

2025

Salary Distribution Across Job Levels: A Global and Nigerian Perspective

Abstract

This report examines salary distribution across various job levels, focusing particularly on the Nigerian context while juxtaposing global examples to provide a comparative analysis. The study investigates disparities in remuneration within the public sector, analysing factors that contribute to wage differentials, the repercussions on employee morale and productivity, and the broader implications on national service delivery. Special focus is given to the Nigerian public sector salary structure, where cases have emerged of junior officers in some agencies earning more than senior employees in core ministries. In parallel, global examples such as public sector pay practices in the United Kingdom, Ghana, and Uganda offer a broader contextual understanding of salary disparities. Utilizing empirical data, case studies, and scholarly commentary from sources like Pillah (2023), Punch Newspapers (2023), Daily Times Nigeria (2023), and other local and international reports, this report offers actionable recommendations. These include policy reforms that call for salary harmonization, transparency measures, and regular structural reviews to achieve equity. Ultimately, by addressing these discrepancies, the study aims to contribute to more efficient public sector operations, bolstering employee morale and national development.



Executive Summary

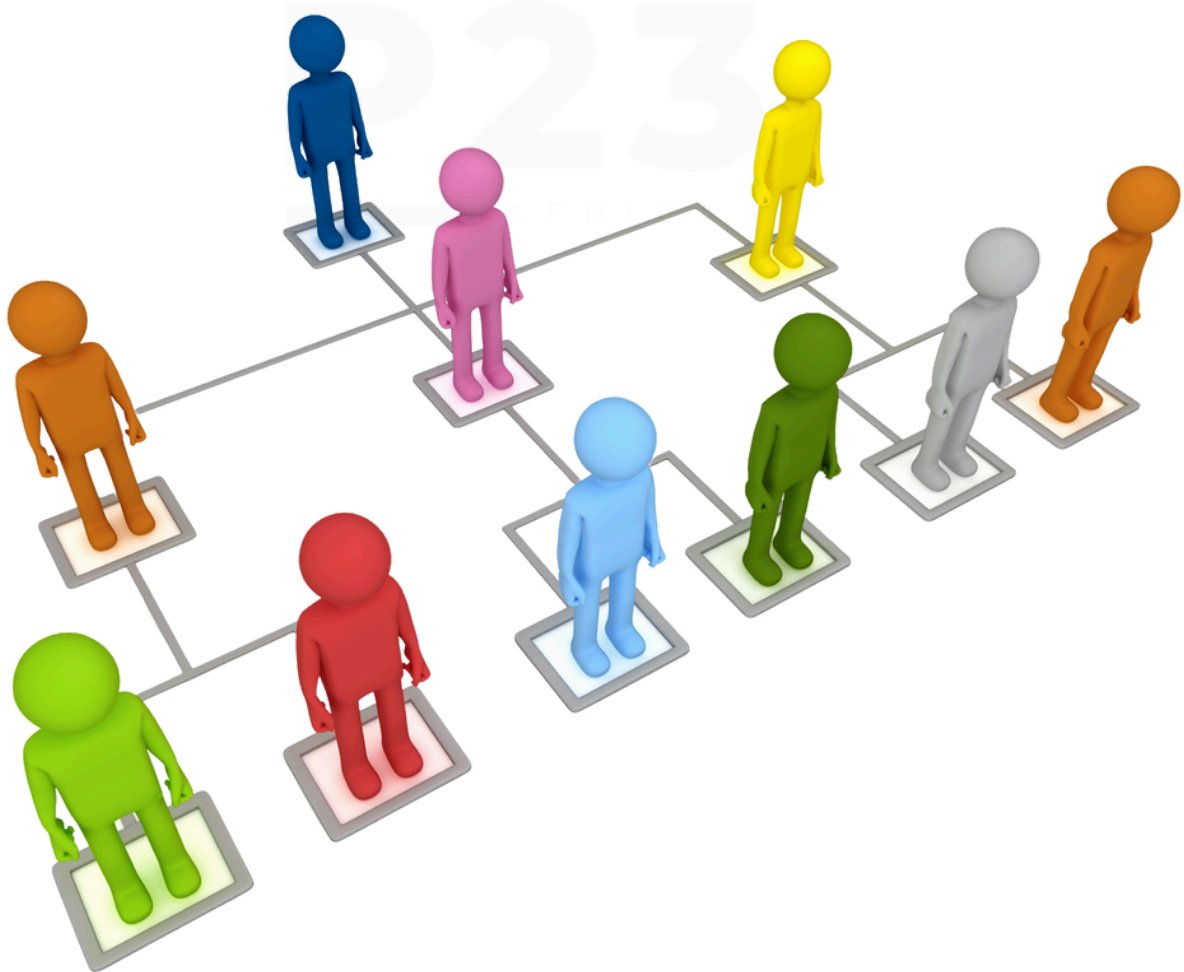
Salary disparities are at the heart of many public sector challenges across the globe. In Nigeria, the existing wage structure reveals significant imbalances where, for instance, a Nigerian senator may receive over ₦13 million monthly in salaries and allowances while a Grade Level 8 civil servant earns as little as ₦99,000 per month. Such imbalances are not unique to Nigeria.



Globally, similar disparities have raised concerns: in the United Kingdom, for instance, over 1,300 employees at quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (quangos) have reported annual compensations exceeding £100,000, with some earning even more than the Prime Minister. In Ghana, despite an average monthly net public sector salary of GH¢2,594 reported in 2022, the wage gap remains stark where the highest-paid employee earns 81 times more than the lowest-paid. These inequities have led to low morale, high turnover, and inefficiencies, alongside fostering environments in which corruption may flourish. Moreover, challenges such as structural misalignment, political interference, and outdated salary frameworks further complicate efforts to attain equity and improved service delivery. This report presents a thorough exploration of the historical evolution of salary structures, alongside a detailed empirical analysis that draws on quantitative data and qualitative insights. It culminates in a series of recommendations designed to harmonize salary scales, instill transparency, and ultimately enhance productivity and national development.

Introduction

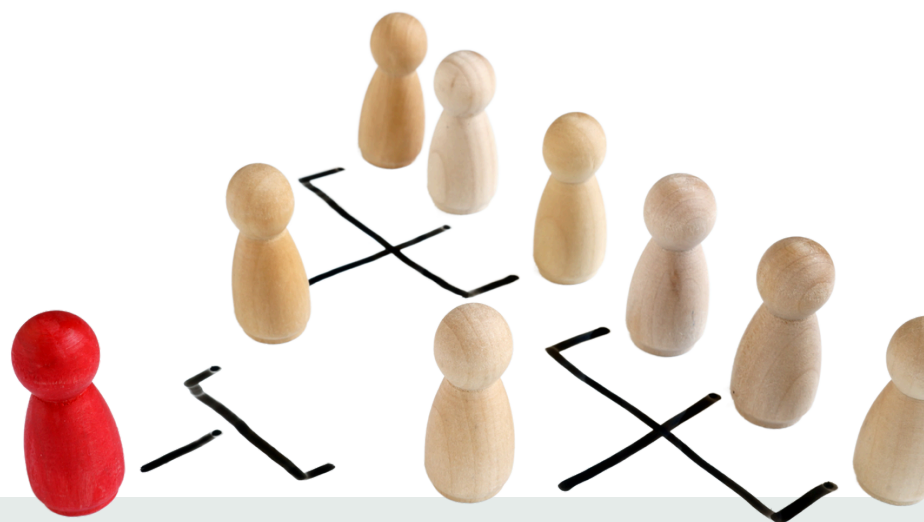
Salary structures constitute a critical component of organizational functioning, directly impacting employee motivation, retention, and service quality. Public sector salary frameworks are no exception; they play a pivotal role in shaping policy effectiveness and public trust. In Nigeria, where public institutions form the backbone of governance and service delivery, the stark discrepancies in remuneration have undermined both employee morale and broader institutional efficiency.



The evolution of these wage structures is deeply rooted in historical legacies and socio-economic transformations. Colonial-era administrative systems, which often favoured a rigid and hierarchical structure, have given way to modern but still fragmented salary frameworks influenced by numerous political, economic, and bureaucratic factors. Over time, these disparities have become exacerbated by inconsistent policy implementation, cyclical inflationary pressures, and practices that reward political affiliation over merit.

Beyond Nigeria, similar disparities are also observed in other parts of the world. The United Kingdom's experience with public sector remuneration, particularly among quangos, and cases from Ghana and Uganda illustrate that wage imbalances are not isolated phenomena. Instead, they reflect a global struggle to balance fiscal discipline with equitable and transparent compensation practices. Against this backdrop, this report seeks to delineate the intricate patterns underlying salary distributions while advancing pragmatic solutions and benchmarking global best practices.

In the sections that follow, rigorous quantitative data, comprehensive qualitative insights, and robust case studies are presented. The aim is to provide a nuanced interpretation of the factors that have driven salary disparities in Nigeria and across the global landscape. Ultimately, this report serves as a resource to guide policymakers, researchers, and advocacy groups in implementing robust reforms for an equitable salary distribution framework.



Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to analysing salary distribution across job levels, particularly within the Nigerian public sector, while drawing parallels with global practices. The research methodology comprises the following components:

Quantitative Data Analysis:

Primary Data:

Salary figures and wage scales extracted from government reports, official statistics, and authorized releases.

Secondary Data:

Historical trends derived from academic journals, research papers, and media reports. For instance, empirical data on salary trends from the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC) in Nigeria, and publicly available data on similar frameworks in the United Kingdom, Ghana, and Uganda.

Qualitative Analysis:

Interviews and Surveys:

Although not directly conducted for this report, insights from public sector stakeholders collated from news articles, interviews, and investigative reports inform the analysis of employee sentiment and institutional behaviour.

Case Studies:

Detailed examinations of salary disparities in various case studies, including Nigeria's legislative bodies versus core ministries, and comparisons with public institutions in the United Kingdom and Ghana.

Comparative Studies:

Use of cross-national comparisons to identify benchmarks and gather lessons from best practices in public sector remuneration worldwide. This involves a detailed analysis of compensatory patterns, performance metrics, and structural reforms.

This multifaceted approach ensures that the findings in this report are well-grounded in empirical evidence and synthesized from diverse sources, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play.



Salary Distribution in Nigeria's Public Sector

Overview of the Salary Structure

Nigeria's public sector wage structure is characterized by multiple pay scales and is administered by separate entities for different government institutions. The National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC) is tasked with reviewing and setting salary structures; however, discrepancies persist despite these centralized efforts.

The current salary structure can be summarized as follows:

Senators and Senior Officials:

In legislative arms, such as the Nigerian Senate, remuneration packages often include base salaries, allowances, and benefits that result in monthly earnings exceeding ₦13 million. This figure not only reflects the seniority of the position but is also indicative of the value placed on political roles.

Middle-Level Managers:

Public sector managers and mid-level officers receive salaries that vary according to departmental budgets and policy directives. While certain parastatals have competitive pay scales, there remain instances where the salary of a junior officer in one agency outstrips that of a senior officer in another core ministry.

Junior Officers and Entry-Level Positions:

At the lower end of the pay spectrum, civil servants in lower grade levels (such as Grade Level 8) may earn as little as ₦90,000 per month. This steep contrast between the highest and lowest earners is emblematic of the underlying structural inequalities within the Nigerian public sector.

The fragmentation within the salary structure is further compounded by ad hoc promotions, allowances, and benefits that do not adhere uniformly to a centralized policy. This results in a complex matrix where two individuals at ostensibly similar levels may receive vastly different compensation due to factors such as agency-specific policies, political patronage, or discretionary allowances.

Factors Contributing to Salary Disparities

The wage differentials in Nigeria's public sector are driven by a complex interplay of multiple factors:

Lack of Harmonization:

Each public institution in Nigeria often adopts its own salary structure. This lack of standardization means that a junior officer in one parastatal might enjoy a salary package that exceeds that of a senior civil servant working in a core government ministry. The absence of a universal framework allows inter-agency disparities to multiply over time.

Political Influence and Patronage:

Political dynamics often play a significant role in salary assignment. Positions that are politically appointed even if they do not correspond with the expected responsibilities tend to come with lucrative compensation packages. This politicization of job levels undermines merit-based rewards and exacerbates inequalities.

Economic Factors and Inflation:

Nigeria has experienced persistent inflation over recent decades. While salary increments have been applied sporadically, they often lag behind the actual rate of inflation. For example, from 2007 to 2019, certain salary levels witnessed a growth rate of 169%, whereas inflation increased by over 214% from 2007 to 2022. This disconnect further erodes the real value of wages, particularly impacting lower-level employees.

Corruption and Mismanagement:

The absence of transparency and accountability within certain public sector institutions has allowed for malpractices in salary administration. Cases of funds misappropriation and salary manipulation have been documented, contributing not only to a skewed distribution of wages but also to the emerging culture of corruption and inefficiency.

Structural and Institutional Anomalies:

Variations in the responsibilities assigned to roles across different institutions lead to wage inconsistencies. The compensation for a role in one ministry may be commensurate with the political weight rather than with the operational workload or challenges faced, hence creating imbalances between similar job levels across institutions.



169%

The infographic features two large percentage figures side-by-side. The first, '169%', is in a dark blue color. Below it, in a smaller green font, is the text 'Certain salary levels growth rate from 2007 to 2019 in Nigeria'. The second, '214%', is in a brown/orange color. Below it, in a smaller green font, is the text 'Inflation increase from 2007 to 2022 in Nigeria'. The background is white with a faint 'P23' watermark in the center.

Certain salary levels
growth rate
from 2007 to 2019 in
Nigeria

214%

Inflation increase from 2007 to 2022 in
Nigeria

Impact on Employee Morale and Productivity

The consequences of these salary disparities are far-reaching and affect both individuals and the broader public sector productivity:

Low Morale:

A pronounced disjunction between the wages of senior and junior officers fosters a sense of inequity. When employees at lower levels observe that their efforts are under-compensated relative to the rewards enjoyed by their politically connected or higher-level counterparts, overall morale suffers. This can lead to diminished initiative and reduced commitment to service delivery.

High Turnover and Brain Drain:

Sound remuneration is a key factor in employee retention. In Nigeria, the widening wage gap has resulted in the loss of skilled personnel who seek better-paying opportunities in the private sector, both locally and abroad. This “brain drain” represents a significant loss for the public sector, undermining institutional capacity.

Corruption and Maladministration:

Frustration stemming from perceived and actual inequities often causes disillusionment among lower-paid employees. In some cases, this disillusionment fuels corrupt practices where employees supplement inadequate earnings through unofficial means further perpetuating systemic inefficiencies.

Reduced Service Delivery:

Public sector organizations that are characterized by internal inequities may also experience marked declines in service delivery. Inefficiency, high absenteeism, and reduced innovation are common outcomes when employees feel undervalued by the wage structure.

These consequences collectively diminish the overall effectiveness of public administration and undermine citizens’ trust in governmental institutions.

Global Perspectives on Salary Distribution

By juxtaposing Nigeria's salary distribution with global practices, we gain a broader understanding of the causes and consequences of wage disparities.

United Kingdom: Salary Dispersion in the Public Sphere

In the United Kingdom, public sector compensation has come under intense scrutiny in recent years. One notable example involves quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (quangos). Recent reports indicate that during the 2023–2024 financial year, over 1,300 employees in these institutions received total compensation packages exceeding £100,000. In some instances, individual earnings surpassed those of the Prime Minister.

Key Observations:

High Compensation Levels:

The high earnings among quango staff reflect the complexity of responsibilities and the premium attached to certain specialist roles. However, it also raises questions about the justification of such high salaries, especially in light of public sector budget constraints.

Transparency Measures:

Although transparency in pay is enshrined in public accountability mandates, disparities persist. Reforms that were introduced to align pay structures across departments have not fully addressed the underlying causes of inequity.



Impact on Public Trust:

Comparisons between public sector salaries and those of top political figures often generate public debate about fairness and the effective use of taxpayer money. In the United Kingdom, these disparities sometimes fuel public protests and calls for comprehensive salary reviews.

Ghana: Balancing Equitable Standards in Public Remuneration

Ghana offers another instructive case study in public sector remuneration. The Ghana Statistical Service reported in 2022 that the average monthly net salary for public sector employees was GH¢2,594. Yet, despite this seemingly modest average, wage disparities are vast: the highest-paid employee can earn up to 81 times more than the lowest-paid worker.

Key Observations:

Wage Disparity Dynamics:

Much like Nigeria, diverse salary structures exist in Ghana, reflecting differences in institutional funding, regional policies, and political influences. The wide gap between the top and bottom wage earners not only affects morale but also discourages qualified professionals from persisting in lower-paying positions.

Policy Initiatives:

The Ghanaian government has made efforts to streamline public sector wages by introducing salary caps and harmonization initiatives. However, enforcement remains challenging due to institutional resistance and budgetary constraints.



Uganda: Implications for Service Delivery

In Uganda, research has similarly noted that salary inequities within public institutions affect overall service delivery. In some cases, junior officers in one agency have been documented to earn more than senior officers in another, highlighting an irregular distribution of remuneration.

Key Observations:

Institutional Inconsistencies:

The variance in salary distribution undermines a meritocratic approach to public employment, with personal and political factors often overshadowing the seniority or workload associated with a role.

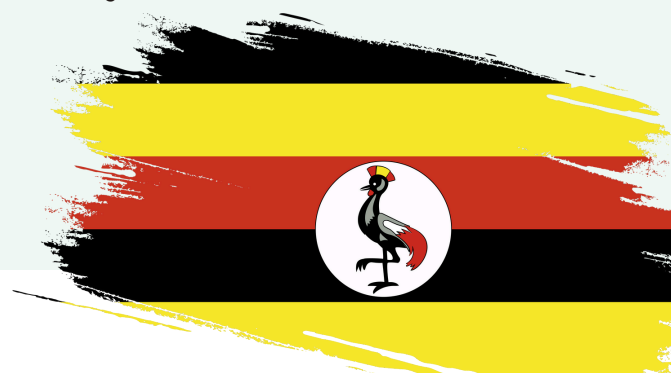
Effects on Public Services:

Such disparities translate directly to operational inefficiencies. Critical public services ranging from healthcare and education to infrastructure management suffer as demotivated and underpaid employees leave positions or engage in practices that compromise service quality.

Ongoing Reforms:

Uganda's experience underscores the importance of embedding systematic salary reviews and aligning wage structures with performance metrics, a lesson that holds relevance for other developing nations grappling with similar issues.

When these global examples are viewed alongside Nigeria's context, a common theme emerges: without harmonized salary structures and transparent pay policies, public institutions risk a cycle of low morale, inefficiencies, and growing inequalities.



Challenges in Addressing Salary Disparities

Effectively addressing salary disparities in Nigeria and indeed, in any public sector requires confronting several interrelated challenges that stem from both systemic and external factors.

Institutional Resistance

Entrenched Interests:

Many existing agencies and ministries have cultivated salary structures that favor specific groups. Institutions that benefit from the status quo often resist reforms that could standardize pay scales. This resistance is driven by the fear of losing benefits and privileges that come with higher, yet unequally distributed, remuneration packages.

Bureaucratic Inertia:

The complexity of Nigeria's bureaucratic system contributes to a culture where change is slow and incremental. Without a clear mandate from top leadership or sustained public pressure, entrenched practices persist.

Political Interference

Politicization of Appointments:

Political patronage heavily influences salary structures. Positions that bring political advantages are often compensated disproportionately. This politicization distorts the merit-based principles that should underpin public administration and can lead to conflicting salary scales even within the same job grade.

Policy Shifts with Regime Changes:

Changes in government or political priorities frequently result in inconsistent salary review processes. When successive administrations do not maintain a consistent approach to salary review, the outcome is a patchwork of policies that further exacerbate discrepancies.

Economic Constraints

Budgetary Limitations:

Nigeria operates under fiscal constraints that limit the capacity for widespread salary increments, even when such increases are necessary to match inflation. Budget shortages often force the government to prioritize certain sectors over others, causing a cascade of imbalances in pay.

Inflationary Pressures:

As highlighted by recent data, the rate of inflation in Nigeria has outpaced the rate of salary adjustments. This persistent economic challenge erodes the real value of wages, particularly for lower-level employees, leading to a decline in purchasing power and overall living standards.

Lack of Data and Transparency

Inadequate Reporting Systems:

The absence of a centralized, transparent salary database complicates any effort to quantify disparities accurately. Without comprehensive, real-time data, it is challenging for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to identify trends and propose targeted interventions.

Openness and Accountability:

Transparency in salary administration is crucial not only for ensuring accountability but also for building public trust. The lack of disclosure regarding detailed compensation packages often leads to speculation and distrust among public sector employees and the general populace.

Cultural and Structural Barriers

Societal Norms:

In some cases, cultural norms and perceptions about public service roles may downplay the significance of equitable pay. Misconceptions that associate higher salaries exclusively with political power or seniority further complicate efforts to foster an equitable compensation environment.

Structural Fragmentation:

The compartmentalized nature of Nigeria's public institutions each with its own rules, allowances, and benefits presents significant obstacles to achieving a unified salary framework. The existence of numerous grading and classification systems makes it difficult to implement reforms that would standardize wages across all sectors.

Recommendations

Addressing the entrenched salary disparities requires a concerted, multifaceted approach that cuts across policy restructuring, improved data management, and stakeholder engagement. The following recommendations are proposed:

Salary Harmonization

Unified Salary Structures:

Develop a standardized salary framework that applies uniformly to all public institutions. A harmonized system would help eliminate discrepancies where junior officers in one agency earn more than senior staff in another. This requires a comprehensive review and restructuring of the existing pay grades by the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC).

Role-Based Compensation:

Introduce a merit-based pay system that links salary adjustments to performance metrics rather than solely to rank or tenure. This could involve the development of standardized job descriptions and performance appraisal systems that apply universally across public sector entities.

Regular Reviews and Adjustments

Periodic Salary Revisions:

Establish mechanisms for regular salary reviews to ensure that public sector wages keep pace with inflation and evolving economic realities. Instituting annual or biennial salary reviews could help address the lag in wage increases relative to rising costs of living.

Index-Linked Increments:

Implement salary adjustments that are directly linked to inflation indices. By doing so, wage increases can be automatically calibrated to reflect changes in the cost of living without necessitating ad hoc policy interventions.

Transparency and Accountability

Open Data Initiatives:

Create and maintain a centralized database that details salary information across all public institutions. Transparency in salary data not only facilitates external audits and evaluations but also builds trust among employees and citizens alike.

Enhanced Oversight Mechanisms:

Strengthen oversight bodies to monitor compliance with the standardized pay framework. The involvement of independent auditors and civil society organizations can help ensure that salary structures are adhered to, and any malpractices are promptly addressed.

Capacity Building and Training

Professional Development Programs:

Invest in training and development initiatives for public sector employees. A well-trained workforce can better meet the challenges of modern governance, thereby justifying higher pay scales through increased productivity.

Incentives for Rural and Hard-to-Staff Positions:

Introduce targeted incentives such as hardship allowances and career development opportunities to attract and retain talent in under-served or rural areas where salary disparities are often most pronounced.

Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Dialogue

Inclusive Policy Formulation:

Engage all relevant stakeholders ranging from labour unions and professional associations to civil society organizations in the process of devising salary reforms. This collaborative approach can improve buy-in and smooth the implementation of new policies.

Regular Policy Dialogues:

Establish platforms for ongoing dialogue between policymakers, employees, and academic experts to continuously refine and adjust the salary framework based on emerging challenges and economic dynamics.

Legislative Reforms

Enacting Supportive Legislation:

Policymakers should consider enacting laws that mandate the harmonization of salary structures and enforce transparency in wage administration. Legislative backing can provide the necessary authority to implement reforms that may otherwise face resistance from entrenched interests.

Monitoring and Enforcement Provisions:

Incorporate clear monitoring and enforcement mechanisms within the legislative framework to ensure that deviations from the stipulated salary structures are penalized appropriately.



Case Studies

Case Study 1: Nigerian Public Sector Pay Discrepancies

A detailed study of Nigeria's public sector pay structures reveals severe discrepancies. For instance, data from 2023 indicates that while a senator's remuneration package can exceed ₦13 million monthly, a civil servant in a lower grade might earn less than ₦100,000. This case study illustrates how disparate job classifications born out of historical evolution and political intervention have led to unsustainable wage differentials that detract from the overall efficiency of public service delivery. The study also highlights that the misalignment between salary increments and inflation has severely devalued the earnings of lower-level employees.

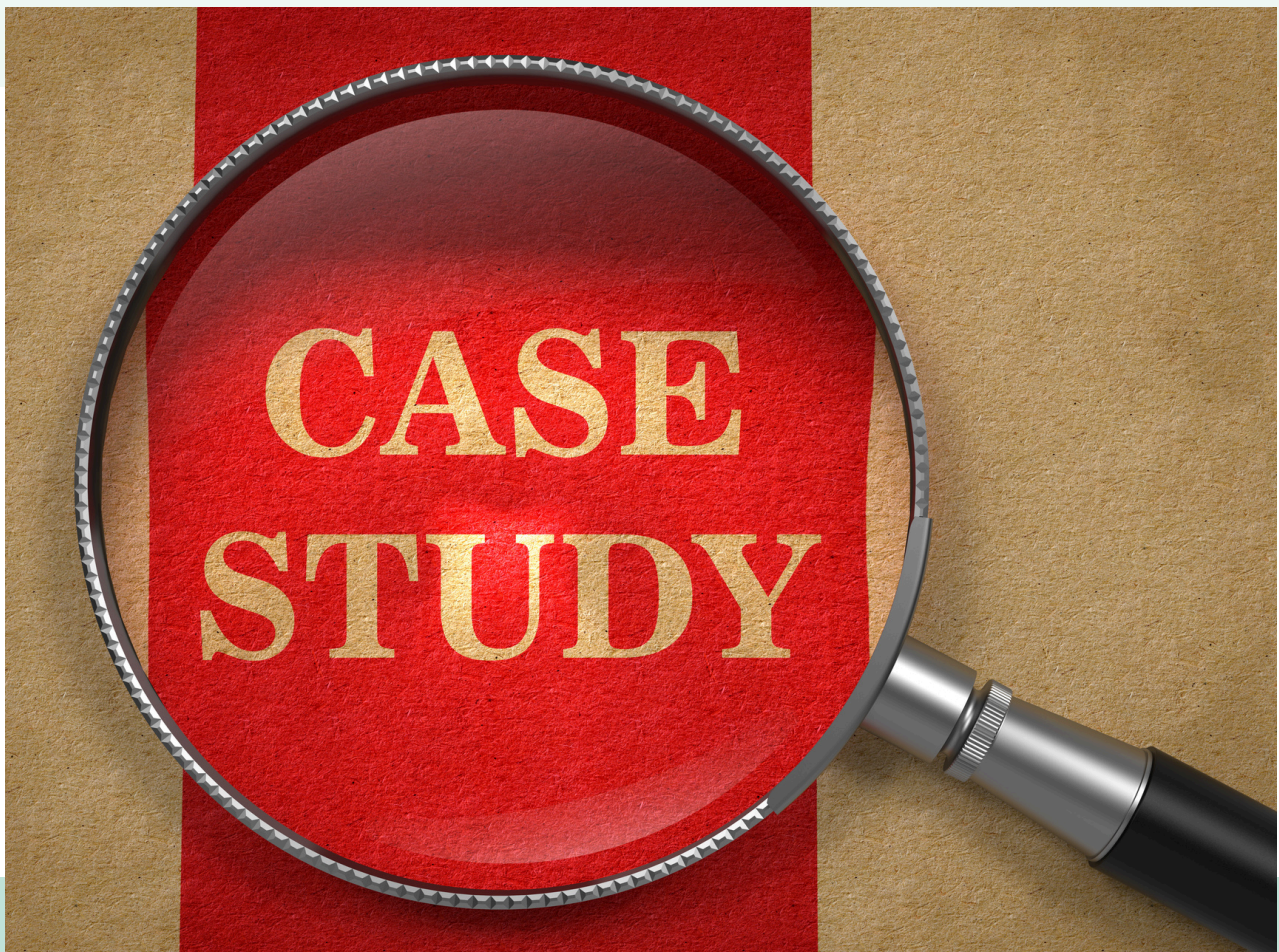
Case Study 2: The United Kingdom Quango Conundrum

In the United Kingdom, the issue of high compensation within quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations (quangos) has sparked debates about accountability. In the 2023–2024 financial year, reports showed that over 1,300 staff members in these organizations were compensated at levels exceeding £100,000 annually. This phenomenon raises questions about the justification for such high salaries, particularly when juxtaposed with the compensation patterns observed in core public services. The case study underscores the need for systematic reviews that align public sector wages with performance expectations and societal expectations regarding the responsible use of public funds.

Case Studies

Case Study 3: Ghana and Uganda Comparative Insights

Ghana serves as another instructive example. Despite an average monthly net salary of GH¢2,594 for public sector employees, the wage structure in Ghana is characterized by an 81-fold disparity between the highest and lowest earners. Similarly, Uganda's experience with instances where junior officers in certain institutions command salaries higher than their senior counterparts in others mirrors the challenges seen in Nigeria. These studies indicate that while the contexts differ, the underlying issues of institutional fragmentation, economic constraints, and the politicization of public sector wages are common across these countries.



Broader Implications for Public Service and National Development

The Impact on Service Delivery

Equitable salary distribution is not merely an issue of fairness; it directly impacts the quality and efficiency of public service delivery. When public sector employees are demotivated by gross disparities in pay, service quality suffers. This has significant repercussions for national development, as inefficiencies in public service delivery can deter economic growth, discourage public investment, and ultimately erode trust in governmental institutions.

Socio-Economic Development and Social Stability

Salary disparities can also widen socio-economic divisions, contributing to social instability. The vast differences in earnings create environments where meritocracy is sidelined by patronage and political favouritism. When a large segment of the workforce feels undervalued, the resultant social discontent can manifest in protests, strikes, or even more severe forms of unrest. Addressing this is crucial for maintaining social cohesion and ensuring that economic development benefits all layers of society.

Attracting and Retaining Talent

In a globalized economy, the competition for skilled public sector professionals is fierce. Countries that fail to offer equitable and competitive pay risk losing talent to both the private sector and international markets. By contrast, a reformed and transparent salary structure can serve as a powerful tool in retaining qualified personnel, thereby enhancing institutional capacity and overall national growth.



Policy Recommendations for a Sustainable Future

Based on the detailed analysis and case studies, the following strategic measures are imperative for reshaping the public sector wage landscape:

Adoption of a Universal Pay Framework:

Create a comprehensive bill aimed at integrating existing disparate salary structures into a unified system. This should address discrepancies across agencies and ensure that all public sector employees are compensated equitably, based on standardized criteria encompassing job responsibilities, performance, experience, and regional cost indices.

Economic Recalibration of Salary Increments:

Tie salary adjustments to robust economic indicators such as inflation rates and changes in real GDP per capita. Such recalibration can help ensure that increases in salaries are commensurate with the economic realities, thus preserving the purchasing power of public employees.

Strengthening of Monitoring Mechanisms:

Invest in digital platforms that consolidate salary data across public sectors. These platforms can be queried by relevant stakeholders and form the basis for independent audits, thereby increasing transparency and accountability in wage administration.

Legislative and Institutional Reforms:

Empower statutory bodies, such as the NSIWC, with the legal mandate and the necessary human and technological resources to enforce policy reforms. Legislators should prioritize the passage of laws that mandate regular salary reviews and establish strict penalties for deviations from the harmonized framework.

Capacity Building Initiatives:

Boost retraining and professional development programs aimed at enhancing the competencies of public sector workers. This strategy not only aligns with improved service delivery but also provides a solid justification for differential remuneration when performance-based incentives are introduced.

Enhanced Stakeholder Participation:

Formulate inclusive advisory panels composed of representatives from labor unions, civil society, and academia. These panels should be tasked with periodic reviews of the wage structure and act as mediators between the government and the public sector workforce.

Public-Private Partnerships:

Explore innovative financing models by engaging the private sector in complementary roles that could help subsidize temporary wage imbalances during the transition phase toward a harmonized system. Partnerships that invest in technology and data infrastructure can also lead to more efficient salary management practices.

Conclusion

Salary disparities across various job levels are symptomatic of deeper systemic issues that plague not only Nigeria but also many countries around the globe. In Nigeria, the public sector wage structure is marred by contradictions wherein junior employees in certain agencies earn more than their senior counterparts in core ministries fuelling inefficiencies, bureaucratic inefficacy, and a pervasive sense of injustice. Globally, experiences in places like the United Kingdom, Ghana, and Uganda reinforce that wage imbalances are both a local and international concern.

Addressing these disparities is not a task that can be achieved overnight. It requires a cohesive strategy that brings together policy reforms, robust transparency measures, consistent data collection, and an unwavering commitment to equitable practices. With the recommendations outlined in this report ranging from salary harmonization and regular review mechanisms to stronger legislative backing and stakeholder engagement a clear roadmap can be established that benefits public sector organizations, uplifts employee morale, and ultimately enhances national development.

By embracing these reforms, Nigeria and indeed other countries grappling with similarly skewed salary distributions can create a more motivated, efficient, and equitable public service that benefits all layers of society. The journey towards equitable remuneration is fraught with challenges; however, with sustained political will, resource commitment, and strategic stakeholder collaboration, a more balanced and productive public sector future is attainable.

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This comprehensive article has sought to elucidate the complex dynamics of salary distribution in Nigeria's public sector while drawing global parallels to facilitate a deeper understanding of the systemic issues at hand. The multidimensional approach outlined herein is intended to serve as a robust foundation for policymakers, academic researchers, and advocacy organizations committed to forging a more equitable and efficient public sector in Nigeria and beyond.

Further Considerations by Olanrewaju

Beyond the immediate recommendations, future research might explore the role of technological innovations in real-time salary management, the potential for blockchain-based transparency measures in public sector transactions, and broader international comparisons to identify best practices in public remuneration. These avenues can further enrich our understanding and spur holistic reforms that are responsive to the evolving socio-economic landscapes of today's globalized world.