International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Fiscal Irresponsibility: A Bane to Financial Accountability in The Nigerian Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

Every successful government is expected to balance the budget and eliminate all forms of wasteful government spending which fiscal responsibility stands for. It is quite worrisome that the different arms of government have not taken the issues of fiscal responsibility seriously. They often fail to translate the macro-economic goals and sector priorities to conform to budget programmes. The study therefore examines the extent to which fiscal irresponsibility engenders, increased debt profile, mismanagement of fund, poor discipline, budget padding, inadequate monitoring and review of budgetary processes in Nigeria, and to also assess if an effective fiscal responsibility framework could strengthened government's accountability, budget transparency, budget implementation and budget credibility in the Nigerian public sector. To this end, the study used a sample size of 223 staff members of the Ministries of Finance in Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo and Delta States. ANOVA was used for the hypotheses tests and it was discovered that Fiscal irresponsibility engenders wasteful spending to the of benefit of few and at the expense of the general population. Fiscal irresponsibility also breeds increased debt profile, mismanagement of fund, poor discipline, budget padding and inadequate monitoring & review of budget. Fiscal responsibility on the other hand encourages budget transparency, accountability and credibility. It was recommended that government should meticulously implement the fiscal responsibility act in a way that would make government at all levels to be accountable and transparent enough in providing full justification of the value of monies that is set aside for all projects. Government should focus much of it attention to top priority projects that are profitable, people driven and could help in generating income.

KEYWORDS: Fiscal Irresponsibility, Increased Debt Profile, Mismanagement of Fund, Poor Discipline, Budget Padding, Budget Transparency.

1. Introduction

Nigerian has lost billions of naira needed for capital development as a result of fiscal irresponsibility in the public sector. There have been high levels of socio-economic retrogression despite the presence of a Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007) in Nigeria. The Nigerian society is filled with stories of wrong practices such as ghost workers on the pay roll of Governments' Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Others include embezzlements and commission of arsons by setting ablaze of offices that are housing sensitive documents in order to conceal fraud (Nwoko, 2014). In other instances, the Nigerian government keeps on heaping misery on its citizens through astronomic growth in the country's debt profile, coupled with mischievously prepared and implemented budget. It is important to note that the core problem with the Nigeria's budget system has been low efficiency in budget spending and not inadequate funding. The Nigerian government also pays less attention to its revenue budget and how to improve it.

Government is unaccountable of the funds entrusted in their care. Issues concerning what successive governments have done with tax payers' monies still remain unanswered (Igbeng, Beredugo & Adu, 2015). The preponderance of fiscal irresponsibility by government can also be seen for instance when the federal government approves the $1.96 billion for 284km rail project connecting Kano in Nigeria to Maradi in Niger Republic, when most train station in Nigeria are already closed down due to insecurity especially kidnapping and banditry (Adepegba, Olokor, Nnodim, Odeniyi & Angbulu, 2022). Nigeria is still engulfed in the payment of fuel subsidy to the tune of billions of dollars yet the government does not see any reasons to invest in building at least 400,000bpd refinery in any of the oil rich states for proximity in order to bring to an end the importation of fuel and save the cost of subsidy or to build four power generating plants and transmission facilities to upgrade power supply from 4000MW to 7000MW of electricity (USAID, 2022). This would have been a more profitable venture to help generate income to service loans.

The federal government also chose to approve N1.2 billion to aid Niger Republic to buy cars to tackle security situation in that country. This is no doubt a very big sign of fiscal irresponsibility where a nation that is borrowing to pay salaries is buying vehicles worth billions of Naira for another nation (Daka, 2022). This had sparked outrage among Nigerians, many of whom argued that funding a foreign entity should not be the government's priority amid harsh economic realities.

It will be recalled that the Federal Government of Nigeria has not explained to its citizens what happened to the $2.1 billion arms deal. The money was budgeted to purchase arms and ammunition to fight against insurgency in the North-East. But it was not utilised for the appropriate purpose. Does it mean the money suddenly disappeared into thin air without trace? The Nigerian citizens are still demanding an explanation from the appropriate authority.

It is also shocking to note that in 2020, during the two weeks lockdown in Nigeria due to coronavirus pandemic, billions of naira was spent to feed school children in the northern states, when schools were shut down. This does not show sign of a fiscal responsiveness (Alechenu, 2020; Baiyewu, 2020). These actions have been historically corroborated by succession World Bank Public Expenditure Review (PER) (2019) and Financial Accountability Review (PEMFAR) (2020) which established that, budget implementation in Nigeria have persistently faced multifaceted challenges to include: increasing neglects of outcome and effectiveness of the MDAs, improper costing of realizable revenue and expenditure while concentrating on inputs and outputs.

The Nigerian government no doubt hardly translates the macro-economic goals and sector priorities to conform to budget programmes. The budget usually contains items that are underprepared and un-implementable. It is also in Nigeria that the word 'budget padding' was mostly used to represent a situation where the leadership of the National Assembly smuggles financial items into the budget without the knowledge of other participants (Adejo, 2017). Padding of the budget was used for the wrong reasons to inflate the proposed budget in order to encourage the symphonizing of funds in MDAs (Aguguomi & Ehiogu, 2016).

The high-level of fiscal irresponsibility of government engenders inability to function effectively (Ndan, 2013). Typically, a fiscally irresponsible government is not able to sustain programs designed to provide fast relief to its citizens, and depending on the extent of the budgetary problem, may not even be able to fund its own programs in ordinary times. Not only does this cause problems internally, but it can also cause a lack of confidence on a global scale that can negatively impact the economic development of the nation.

The continuous call for fiscal responsiveness through increasing budget transparency, effective participation and financial accountability is extremely relevant in order to safeguard the integrity and improve the efficacy of public spending, so that public resources can be more effectively deployed to promote development and reduce poverty and inequality. This is also crucial to boost the effectiveness of resources usage and ensure that these resources are used for the purpose intended and satisfying the concerns of the citizens.

Afonso (2008), iterates that cases of fraud is prevalent in the Nigerian public sector; and that every segment of the public service seem to be involved in one way or the other in some of these illegal acts; this is as a result of weak accountability. There is a therefore need to explore further the issue of fiscal irresponsibility and financial accountability in the Nigerian Public sector.

1.1 Statement of the problem

Every successful government is expected to balance the budget and must eliminate all forms of wasteful government spending which fiscal responsibility stands for. It is quite worrisome that the different arms of government have not taken the issues of fiscal responsibility seriously which has amounted to wasteful spending by all levels of government. It is no doubt that the country is littered with so many abandoned government budgets or projects that are not people friendly or completely abandoned for selfish reasons.

There have also been speculations that the Nigeria government spends 1/3rd of its budget on servicing government debts with little or nothing left for human and capital development. The monies spent of the National Assembly for a year is enough to create two million jobs in a year, yet most Nigerian graduate are jobless. It goes to show that the Nigerian levels of government are simply fiscally irresponsibility and can hardly give reassurances that their agencies can judiciously generate funds and make expenditures without placing undue hardship on its citizens

This irresponsiveness had continued to deprive future generation of their own financial sustainability through the mismanagement of the present revenue and expenditure and undermining government present performance. It is against this background the article revolves on examining the extent to which fiscal irresponsibility engenders, increased debt profile, mismanagement of fund, poor discipline, budget padding, poor financial management, inadequate control, monitoring and review of budgetary processes in Nigeria, and to also assess if an effective fiscal responsibility framework could strengthened government's accountability, budget transparency, budget implementation and budget credibility in the Nigerian public sector.

2. Review of related literature

The Financial Responsibility Act of Nigeria was enacted in 2007 in order to promote the rule of openness in the planning and formulation of the yearly budget and by ensuring that the budget sessions are made known to the people, financial obligation in publication of the financial records, reports and documentation of the different levels of government and limiting all forms of further budgetary disbursement, as well as enable due process conformity at all tiers of government. The focus was to boost judicious supervision and management of the country's financial assets with intent to guaranteeing long-term macroeconomic steadiness, among others. This act of fiscal responsiveness was underpinned on the theory of Common Pool Resource (CPR) which establishes that the root of fiscal indiscipline is in the lack of proper governance over common pool resources of public finance (Wyplosz and Kostrup, 2010; and Hallerberg et al., 2009). The common pool problem of public finance is the consequence of subsidising public policies focused at particular groups of people in the society from a general tax fund, which makes an externality; whereby, those enjoying the marginal benefit from an extra fund of public spending are not those bearing the marginal cost of funding it. This no doubt gave rise to fiscal irresponsibility where governments are pushed into higher levels of spending, deficits, and debts.

Ezeabasili and Herbert (2013), posited that federalism and fiscal adjustment emerging economies should devote attention not only to the maintenance of prudent fiscal policies in every budgetary period, but also progressively seek to build over the long-run, a coherent consistent, reliable and stable fiscal policy. It is this perception of the long-term trend, based on credible institutional framework and positive socioeconomic development pursuits that generate positive signals to drive a sustainable economic development.

The sustenance of transparency and accountability is an important aspect of achieving every nation's policy strides across the globe (Arowolo, 2011). However, in wake of neither low transparency nor accountability, corruption and under development festers (United Nations, 1999). In other words, the path towards poverty reduction and economic advancement is laced with first the establishment of sound and sustainable institutional frameworks, fiscal policies, delivering consistent economic results with strong institutions and mechanisms, like the fiscal responsibility law and effective execution (Ewetan, 2012). Although this law has been in place for transparency and accountability sake, it is worrisome that concerns have been raised by various authors about the lingering issues of low transparency and accountability which have enhances the need for fiscal responsibility within the Nigerian public sector. Although ethical traps are more common now than a generation ago, as it is easy to step over moral boundaries (Ebitu & Beredugo 2015).

Yelwa (2014) asserted that, huge amount of Naira is lost through one financial malpractice or the other in Nigeria as a result non accountability, which to say the least, drains the nation's meager resources through fraudulent means with far-reaching and attendant consequences on the development or even socio-economic or political programmed of the nation. Billions of Naira is lost in the public sector every year through fraudulent means (Ushe, 2002). This represents only the amount that is ferreted out and made public. Indeed, much more substantial or huge sums are lost in undetected frauds or those that are for one reason or the hushed up (Ezeabasili & Herbert, 2013).

To worsen, the whole situations, the country is been ravaged with the under-utilisation of resources while others include either exclusion or conflict on the roles of stakeholders in the budget process; Poor discipline; Corruption and lack of due process as well as inadequate control, monitoring and review processes.

Effective implementation of the budget can only be ascertained if there are independent reviews and assessments from the public using relevant indexes and/or indicators. Therefore, strengthening external oversight of public finances is a defining challenge for Nigeria in its quest to foster fiscal responsibility and curb corruption.

One of the ways of ascertaining if a government is fiscally responsible is through the level of fiscal transparency or budget transparency. The rising importance of fiscal transparency, as part of budgetary institutions, is directly linked to solve a problem of governance in public finance: "The insight that institutions matter for choices and outcomes is the basis for the increased focus during the past two decades on principles of good governance, of which transparency of government is a prominent part" (Alt, Lassen & Rose, 2006). To this effect, fiscal transparency is considered as part of institutional arrangements that "can play a role in helping contain the widely observed penchant of policymakers for excessive deficits" (Debrun & Kumar, 2007, p. 479). Fiscal transparency, minimizing fiscal illusions (Puviani, 1973), is deemed a fundamental tool for obtaining governments' fiscal sustainability: "transparency in government operations are widely regarded as an important precondition for macroeconomic fiscal sustainability, good governance, and overall fiscal rectitude [and] are a necessary condition for sound economic policy" (Larch, 2009, p. 8).

Both fiscal governance and fiscal transparency interplay with the contemporary politics and macroeconomic conditions in determining the fiscal outcome in each country. "The actual choice of instruments for financing the government activity, and more in general its size and the balance of fiscal policy, are shaped by political actors**"** (Ricciuti, 2002, p. 2). Government partisanship, as well as features of the political party system and of government institutions is deemed responsible of fiscal profligacy as many theories "identify the characteristics of governments and institutions that vary across national systems and that might affect the supply of fiscal responsibility and determine the actual design of the fiscal budgeting process" (Leachman *et.al.* 2007).

2.1 History of Fiscal responsibility in Nigeria

Public finance in Nigeria has been characterized by the "*common pool problem*" where revenue are drawn from every part of the economy and from the larger population fund expenditure programs targeting narrow interest groups thereby creating differences in benefits between the larger group of taxpayers and the smaller group of program recipients, with abundant possibilities for huge free riders. With such situation, representatives of interest groups receiving targeted spending have an incentive to overspend compared to the socially optimal levels and abuse the system (Ewetan, 2012).

Experience in Nigeria has shown that the fiscal policy objectives of government are often missed, either through the wrong specification or application of rules and procedures or through failures relating to fiscal management. Many countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and Argentina have therefore found it necessary to guide and control the process through specific legislation.

Nigeria's Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007 is in this tradition. Organic budget laws cover three broad areas – organisational, transparency and accountability.

a. The organisational aspects normally include the basis and coverage of the budget, budget calendar, budget implementation processes, accounting, internal and external audits, role of central and spending agencies, intergovernmental fiscal relations including the roles of states and local governments.

b. The transparency requirements may specify the sectoral roles, nature, sources and regularity of fiscal information production and dissemination and observance of both internal and international standards on fiscal transparency.

c. The accountability aspects may cover levels and types of horizontal and vertical accountability, and the role of oversight bodies and their functions, as well as the mechanism in place for addressing fraud and corrupt practices (Ezeabasili & Herbert, 2013).

The Nigerian budgetary experience has been tortuous and troubled, affected by rapid succession of regimes, constitutions and administrations as well as significant changes in the macroeconomic framework and the global economic order (Ndan, 2013). Colonial budgets were minimalist but tightly controlled under a comprehensive and stringent code of *Financial Instructions.* Inherited at Independence, the code was modified to take account of the constitutional change to a presidential form of government, but the traditions of budget discipline were maintained. With the advent of military rule, however, the traditions were summarily abandoned or progressively eroded. The brief civilian inter-regime (1979-1983) did little to restore due process but the return to democratic civil rule in 1999 heralded a new beginning.

Historically, as a succession of World Bank Public Expenditure Review (PER) and Public Expenditure Management and Financial Accountability Review (PEMFAR) and other studies have noted, budget implementation in Nigeria has faced many challenges, among them:

1. The tendency to concentrate on inputs and outputs, not outcomes;
2. Concern with legal requirements and appropriate processes and procedures rather than with effectiveness;
3. Non-rigorous preparation on the basis of realizable revenues, proper costing and absorptive capacity;
4. Poor translation of macro-economic goals and sector priorities to effective budget programmes;
5. Admission of under-prepared and un-implementable budget items;
6. Under-utilisation of resources;

Other problems identified highlight the management dimension. They include:

- Confusion and/or conflict of roles among stakeholders;
- Exclusion of some critical stakeholders from significant roles in the budget process;
- Lack of executive and management capacity;
- Poor discipline;
- Corruption and lack of due process;
- Poor project management;
- Poor financial management; and
- Inadequate control, monitoring and review processes.

Indeed, the problems of budget expenditure have manifested at all stages of the budgetary process, as well as across sectors and Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of government. On the revenue side, much of the potential revenue is lost as a result of lack of proper monitoring and control of oil-related flows as well as insufficient attention to optimisation of non-oil revenue. Although it is true, as the 2007 Public Expenditure Management and Financial Accountability Review (PEMFAR) report remarks, that “the core problem with Nigeria’s budget system has been low efficiency in budget spending, not inadequate current of funding”, there is need to pay due attention to the revenue budget and how to improve it.

The passage of the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) in 2007 was expected to provide the desired effect in terms of improved fiscal performance and fiscal governance at the federal level and across MDAs. This goes to show that the issue of fiscal responsibility is yet to be taken seriously in Nigeria **(**Nwoko, 2014).

2.1.1 Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability in the Nigerian Public Sector

Fiscal responsibility policy started as a response to demands during Obasanjo’s administration by Nigerian civil society and international financial institutions for more transparent and people-centered development policies and actions, especially within the context of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), which Nigeria had earlier subscribed to, and domesticated under its National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Umunna, 2013). The objectives of Fiscal Responsibility policy according to the FRA (2007) are to: provide for prudent management of the nation’s resources; ensure long term macroeconomic stability of the nation’s economy; secure greater accountability and transparency in fiscal operations; and establish the Fiscal Responsibility Commission (FRC) to ensure the promotion of the nation’s economic objectives.

Through Fiscal responsibility, government should be able to engage in prudential administration of all revenues and expenditures as well as strict classification on specification of time, area and levels of expenditure. It helps in ensuring that all revenues and expenditures are estimated at fair market values in order to avoid padding of the budget. It gives clarity of purpose in the management of fund in line with the MDAs’ functional lines and responsibilities.

In view of the high rate of corruption, dwindling revenue and ever demanding needs of the people especially within the climate of democracy being experienced in the country, Olutuyi(2008) made valid claims that fiscal responsibility can go a long way to curtail the issue of lack of transparency and accountability in the Nigerian public sector. According to Nwoko, (2014), the challenge of corruption in Nigeria’s public sector led to the enactment of the Fiscal Responsibility Act 2007; to ensure the promotion and enforcement of the nation’s economic objectives. The Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007) ensures that the Federal government carries out expenditure within formally specified and reasonable limits, given a sound revenue base. The FRA 2007 also places strict limits on the accumulation of public debts. The FRA is designed to institutionalize transparency in the budgeting process in Nigeria, provide guidelines for public expenditure management and revenue forecasting, and limit the level of national debt. Collectively, the FRA 2007 seeks to improve fiscal transparency on one hand, and accountability of public expenditure, on the other.

However, the institutional and policy environment presents constraints for the effectiveness of the FRA 2007, and there is the knotty issue of the fiscal and political privileges enjoyed by sub-national units in the Nigerian federation, and how the national political economy influences fiscal discipline (Ushe, 2002). In Nigeria the dismal performance of the public sector since the first half of the 1980s has brought to the front burner the issue of fiscal federalism which has remained dominant and most contentious in Nigeria’s polity (Arowolo 2011). According to Ewetan, (2012), in the last three decades Nigerians have contended with not only vanishing real incomes but also unbearable levels of unemployment and inflation, decay in social amenities and failure to maintain, not to talk of improving, the nation's infrastructures. This dismal performance of the public sector as a result of non-accountability has prevented the creation of opportunities for a resilient and sustainable growth and development of the Nigerian economy, which should be the object of rational and functional fiscal federalism.

In spite of the problem encountered, the fiscal responsibility commission has braced up to its assignment as there is marked departure from the disjointed, adhoc and poorly enforced fiscal policy management to a new system aimed at expenditure restraint (Ndan, 2013). The passage into law of the FRA 2007 at the federal level help in reducing financial recklessness and has improved efficiency in fiscal management, especially in areas of allocation and management of public expenditure, revenue collection, saving and transparency in fiscal matters. Over the past decades, Nigeria has brought on board fiscal reforms such as; the passing into law of the Bureau for Public Procurement Act and initiating the FSA. Nigeria is also one of the few oil producing countries that have signed up to the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiatives as a way to help improve corporate governance in the oil sector. Nigeria also, established the Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) to monitor the consistency of oil revenue to production quotas. These are all legislations geared towards improving transparency and accountability in the Nigerian public sector.

2.1.2 Transparency, Accountability, Credibility and Implementation Initiatives

The relationship between good governance and better economic and social outcomes is increasingly acknowledged. Transparency – openness about policy intentions, credibility and implementation – are key elements of good governance.

The budget is the single most important policy document of governments, where policy objectives are reconciled and implemented in concrete terms. However, it must incorporate some criterion to achieve good governance such as the followings

1. Budget transparency is defined as the full disclosure of all relevant fiscal information in a timely and systematic manner. Budget transparency spurs MDA to adhere to the general budget calendar, while ensuring that budgeted revenues are usually classified according to individual administrative departments.

It also ensures that budgeted expenditures are classified according to individual administrative department and that all receipts from various resources are separately identified in the annual budget. Budget transparency encourages the formal analysis of overall macroeconomic implication of the expenditure items included in the budget by the MDA; while efforts are also made to inform the public about proposed policy/regulatory changes (Ndan, 2013).

2. In relation to budget implementation MDAs shall regularly publish projects whose contracts have been awarded, MDA should always invite the CSOs to discuss the expected impacts of the ongoing/ completed projects and CSOs are encouraged on their own to monitor the projects and submit their reports to the MDA (Ndan, 2013).
3. Government's accountability represents the availability of in-year budget implementation reports (monthly, quarterly and half yearly); Annual independent external review (audit) of budget reporting and evidence of addressing issues are usually raised; availability of monitoring and evaluation report of the MDA and regular analysis and assessment of the quality of financial management (Ezeabasili & Herbert, 2013).
4. Concern is also required for budget credibility which emphasizes that for the budget to be credible the budget can contested/rejected by the Budget Office of the federal Ministry of Finance or the National Assembly. The budget can be reviewed upwards or downwards in order to reach a consensus point in the budget. This review could become necessary in order to add other important items or remove all unclear line items. In order to further boost the budget credibility, the National Assembly could also request that the MDA resubmits the revised proposal before approval. In addition to the above budget credibility ensures that on no account would a budget proposal be approved without comments from the Budget Office of the Federal Ministry of Finance or the National Assembly (Ezeabasili & Herbert, 2013).

2.2 Empirical Review

Elina (2010) examined the association between transparency, fiscal governance, and fiscal discipline on macro-economic advancement. This is because the effect of macro-economic on fiscal institutions has been undermined in Ghana which instigates budget balances. The study was conducted in Ghana, while the expost facto research design was used. The hypotheses were test using multiple regression and the result shows that macro-economic was principally significant in deciding fiscal effects, which politics can play a significant role. The evidence implies that the more disciplined budgetary process and adoption of stricter rules can be tougher when nations face deficit challenges.

Asatryan et al. (2015) examined fiscal inefficiencies/indiscipline associated with the soft budget constraint problem of sub-national government. The ravaging effect of fiscal inefficiency as continued to affect budgeting in the sub-national nation of Kenya. The study adopts expose facto design. The analysis of variance was used for analysis of the data. They tested the proposition that weak local-level budget incentives and excessive borrowing can be overcome when the financial consequences of expenditure choices are adopted in a domain, and that the latter can be achieved by assigning (a sufficient degree of) revenue autonomy to subnational governments, and find evidence supportive of the idea that higher revenue decentralisation is linked with better sub-national government budget balances (fiscal discipline). It was recommended that fiscal efficiency should be inculcated in all government institutions.

Alesin and Perotti (1996) examined the problems of fiscal discipline and budget process by analysing whether budget procedures matter for the determination of balanced budget and its composition and the certain institutional reforms necessary for such balance budget in Trinidad. The authors hypothesized that balance budget laws should apply to sub-national government and not necessarily national government. Descriptive design was used together with panel data and it was discovered that budget procedures should not create obstacles to a fiscally responsible government and its however, suggested that transparency and reinforcing of the role of the branch executive, treasury minister vis-à-vis the legislature should be in place in order to achieve centralisation.

Omodero and Okafor (2016), examine the efficiency and accountability of public sector revenue and expenditure in Nigeria (1970-2014). They collected data on total federal government revenue and expenditure, state governments' revenue and expenditure were collected from Statistical bulletin from the Central Bank of Nigeria from 1970-2014. Expost Facto and regression method were used and their study findings reveals that the level of accountability is very poor in Nigeria because the attributes of accessibility, comprehensiveness, relevance, quality, reliability and timely disclosure of financial information, social and political information about government activities are completely non available or partially available for the citizens to assess the performance of public officers mostly the political office holders.

3. Methodology

The survey research design was used to examine the effect of fiscal irresponsibility in Nigeria. This was undertaken by administering copies of questionnaire to cross section of staff members of the state ministries of finance in Cross River State, Akwa-Ibom State, Rivers State, Bayelsa State, Edo State and Delta State.

The population was 508 for the six states while the sample size of 223 was considered adequate after the application of the Yamane (1967) sample size determination. The study focused majorly on the primary data which were sourced through the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed on a 5-point Likert scale. The scales are: Strongly Agree (4 points); Agree (3 points); Disagree (2 points); Strongly Disagree (1 point) and Undecided (0 point). From this scale, the 'strongly agreed options = 4 points' is regarding as the maximum (Max), while 'undecided option = 0 point' is regarded as the minimum (Min). In relation to the analysis of data, the objectives were examined using the Analysis of variance (ANOVA) to model the effect between the variables at 5% levels of significance.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

It constitutes the presentation of primary data collected from respondents of the six State Ministries of Finance comprising Cross River State, Akwa-Ibom State, Rivers State, Bayelsa State, Edo State and Delta State. This section covers data analysis using the descriptive statistics of increased debt profile, mismanagement of fund, poor discipline, budget padding, inadequate monitoring and review of budgetary processes in Nigeria as prerequisite of fiscal irresponsibility. These descriptive statistics are as presented in the tables below:

TABLE 1a:

Descriptive Statistics of Fiscal Irresponsibility and Bad Governance

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Fiscal Irresponsibility	3.3049	1.04680	223
Increased debt profile	3.3408	.95412	223
Mismanagement of fund	3.1928	.82393	223
Poor discipline	3.2556	.91146	223
Budget Padding	3.3677	.98605	223
Inadequate monitoring & review	3.3318	.98512	223

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

Table 1a shows the descriptive statistics of the fiscal irresponsibility and bad governance in the Nigerian public sector. It was revealed that the minimum and maximum values of the responses were 0 and 4 respectively, while the mean response of 3.3049 which is approximately 3 indicates that majority of the respondents affirms the high prevalence of fiscal irresponsibility of government in the Nigerian public sector. The mean response for the respective items which ranges 3.1928 to 3.3408 reaffirm the prevalence of increased debt profile, mismanagement of fund, poor discipline, budget padding, inadequate monitoring and review in the Nigeria Public sector. The standard deviation ranges from 0.82393 to 1.04680 show variation from the mean. In order words, the responses of all the respondents were unrelated.

TABLE 1b

MODELLING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FISCAL IRRESPONSIBILITY AND BAD GOVERNANCE

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Increased debt profile Fiscal irresponsibility	*Between Groups	165.239	4	41.310	244.322	.000
	Within Groups	36.859	218	.169		
	Total	202.099	222			
Mismanagement of fund Fiscal irresponsibility	*Between Groups	37.794	4	9.449	18.242	.000
	Within Groups	112.914	218	.518		
	Total	150.709	222			
	Between Groups	100.365	4	25.091	65.067	.000

Poor discipline * Fiscal irresponsibility	Within Groups	84.066	218	.386		
	Total	184.430	222			
Budget Padding * Fiscal irresponsibility	Between Groups	184.088	4	46.022	315.904	.000
	Within Groups	31.759	218	.146		
	Total	215.848	222			
Inadequate monitoring & review * Fiscal irresponsibility	Between Groups	54.700	4	13.675	18.546	.000
	Within Groups	160.744	218	.737		
	Total	215.444	222			

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

In relation to our first objectives, the result from the above table shows that fiscal irresponsibility (F_{cal} = 244.322, p-value = .000 < 0.05) bring about an increased debt profile. Fiscal irresponsibility (F_{cal} = 18.242, p-value = .000 < 0.05) also propels mismanagement of fund. It bring about poor discipline (F_{cal} = 65.067, p-value = .000 < 0.05); budget padding (F_{cal} = 315.904, p-value = .000 < 0.05) & inadequate monitoring & review of budget (F_{cal} = 18.546, p-value = .000 < 0.05).

TABLE 2a
Descriptive Statistics
on Fiscal Responsibility and Financial Accountability

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fiscal_Responsibility	223	.00	4.00	2.9453	1.20671
Budget_Transparency	223	.00	4.00	2.7556	1.27213
Budget_Implementation	223	.00	4.00	2.6351	1.30015
Government_Accountability	223	.00	4.00	2.7309	1.21895
Budget_Credibility	223	.00	4.00	2.8009	1.30011
Valid N (listwise)	223				

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

The descriptive statistics of the second objectives of the study shows that the mean response of Fiscal Responsibility stood at 2.9453 indicating that fiscal responsibility revolves around prudential administration of all revenues and expenditures as well as strict classification on specification of time, area and levels of expenditure and also gives clarity of purpose in the management of fund along functional lines and responsibilities. The mean response on budget transparency which stood at 2.7556 also shows that respondents agreed that budgeted revenues and expenditure should be classified according to individual administrative departments and that all receipts from various resources should be separately identified in the annual budget

The mean response of 2.6351 for budget implementation also suggests that respondents agreed that MDA should regularly publish the projects and contracts that have been awarded, and that in the event that CSOs monitor the projects on their own they should submit their reports to the MDA and also make it public. The mean response of 2.7309 for government's accountability also suggests that respondents agreed that there should be availability of in-year budget implementation reports and there should be annual independent external review (audit) of budget reporting and evidence of addressing issues should also be raised. The mean response on budget credibility which stood at 2.8009 also shows that respondents agreed that budget proposal should be approved after due comments have been raised and resolved from the Budget Office of the Federal Ministry of Finance or the National Assembly.

TABLE 2b
MODELLING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Budget_Transparency * Fiscal_Responsibility	Between Groups	221.415	4	55.354	87.538	.000
	Within Groups	137.850	218	.632		
	Total	359.265	222			
Budget_Implementation * Fiscal_Responsibility	Between Groups	223.284	4	55.821	80.069	.000
	Within Groups	151.981	218	.697		
	Total	375.265	222			
Government_Accountability * Fiscal_Responsibility	Between Groups	233.294	4	58.323	131.671	.000
	Within Groups	96.563	218	.443		
	Total	329.857	222			
Budget_Credibility * Fiscal_Responsibility	Between Groups	21.689	4	5.422	3.898	.004
	Within Groups	303.226	218	1.391		
	Total	324.915	222			

Source: SPSS Output, 2022

In relation to our second objective, the result from the above table shows that potency of fiscal responsibility frameworks in strengthening, budget transparency, government's accountability, budget implementation and budget credibility in the Nigerian public sector. It was revealed form the table that fiscal responsibility frameworks can (F_{cal} = 87.538, p-value = .000 < 0.05) significantly enhance budget transparency. Fiscal responsibility frameworks can (F_{cal} = 80.069, p-value = .000 < 0.05) also significantly strengthen government's accountability. Fiscal responsibility frameworks can also enhance favorable budget implementation (F_{cal} = 131.671, p-value = .000 < 0.05) and budget credibility (F_{cal} = 3.898, p-value = .000 < 0.05).

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The study used a sample size of 223 respondents contacted from cross section of staff members of the States Ministries of Finance in Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo and Delta States. It specifically focused on the fiscal irresponsibility as a bane financial accountability in the Nigerian public sector. It was discovered from the perception of the respondents and hypotheses tests that indeed fiscal irresponsibility that is evidenced in the poor translation of macro-economic goals, high concentrates on inputs and outputs & not outcomes; improper costing and underutilization of resources as well as engagement on unsustainable programs designed and high frequency in the wasteful spending to the of benefit of few at the expense of the general population shall continue to breed increased debt profile, mismanagement of fund, poor discipline, budget padding, inadequate monitoring & review of budget.

The second objective shows that fiscal responsibility framework on the other hand has a significant strengthening effect on budget transparency, government's accountability, budget implementation and budget credibility in the Nigerian public sector. These were corroborated by Ndan (2013) Akinleye and Alaran-Ajewole (2018) who established that fiscal responsibility act as a viable institutional framework for transparency and accountability and budgetary implementation.

The adoption of fiscal responsibility framework to lend credence to government financial performance has attracted considerable research attention in Nigeria. It is no longer news that most government in African countries has been reckless in the administration of the fiscal sectors of the economy. Their lack of fiscal responsibilities have engenders wide spread of corruption within all government ministries, department and agencies. This fiscal rascality has been evidenced in the mismanagement of the tax payers' monies. The revenues that are generated do not commensurate with the available projects on ground. Budget planning and execution are usually carried out on projects that do not exist or never ends. So much billions of Nairas have been passed in the budget without meeting the general needs of the citizenry. Budget planning and execution are conducted in favour of functional units that contribute less than proportionate increase to either the revenue base or welfare of the country. Most State governments also build bridges, roads, dams at exorbitant cost that far outweighs fair/actual value of the projects thereby undermining the intricacies of fiscal responsibility act that is on ground in Nigeria. The civil society organisations that would have also helped in holding government accountable to the funds entrusted in their care are equally prevented from having privileged information from the conception to implementation of the budget. Government's activities are shredded in conspiracy and secrecy where the citizenry are left in the dark, whereas representation calls for responsibility, stewardship or accountability.

It follows therefore that the full implementations of fiscal responsibility act in Nigeria which calls for the prudential management of the nation's resources, and ensuring long-term macro-economic stability of the national economy, securing greater accountability and transparency in their fiscal operations within the Medium and long Term Fiscal Policy Framework cannot be undermined if Nigeria must success even in the present time. Fiscal responsibility would not only ensure that government's accountability which include the stewardship of the resources entrusted into the hands of government but to include Budget transparency of the consistency in the budget classification system and openness in budget documentation including details of revenue and expenditure forecasts which is comprehensive enough to provide complete overall picture of fiscal risks. Corroboratively, it is also high time our leaders changed their mindset and work for the progress and unity of this nation instead of amassing wealth to themselves. This is the only way we can achieve development and make Nigeria great again.

The civil society organizations should be involved in budgetary planning process as well as in the auditing process of all government activities as a prerequisite to fiscal responsibility so as to propel appropriate accountability of their activities. Government should meticulously implement the fiscal responsibility act in a way that would make government at all levels to be accountable and transparent enough in providing full justification of the value of monies that is set aside for all projects and activities in their budgets. Government should focus much of it attention to top priority projects that are profitable, people driven and could help in generating income.

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