manages all its receipts and payments and is able to acquire actual stint information of its cash position on demand. While such fiscal reforms in the public sector have been in place for decades in the advancement West, self-seeking elites and other contextual factors has hindered implementation and social acceptance in the developing parts of the globe. Although the TSA policy was established by a legislative act, as obtained in section 8 (20) of the 1999 constitutions as amended, mandating the remittance of all government revenues to a single or allied set of accounts domiciled with the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). In flagrant disregard for constitutional provisions, consecutive governments in Nigeria operated manifold accounts with various commercial banks for the collection and appropriation of government revenue.

In a twist of events, the President Muhammad Buhari led government in 2015 issued a directive through the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation, mandating all Ministries, Agencies and Departments to implement the TSA scheme for managing receipts and expenditures. In light of the foregoing, this research sets out to review existing literature on TSA and public finance management, with a view to ascertaining the existence of a coherence pattern, contradictions and plausible literary gaps within studies. More abstractly, the study will place more emphasis on the fraud detection and prevention mechanism of the TSA if any.

### **Methodology**

The study relies on the qualitative research methods for collation and data analysis. More explicitly, secondary data will be analyzed using a descriptive method of social inquiry.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

A return to democracy in 1999 exposed the flagrancy at which previous military administration perpetuated fraud in Nigeria. In lieu of the foregoing, the democratic

government initiated a handful of fiscal and public finance management reforms, aimed at fostering proficient oversight of government cash resources.

### Treasury Single Account

Operating either as a central or decentralized government banking arrangement, TSA is responsible for collecting, managing and disbursement of government cash resources. In Nigeria a centralized system of TSA was adopted, with the CBN mediating as an interface with revenue generation organs. Accordingly Onyekpere (2015), Oyedele (2015), and Ekubiat and Ime (2016), define TSA is a integrated structure of government bank accounts aiding the merging and ideal utilization of government funds. While the World Bank (2013:1) conceives TSA is a unique and established practice in convallescening the payment and revenue collection system, and carrying out consistent oversight of public expenditure through a consolidated government bank accounts. Kanu (2016) on the other hand argues TSA as one of the financial policies implemented by the FG to incorporate all revenues and treasuries from MDAs, held with the apex bank. Tayo (2015) point out the implementation of TSA is aimed at strengthening revenue e-collection initiative, which reduces the likelihood of fiscal fraud against the state.

Optimistically, the implementation of TSA will address the issue of operational secrecy surrounding Public Finance Management (PFM). Secondly, revenue generating organs will also find it difficult to short change the national coffers. Farther than transparency and accountability, the TSA will infuse proficiency into the overall management of public funds. In this regards Kanu (2016) claims the key objective of the TSA is to enthrone fiscal discipline, improve revenue generation, foster transparency and deter embezzlement of funds. The CBN (2014) lamented the erosion of the fiscal coffers through the depletion of the Excess Crude Account (ECA) and exposing the economy to vulnerabilities, compelling the enactment of TSA. As an e-governance initiative, TSA may perform similar functions over, however the mechanism through which they do is likely to differ contextually.

### Fraud

In less developed countries such as Nigeria, fraud is not uncommon, more than often perpetrators get away with the act with a slap on the wrist. This is to say that, only in few instances are fraudulent activities uncovered, investigated, prosecuted in a timely manner. According to Dandago (1997), fraud is a deliberate act carried out with a view of fabricating financial information by one or more individuals among management, employees or third parties. According to the Black's law Dictionary, (1979) fraud include all the multifarious means human ingenuity can devise that are resorted to by one individual to get an advantage over another by false presentation or suppression of the truth.

Thus, fraud in this context entails the act of obtaining financial value by deceit. They include inflation of contract, kickbacks, budget padding, and fabrication of accounts to disclose false position, wages fraud, and ghost workers amongst others. Accordingly, Gebgi and Adebisi (2014, p. 110) observes cases of fraud are so pervasive in Nigeria, that one in each partition of the public sector seem to be involved in one way or the other in fraudulent practices. The implication of these claims depicts inefficiencies and inadequacies of control mechanisms of PFM in the public sector. The widespread kleptocratic tendencies amongst political elites in Nigeria foster the persistence of fraudulent practices in the public sector. Penultimately, prior to 2015 fraud prevention remained almost impossible. By operating numerous bank accounts top governments officials are able to amass wealth for themselves and cronies. The advent of TSA however has made public sector fraud difficult to perpetuate.

### **Treasury Single Account, Fraud Detection and Prevention**

The implementation of the policy has arguably affected the frequencies at which fraud is perpetrated. The TSA brought an end to the era when commercial banks colluded with top public officials to defraud the governments. It has also strengthened the capacity of the apex bank, Federal Ministry of Finance (FMF) as well as the Office of the Accountant General of the Federation and the CBN. Of the pronounced implications of implementing the TSA policy is that it gives the government on the spot account of its revenue. Accordingly Gbegi and Adebisi (2015) contend the increased frequencies of fraud in the public sector could be attributed to the absence of stringent fraud policy, weak internal control and low management integrity. Prior to the advent of e-governance, manual control mechanisms largely failed to produce predetermined outcomes. This is thought to be so as control mechanism demands a certain level of integrity across all cadres in the MDAs.

Explicitly, a Bulletin of the CBN (2015) affirms that in 2012 the FG carried out a pilot scheme for a single account using Two Hundred and Seventeen MDAs as test case. The outcome of the scheme saved Nigeria a whopping N500 billion in baseless spending. In another instance as reported by Punch Editorial dated (March 11, 2015), a federal high court in Lagos ordered seven commercial banks to remit a total of \$793, 200, 000 to government coffers,. According to court documents filed by counsel for the Attorney General of the Federation, a total of \$367.4m was illegally hidden by three government agencies with United Bank of Africa, while \$14m was also held up with Skye Bank. In concurrence, Okogbu (2014) claim at the end of 2012, Ninety Three of Eight Hundred and Thirty Seven had implemented the TSA policy. FGN (2013) the enactment of the TSA policy Its implementation took the government from an overdraft of N102 billion in 2011, to an average credit of N4.6 billion in 2013.

### **Empirical Review**

In other to proffer a more lucid account of the role of TSA in deterring and preventing fraud, this section is committed to reviewing existing empirical literature on the subject matter of TSA. Yusuf (2016) conducted an inquiry on the effects of TSA on PFM in Nigeria. The specific objectives of his inquiries were to interrogate the level at which TSA blocks illicit financial outflows, encourage transparency and responsibility in PFM. His finding validates the existence of a significant positive correlation between TSA and fraud detection and prevention as well as TSA and enhanced transparency and accountability in PFM. While the study covered pertinent issues revolving around fraud in the public sector. It drew its sample from various government organs. By ignoring the existence of contextual variations across these MDAs in spite of their structural differences, the study generalizes its findings across all MDAs. This is thought to be pertinent because MDAs may all be government organs, but they also vary in the sense that, some are revenue generating while others are not. This distinction is likely to affect the manner in which they manage the financial resources at their disposal.

Akhidime (2012) on the other hand investigated the nature of honesty and financial records with recourse to PFM in Nigeria. The study cross-examined public financial reporting and accountability within the precepts of FGS financial reporting and public accountability in Nigeria. Engaging personal interviews and accountability evaluation questionnaires as instruments of data collection, the study asserts the successful functioning of development policies and programs are based on the purity of action, honesty of purpose, probity and integrity, which are important hallmarks of accountability and transparency. While the policy and literary significance of such studies cannot be downplayed, it falls short of elucidating

the process in totality, stakeholders and method of financial reporting in Nigeria. In the sense that, it limited its analysis to attainment of accountability and financial reporting in Nigeria's public financial management, without examining aptitude in terms of capacity in line with global practices and application of information technology in realization of robust financial reporting in the public sector. Secondly, a pronounced shortcoming of the study is that it fails to limit its analysis to a defined time frame, thus lacking precision.

Oguntode *et al.*, (2016) studied the economic implications of TSA between 1999 and 2015 respectively. The study was carried out to establish if the application of a TSA will solve address the challenges of wasteful and devious spending of Government fund. Secondary data was employed for the research work, CBN statistical bulletin (1999-2015) was analyzed using the OLS estimator. The result shows that the TSA has a positive significance on economic growth of Nigeria, but this impact is conditioned by certain determinants, one of them being the absence of historic data. It posits the FG should enact policies geared towards fostering accountability as regards to deposits been made into the TSA. And that such fund should follow due process. Also that any subsequent foul play by any agencies, or even the CBN is duly prosecuted. The underlying study shares similar sentiments with the Nigerian populace, hampering on the need for institutional efficiencies in implementation of public policy. This is thought to be so because numerous developmental policies have been conceived and formulated by successive governments, their failure can be tied mostly to institutional inefficiency and weak enforcement capacity.

Tari *et al.*, (2016) interrogated the enactment of the TSA from the incrementalist perspective. Taking into cognisance the policy was conceived during the past administration. Relying on secondary data, the paper suggests better ways of making the policy effective amidst the dwindling oil price and the superiority of Dollar against the Naira. Hence, the research concluded that except proper monitoring of government account is carried out, in all government institutions and strong punitive measure applied against defaulters and corrupt officers, that TSA will be a failure in Nigeria.

Numerous studies depict the existence of a general pattern in studies on TSA, claiming a positive correlation between the policy and efficiency in public financial management. They also claim the lack of political will as the major hindrance to implementation of the policy by successive governments. They however fall short in capturing the broad scope of accompanying policies without which TSA is a momentary fix to fiscal misappropriation in the public sector.

Notable amongst these policies are the CBN Cashless policy, GIFMIS, ERG policy and NEEDS. This is particularly important because the TSA policy is an e-governance in line with the practice of modern public administration. Existing studies also attempted to cover all the MDAs, failing to take into cognisance that some are revenue generation while others are not, as well as the existence of variations in their funding. More than often, they also limited their analysis to MDAs paying little attention to examining the prospects of state governments to follow suit and implement the policy. Controversially, the overburdening referral of TSA as a cure for all fiscal misconduct is evident in mainstream studies. This is misleading as the scope of the TSA does not necessarily entail monitoring of disbursed funds to MDAs. Rather it has a limited function of collation and receipts of government expenditure and payments. In view of the gravity of the monetary fraud in the public sector, consecutive governments have largely failed to adopt equal control and oversight mechanisms. Upon reviewing existing literature on fraud, the study argues that fraud is more

likely to occur when someone has an incentive to commit fraud, weak controls or oversight provide an opportunity for the person to commit fraud and the person can rationalize the fraudulent behaviour (attitude).

The views as obtained in mainstream literature also revealed that majority of high level fraud in the public sector are perpetrated by top management public officer, charged with the collation, control and appropriation of public resources. It also revealed that most studies on fraud draw their conclusions based on parochial and theoretical assumptions. Hence, the validity of such studies can be challenged owing to their non-application of empirical inquiries and specificity of time frame and case. The researcher therefore intends to analyze the role of TSA to ascertain how the policy can enhance fraud prevention and detection in NPA upon which generalization can be made.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Inability of the classical model of public administration to solve pertinent challenges of bloated in public bureaucracies depicts the public sector realities in the developing world. In this part of the globe, bureaucracy aids in the consolidation of power by self-seeking state elites, rather than being geared towards effective delivery of public goods and services.

Proposed by David Osborne the New Public Management (NPM) theory constitutes the theoretical framework of this study. Robinson (2015) claims that NPM involves the adoption of a series approach to public administration and management that emerged in a number of OECD countries in the 1980's. NPM emanated in response to the precincts of the old public administration inability to adapt to the demands of a competitive market economy. The model propagates the transfer of private sector driven innovation to enhance the quality of service delivery in the public sector. In other words, NPM focuses less on public administration and more on public service.

For Pollitt and Boukhaert (2004) the theoretical foundations of NPM abound in public choice and principal-agent theory, which claim that individual self-interest drive bureaucratic behaviour. Competition, entrustment, performance and responsiveness offer yardsticks to standardize bureaucratic behaviour and generate improved outcomes. In other times the NPM serves as the framework upon which public sector reforms are initiated. Furthermore, the model propagates the replication of private sector driven innovations, ideals and practices to enhance public service delivery.

Heeks and Bailur (2007); Yildiz (2007) posit the second strand of the NPM literature is grounded in the transformative realities projections of digital governance. Much of the early literature on digital governance dwell on the merits and proficiency associated with the application of technology to enhance the quality of governance. With recourse to TSA, the digitalization of FGs banking system will not only likely deter and prevent fiscal fraud; it will also enhance efficiency, transparency and accountability. In his view on NPM Haque (2004) claims the most defining determinant of the spread of NPM to be the historical modification in state ideology in the late 1970s in advanced capitalist societies. This framework which discredits unnecessary bureaucracy does so in skepticism of the ability of the states to function effectively. Osborne (2006) claims at micro-management level, the neo-liberal fondness of NPM is echoed in its neo-managerial administrative system based on institutional principles, leadership styles and corporate experiences derived from the private sector. Such roots of NPM in neo-liberal and neo- are quite vibrant in contemporary reform policies adopted by advanced capitalist nations.

Frederickson (1997) argues the mutual validation for adopting NPM model swarms in the inefficiencies of classical state bureaucracy, particularly in its monopolistic nature, managerial ineptitude, corruption and self-serving schema. Thatcher (1995) claims dominance of private sector management capacity to public sector vivid, and the application of such practices will consistently bring about advances in public sector proficiency. In concurrence with the evident merits of NPM, Kurt and Iris (2003, p. 3) claim;

In the past, public sector habitually failed to be conceived around output; rather they focus on inputs, given that political debates on public matters normally centers around the issues of resources. Under the NPM model however the focus shifts to results. Weighing in on the argument Stoker (1998), claims sees NPM as an attempt to reinvent the public sector via a number of institutional organizational reforms that aims at results in terms of proficiency and quality of service to fit satisfactorily into the well-built, political theory of governance.

As put forward by Peter and Pierre (1998, p. 232) argue the act of governance to entail the preservation of public resources, within the context of political authority or oversight. With reference to FGs adoption of the TSA policy, this study argues mismanagement and fraudulent embezzlement of public funds as the push behind the digitalization of public finance management in tandem with standard global practices. Hood (1991) argues these properties to include disaggregation of public service to their most basic units and focus on their cost effectiveness and emphasis on proficiency control and aptness. From an intra-organizational perspective, TSA has facilitated for improved co-ordinance between the CBN, FMF and OAGF to ensure proficient public finance management in Nigeria. While the revolutionary reforms of NPM are new, its role in deterring and preventing fraud in MDAs in Nigeria cannot be under stated.

Dunleavy *et al.*, (2006) claims the need to pay more attention to the prospects of digital technologies in redefining the nature relationship between government agencies and civil society and to transform the manner in which statutory government functions are executed. Hence, it will suffice to argue, that albeit its shortcomings the adoption NPM in public sector is likely to enhance the nature and quality of governance. Secondly, it accords the FG an avenue to effective PFM oversight mechanism. While the NPM model remains promising, it fails to address the challenges of the old public administration beyond the proffering of replicating private sector driven innovations. Owing to the relatively growing private sector, the application of such initiatives could prove challenging particularly in Nigeria as in other developing countries. Nonetheless their abound a compelling case for drawing on elements of the NPM in ensuring that public sector reforms are grounded in the interests and needs of citizens rather than been politically motivated.

### **Challenges and Trajectories of Treasury Single Account in Nigeria**

TSA was conceived to make certain that funds are available for the execution of government policies, effective oversight of aggregate cash flows, improve management of domestic borrowing schemes and to facilitate for investments of idle funds amongst others. However the above stated objectives cannot be attained hitch-free. Upon enactment some of the intricacies encountered by TSA include disbursement of funds to MDAs for their operations, which the AGF recently declared that the preliminary setbacks associated with the scheme has since been addressed. For developing countries such as Nigeria, full scale implementation a scheme with such coverage might prove problematic in terms of capacity and technical know-how. For Agbe *et al.*, (2017, p. 791); within the parameters of a developing country, TSA has a myriad of prospects and challenges. Because in practical terms pre-existing

banking arrangements may consist of thousands of bank accounts. Merging this may require extensive effort and genuine commitment. Agbe *et al.*, (2017) also claim that the challenges of redistribution of monetary resources accrued to a single treasury account back into the larger economy, remains one of the major setbacks of the scheme.

Amongst other possible negative implications of the policy, the communiqué mandating the enactment of the policy falls short of stipulating, if the TSA will finance budgetary allocation, outflow and inflows of government expenditure. The study identifies this as a major setback, because accumulation of revenue is just a fraction of the multifaceted nature of fraud that abounds in Nigeria. Furthermore, the hurried fashion in which the policy was enacted may bring about certain unintended negative effects. Another possible challenge may arise from the ability to match the technological requirements of the scheme. Hence, the levels of technological capacity as abound in Nigeria may adversely affect the functionality of the scheme.

In his own words Isa (2016) identified the issues of; the transition from a multi treasury to a single treasury account, cash crunch in DMBs, and the challenges of erratic power supply. Of other plausible challenges, the non-implementation of the policy by some state governments may affect the effect of the scheme on the entirety of the economy. The failure to attain all round national coverage may undermine efforts geared towards promoting transparency and accountability across government organs.

Consequently, the study posits the need for the enactment of contingency measures to cushion certain predetermined or unintended effects, with respect to implementation of policies with wide coverage.

### Conclusion

While the TSA may deter fraud in the public sector, there remains the need to implement accompanying policies such as monitoring and evaluation of project executions. By replicating a similar feat in the areas of monitoring and evaluation, the frequency at which fraud occur might likely decrease. Secondly, policies of coverage such as that of TSA should be phased, to avoid sudden shock in liquidity and cash flow in the economy. Lastly, it is of the opinion of this study, that state governments and local governments should as a matter of urgency follow suit in implementing the TSA. As they are thought to have a greater interaction with the Nigerian populace in comparison to the central government, this will increase the level of transparency and accountability in governance.

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