ASSESSMENT OF THE PENSION REFORM ACT 2014 UNDER PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI'S ADMINISTRATION, 2015-2023

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Abstract
The pension fund administration in Nigeria has always been fraught with a lot of challenges for employers and employees alike. Several reforms initiated by successive administrations have failed to address the malaise. The introduction of the Contributory Pension Scheme 2004 as amended in 2014 gave renewed hope that is yet to be properly explored by existing studies. The main objective of this study is therefore to assess the Pension Reform Act 2014 from 2015–2023 under the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari's administration. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Secondary sources of data were employed and complimented with interviews with key informants. The data were validated using the proofreading method and analyzed using the content analysis method. Findings revealed that the 2014 PRA makes provisions that border on participation and contribution, stiffer sanctions and penalties, and investment, which have seen more employees enrolling in the scheme and an increase in savings due to the faithful implementation of the provisions of the act. It is recommended that the current tempo be sustained, and efforts should be made to invest more in the critical infrastructure aspect of the investment portfolio for improved welfare of the employees and growth of the Nigerian economy.

Key Words: Pension, Evaluative theory, PRA, PenCom, PFA

Introduction

The Nigerian's pension scheme has since its inception witnessed a series of reforms as well as reorganization. These were meant to make the scheme more efficient as well as keep abreast of changing trends in the socioeconomic and political spheres of the country. The pension scheme during the colonial period between the 1940s and 1950s was established through an instrument called a pension ordinance (Balogun, 2006). It was designed after the British parliamentary system and meant to cater for British officials posted to Nigeria.

Several other reforms initiated after independence in 1960 were specifically designed for specific services. These include the Pension (Special Pension) Act 1961, the Pension (Transferred Services) Act 1965 no. 28; the Special Constables Decree 1966 no. 7; and the Police Pension Decree 1966 no. 60, among several others, culminating in the consolidation of all enactments of pensions and gratuities for public officers in 1974 (Eneanya, 2013). A common feature of pensions throughout this period is that public servants do not bear responsibility for pension contributions; instead, pension benefits were fully funded by the government. Thus, the system was fraught with a lot of irregularities. For instance, it was observed that the Pension Act of 1979 was marred with widespread corruption, which borders on complaints of diversion of pension funds to other uses by pension officials (PENCOM, 2009). Also, lack of proper monitoring of the payment processes and procedures adopted by states led to the emergence of more ghost pensioners; hence, the accumulated pension arrears are still plaguing the pension industry today (Bassey et al., 2010). It was also noted that the scheme suffered from underfunding. The reason being that the bulk of the contributions (6.5%) rested on the employers. As a result, most employers were unable to contribute adequately but were still making deductions and not remitting them to NSITF officials. There was also a lack of an apex regulating agency to monitor the deduction and administration of the fund. This is coupled with the frequent pension verification exercises (OJo-Aromokudo, 2009), which result from rampant complaints of the loss of pensioners' files and other records, which translate into a loss of public confidence in the scheme (Amaechi and Albano, 2009). These and other related problems led to the introduction of the contributory pension scheme in 2004 (amended in 2014).

The Pension Reform Act 2004 (amended in 2014) brought about some fundamental changes in the Nigerian pension administration. It introduced the contributory pension scheme, which required both the employer and the employee to fund retirement benefits, and established the National Pension Commission to regulate its affairs (Eneanya, 2013). The PRA of 2004 addressed some of the inherent problems in the previous scheme, as investible funds in the post-2004 era have increased significantly to 48.6% per annum when compared to the pre-2004 era (Okpaise, 2009). However, in spite of the contributory and fully funded nature of the scheme, coupled with other provisions that seem more favorable to pensioners than the pre-2004 schemes, some shortcomings were observed. These include: lack of commitment to implement the act by private and public sector employers (including most state governments); most employees are skeptical of the scheme due to the failure of past schemes in Nigeria; preferential treatment given to military employees with regard to their contribution rate; and the two percent (2%) fine proposed for defaulting Pension Fund Administrators in case of delayed or non-remittance of benefits to the Pension Fund Custodian (Bassey et al., 2010).

In a bid to overcome the shortcomings of the 2004 Pension Act and build on its strengths, on July 1, 2014, President Good Luck Ebele Jonathan signed into law the "Act", which repeals the Pension Reform Act 2004. The major changes in the Pension Reform Act 2014 were aimed at broadening participation and contribution, stiffer sanctions and penalties, and increasing investment portfolios. The extent these changes have brought to pension administration in Nigeria has not been adequately addressed by previous studies.

Research Questions

The questions this paper seeks to answer are: What are the major provisions of the Pension Reform Act 2014? How was pension managed under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration from 2015 to 2023?

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to assess the Pension Reform Act of 2014 with specific reference to President Muhammadu Buhari's administration from 2015 to 2023. The specific objectives include: i) examining the provisions of the Pension Reform Act 2014; ii) assessing the management of PRA 2014 under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration during the period of the study. The paper is structured accordingly: introduction, which has just been done; review of related literature follows; next is an overview of pension reforms in Nigeria; the Pension Reform Act 2014; pension management under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration; and conclusion.

Review of Related Literature

The concept of a pension is as old as man itself. In the view of Onukwu (2020), it is traceable to a primitive work environment where man was encouraged to put some savings aside for the future when he may not be able to work again. He averred that it is an acceptable norm in most parts of the globe, where pensions are accepted as payment for employees who have spent their active years serving the people. Pension can therefore be seen as an idea that originated from the traditional system or society of man saving the rainy days. In recent practices, individuals are encouraged to set some money aside to take care of themselves and their dependents when they are retired or disengaged from their monthly job. Iwu (2016) mentioned that a pension is the periodic payment granted to an employee for services rendered, based on a contractual, legally enforceable agreement, paid by an employer at the agreed-upon time of termination of employment. In the views of Olurankinse & Adetula (2010), it is a maxim that anyone who fails to plan for a rainy day is simply getting ready to be swept off when the rain comes. A pension could be considered the sum of money paid regularly by employers to former employees as a result of attaining a certain fixed age or number of years of service due to sickness, disability, or widowhood (Onukwu, 2020).

A pension is a plan for the rainy days after retirement, an arrangement to provide people with income when they are no longer active. It is a plan by an employer to provide their employees with an income when they are no longer working. Fajana (2002) opines that it is natural that after working for a long period of time, the law of diminishing return will set in and the employee's output will fall below expectations. He added that at this stage, it becomes absolutely necessary for the employee to stop working. Iwu (2016) mentioned that a pension is the periodic payment granted to an employee for services rendered, based on a contractually enforceable agreement, paid by an employer at the agreed-upon time of termination of employment. It is a form of retirement plan by the employer for the employees for the later periods of their lives. A pension can be defined as a regular monthly payment that is received by a retired person, called a pensioner, for the duration of his life. The payment should ideally commence on the date of retirement.

The importance of pensions to employers and employees cannot be overemphasized. Armstrong (2010) opines that pensions help employees readjust themselves properly to society after leaving employment. Onukwu (2020) observes that it constitutes an important tool in the hands of management for boosting employee morale, which may lead to efficiency and increased productivity of employees in particular and the organization as a whole. He added that a pension is a device that employers use to meet their social responsibilities and thereby attract goodwill. In recent times, pensions have assumed an increasing role in the economy of any country because the money earmarked for pensions could be used for the establishment of small enterprises and infrastructural development. It can also relieve pressure on the company for individual assistance by instilling in employees a sense of confidence in challenging responsibilities for their future.

Sterns (2006) observes that pensions could discourage labour turnover. In the view of Onukwu (2020), if both employees and employers contribute to the scheme, then it serves as a general area of joint interest and cooperation and therefore helps to foster better employment relations. He added that the employer-employee relationship in the provision of pensions as a form of employee benefits is often affected by factors including pensionable and gratuity age, the amount or percentage of the proposed pension, the method of financing, the administration of the pension and psychological pressure. Onukwu (2020) observes that pension administration consists of five basic elements, namely: flexibility, amount of benefits, finance, and contribution to the cost of pension, gratuity, and death benefits.

Empirical review

Pension Fund Administration has attracted a lot of scholarly work in Nigeria (Anthony, 2008; Bassey, et al., 2010; Ndubuisi, 2004) among several others. The National Provident Fund, which was established in 1961, attracted the attention of Anthony (2008) and Bassey, et al., (2010). According to Anthony (2008), the fund was meant to cater for non-pensionable private sector employees. Under the scheme, according to Bassey, et al., (2010), a lump sum benefit was provided for members or their dependents on retirement or death. The contributory rate was four naira (#4.00) monthly, by both employer and employee. The upper limit of the total contribution was twenty-five percent (25%). This scheme also had minimum coverage, as it was strictly for private sector employees (Bassey, et al., 2010).

The shortcomings of the NPF led to the enactment of the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund Act of 1993, which gave birth to the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF), which was the focus of the study of Ndubuisi (2004). The scheme aims at enhancing the social protection of private sector employees. It took over all assets of the National Provident Fund (NPF) to run a limited social security program (Ndubuisi, 2004). The scheme was established through the agreement of the tripartite platform, which consisted of the government, organized labor, and employers, in response to the requirement of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention of 1952, which mandated member countries to establish a social security program for their members. The scheme mandated all private employers of five or more employees to remit 10% of their monthly emoluments in the ratio of 3.5% by employees and

6.5% by employers. The initial monthly contribution prior to 2001 was 7.5% in the ratio of 2.5% employee to 5% employee. Like its counterpart, the scheme was plagued with numerous problems. For instance, the scheme suffered from poor public perception (Ndubuisi, Ndubuisi, 2004).This is so because it was viewed by the public as an offshoot of the National Provident Fund, which has a reputation problem.

The Pension Reform Act (PRA) of 2004, which was enacted partly as a result of the failure of the past scheme to address the pension needs of Nigerians and partly as a result of the quest by stakeholders to evolve a scheme that can cater for both public and private sector employees, attracted the attention of Bassey, et al., (2010) and Okpaise (2009). They observed that the PRA of 2004 addressed some of the inherent problems in the previous scheme. This is evidenced by the significant increase in investible funds in the post-2004 era to 48.6% per year when compared to the pre-2004 era. In spite of the hope that the PRA 2004 ignited, some shortcomings were observed. These include: lack of commitment to implement the act by private and public sector employers; skepticism of the scheme due to the failure of past schemes in Nigeria; preferential treatment given to military employees with regard to their contribution rate; and the two percent (2%) fine proposed for defaulting Pension Fund Administrators in case of delayed or non-remittance of benefits to Pension Fund Custodian. (Bassey ,et al, 2010).

In view of the shortcomings revealed by these previous studies, an attempt is being made here to fill a knowledge gap by assessing the 2014 PRA Act, which is meant to improve on previous schemes.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design. Secondary sources of data were employed and complimented with interviews with key informants. The data were validated using the proofreading method and analyzed using the content analysis method

Overview of Pension Reforms in Nigeria

The pension scheme in Nigeria dates back to the colonial period. According to Balogun (1961), the first pension legislation in Nigeria was enacted in 1951 by the Colonial Masters, though its retroactive effect started on January 1, 1949. It was termed the pension ordinance and was designed primarily for colonial officers that were deployed from one post to another in the vast British Empire (Bassey, et al. 2010). The essence was to facilitate continuity of service wherever they were deployed. The scheme covered only a few Nigerians who were opportune to work with the colonialists.

In the immediate period after independence, the national provident fund was established in 1961. This was meant to cater to non-pensionable private sector employees (Anthony, 2008). Under this scheme, according to Bassey, et al., (2010), a lump sum benefit was provided for members or their dependents on retirement or death. The contributory rate was four naira (#4.00) monthly, by both employer and employee. The upper limit of the total contribution was twenty-five percent (25%). This scheme also had minimum coverage, as it was strictly for private sector employees (Bassey et al., 2010).

In 1979, all enactments on pension, incorporated pensions, and gratuity scales for all public officers recommended by the Udoji Public Services Review Commission Report 1974 were consolidated under Decree 102 of 1979. In the same vein, Pension Act No. 103 of 1979, like its counterpart Decree No. 102 of 1979, dealt with pension benefits, liabilities, and seals devised for the agreed forces (Business Day, 2014).The Pension Act of 1979 is the basis upon which all recent pension laws are built (Bassey, et al., 2010). Its provisions and rules at the level of parastatal and government-owned companies are reflected in the subsequent pensions. In other words, subsequent pension rules are a replica of the Pension Act 102 of 1979. Although the schemes spell out conditions for payment of entitlements, withdrawal from the scheme, and forfeiture of pension rights, among others (Bassey et al., 2010).The plan was observed to be tainted by pervasive corruption. Because money was previously sent to states by the office of the head of service, which paid on behalf of the federal government, there were several complaints from pension authorities about the diversion of pension funds to other uses (PENCOM, 2009). The development of more "ghost pensioners" was also facilitated by states' inadequate oversight of its payment policies and procedures; as a result, the pension industry is still beset by accumulated arrears (Bassey, et al., 2010).

The Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF) was established on July 1, 1994, following the enactment of the Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund Act of 1993. The program's goal is to strengthen private sector workers' social protection. It seized all of the National Provident Fund's (NPF) assets in order to administer a constrained social security program (Ndubuisi, 2004). In response to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention of 1952, which required member countries to establish a social security program for their members, the government, organized labor, and employers came to an agreement to establish the programme. The scheme mandated all private employers of five or more employees to remit 10% of their monthly emoluments in the ratio of 3.5% by employees and 6.5% by employers. The initial monthly contribution prior to 2001 was 7.5% in the ratio of 2.5% employee to 5% employee.

Like its counterpart, the scheme was plagued with numerous problems. For instance, the scheme suffered from poor public perception (Ndubuisi, 2004).This is so because it was viewed by the public as an offshoot of the National Provident Fund, which has a reputation problem. Also, the scheme suffered from underfunding. The reason being that the bulk of the contributions (6.5%) rested on the employers. As a result, most employers were unable to contribute adequately but were still making deductions and not remitting them to NSITF officials. Additionally, there was no supreme regulatory body to oversee the fund's management and deductions. Together with this, there are regular pension verification procedures (OJo-Aromokudo, 2009). These are a response to widespread grievances regarding the disappearance of retirees' files and other information, which erode public trust in the program (Amaechi & Albano, 2009).

A common feature of the public sector pension schemes in operation in the periods under review was that they were fully funded by the government**.** Pension activities were regulated by three bodies, namely the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which licensed fund managers; the National Insurance Commission (NAICOM), responsible for licensing and regulating insurance companies in the country; and the Joint Tax Board (JTB), which approved and monitored all private pension schemes with enabling powers under Schedule 3 of the Personal Income Tax Decree 104 of 1993 (Oshiomole, 2009). Retirees received pensions or gratuities based on their final wage, which was charged to the Federation's consolidated revenue fund (Bassey, et al., 2010).Despite this, it was noted that the programmes were marked by either non-existent or delayed benefit remission to recipients within the public sector. It was not unusual to witness elderly people standing in long lines to get their pension benefits. Because of this issue, the Pension Reform Act of 2004 was passed.

The Pension Reform Act (PRA) of 2004 was enacted partly as a result of the failure of the past scheme to address the pension needs of Nigerians and partly as a result of the quest by stakeholders to evolve a scheme that can cater for both public and private sector employees (Bassey et al., 2010).It repealed the 1993 Nigerian Social Insurance Trust Fund Act. Under the new pension scheme, both employer and employee in the private and public sectors contribute 7.5% of each of their monthly emoluments, while in the military sector, the employee contributes 2.5% and the employer 12.5%. The Act obliged the employer to deduct and remit contributions to the pension fund custodian not later than seven days after deduction, while the pension fund custodian must notify the pension fund administrators within twenty-four hours of the receipt of such contributions (Bassey, et al., 2010). Also, erring pension fund administrators are sanctioned two percent (2%) of the value of the deduction in case of default. The scheme also made provision for an apex regulating agency (PENCOM), which monitors and controls the deduction, administration, and custody of pension funds and ensures prompt payment of beneficiaries. By so doing, an element of control and monitoring is imposed in the administration of the fund. Besides being privately managed by pension fund administrators based on an individual savings account, it is contributory and fully funded, thereby ensuring all-round liquidity. It further makes it mandatory for all workers in the public service of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory and private sector employees of five or more employees to partake in the scheme.

The schemes exempted employees with three years or less to retire. Also exempt are judicial officers and those in fully funded pension schemes, including defined contribution schemes in the private sector. Contributors under NSITF were given the liberty to choose whether to continue maintaining NSITF as their pension fund administrator or change it. To this end, a transitional arrangement was made where NSITF was licensed as a pension fund administrator to manage her previous reduction for five years (Bassey, et al., 2010).

The PRA of 2004 addressed some of the inherent problems in the previous scheme, as investible funds in the post-2004 era have increased significantly to 48.6% per annum when compared to the pre-2004 era (Okpaise, 2009). Also, each employee had a retirement savings account with a personal identity number with her pension fund administrator for easy identification. This gives the contributor the freedom to change work and still maintain her account number. All they have to do is provide her or him with her retirement savings account number to her new workplace. Furthermore, it is mandated by law for pension fund administrators to periodically provide contributors with rates of return, audited accounts, and frequent statements of accounts. By doing this, fraud is minimized and accountability and openness are guaranteed.

In contrast to the earlier plans, there are explicit legal and administrative penalties for violating parties, and the division of responsibilities among the parties is guaranteed. For example, employers must send contributions to the pension fund custodian no later than seven days following the deduction. The pension fund custodian is also required to notify the pension fund administrators of the receipt of the contributions within twenty-four hours or face a fine of 2% of the deduction's value in the event of a default. The scheme also gives the contributor the freedom to choose who administers her retirement benefits account and promotes competition among pension fund administrators, resulting in better services to pensioners.

A few essential people are brought in to ensure appropriate management of the scheme. By introducing specific components of management, monitoring, and checks and balances in the fund administration, their presence minimizes fraud. These include Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs), limited liability companies licensed by PENCOM to manage pension funds as their sole business; Pension Fund Custodian, a licensed financial institution established to hold pension funds and assets on trust; and the National Pension Commission (PENCOM), the highest regulatory body overseeing pension administration in Nigeria.

The aforementioned features make it abundantly evident that, in comparison to earlier systems (the pre-2004 schemes), the 2004 pension scheme appears to provide retirees greater hope and ought to be supported. Nevertheless, some flaws were noted despite the scheme's fully financed and contributory character, as well as other features that appear to be more advantageous to retirees than the pre-2004 plans. These include: military employees receiving preferential treatment with regard to their contribution rate; employers in the public and private sectors (including the majority of state governments) showing a lack of commitment to implementing the act; and the proposed two percent (2%) fine for failing Pension Fund Administrators in the event that benefits are not remitted to the Pension Fund Custodian on time or at all (Bassey et al., 2010).

The 2014 Pension Reform Act

On July 1, 2014, President Good Luck Ebele Jonathan signed into law the "Act," which repeals the Pension Reform Act of 2004 in an effort to improve upon the Act's inadequacies. The new Act acts as the supporting legislation that allows the contributory pension plan to be administered. To protect workers from the numerous pension issues that the previous Act neglected to address, the Act has undergone a number of significant revisions. One of the main features of the new pension law is the increased severity of the penalties, which aim to rectify the elements of the Pension significant reforms, such as the exclusion of Department of State Security and military workers from the present contributory pension plan, are included in the new Pension Reform Act 2014, which also unifies changes made to the 2004 Act. Along with these updates, the Universities (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 2012 (which updated university professors' retirement age and benefits) and the Third Alteration Act (which delegated pension disputes to the National Industrial Courts) are also included in the 2014 Act.m Act 2004 that were no longer effective in discouraging law-breaking. The primary modifications made by the Pension Reform Act 2014, which will be emphasized in our upcoming conversation, primarily pertain to participation and contribution, sanctions and penalties, and investments.

The revised pension laws of 2014 has reduced the minimum employee count required for companies in the private sector to participate in the contributing pension scheme from five to three, hence allowing a greater number of informal sector workers to participate. Additionally, the rate of contributions was set to rise under the new pension statute. Employers now have to contribute 10% of the monthly salary (formerly 7.5%), while employees have to contribute 8% (previously 7.5%), for a total of 18% under the Act. Another provision of the PRA 2014 is a decrease from the prior 6-month waiting period to a 4-month waiting period for benefit assessments in the case of job loss. Additionally, the PRA 2014 includes a clause requiring an employer to open a Temporary Retirement Savings Account (TRSA) for a worker who neglects to do so within three (3) months of starting work. The 2004 Act does not mandate this.

The absence of strict guidelines for sanctioning and punishing violations is a significant flaw in the 2004 PRA. For example, the Pension Reform Act 2004 does not specify any further temporary corrective actions that PenCom may take to address issues with licensed operators; rather, it only permits PenCom to cancel the license of pension operators that commit errors. PenCom is now authorized by the Pension Reform Act 2014 to take proactive corrective action against licensed operators who put the security of pension assets at risk through their circumstances, deeds, or inactions. This clause protects the pension assets from systemic risks and/or poor management. A reassessment of penalties and consequences for pension defaulters and companies who do not send in the money that has been withheld from their employees is one of the provisions of the new pension law. To the joy of workers, the Act now permits the National Pension Commission to file criminal charges against employers that steadfastly refuse to pay pension contributions, subject to the Attorney General of the Federation's approval.

The Pension Reform Act of 2014 has also established new offenses and provided for harsher penalties that will act as a deterrent against mismanagement or the diversion of pension funds' assets under any pretext, given the sophistication of today's methods of diversion, including the diversion and/or non-disclosure of interests and commissions accruable to pension fund assets. Operators who misuse pension funds will therefore be guilty of mismanaging the funds and face a minimum sentence of 10 years in prison, a fine equal to three times the amount misappropriated or diverted, or both.

In order to support initiatives for national growth, such as investment in the real sector, including infrastructure and real estate development, the PRA 2014 also includes measures that will allow the introduction of additional authorized investment instruments. This is offered without compromising the crucial rules protecting the assets of pension funds. Pension payments would be made directly to pensioners' bank accounts in accordance with current Federal Government policy, thanks to provisions in the Pension Reform Act 2014 that provide for the repositioning of the Pension Transition Arrangement Directorate (PTAD) to ensure greater efficiency and accountability in the administration of the Defined Benefits Scheme in the federal public service.

Finally, it is clear that the new Pension Act 2014 is very advantageous to the workers, since it addresses a number of important issues, including the opening of a temporary retirement savings account for obstinate employees, the upward review of penalties and sanctions, expanded coverage of the contributory pension scheme and informal sector participation, and access to benefits in the event of a loss of employment.

PRA 2014 Under President Muhammadu Buhari's Administration

Upon assumption of office on May 29, 2015 after a keenly contested election, President Muhammadu Buhari, pledged to tackle insecurity, corruption and the economic challenge facing the country among other issues. One aspect of the economic sub-sector is the pension reform act 2014. Successive governments in Nigeria, both federal and state, have not fared well in the aspect of pension, necessitating series of reforms culminating in the PRA 2014. In its magnanimity, the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari's made major improvements in the implementation status of the PRA 2014, which includes Participation and Contribution; Sanctions and Penalties; and Investments. This is briefly discuss as follows.

In a bid to encourage more participation in the new pension act, President Muhammadu Buhari launched Nigerias Micro Pension Scheme in January 2019(thisday, 2019).This scheme allows self-employed persons and persons working in organisations with less than three employees to save for the provision of pension at retirement or incapacitation. To enforce compliance in the private sector, the pencom has engaged the services of Recovery Agents, who are ensuring compliance as contributions are being recovered from non-complying employers, including penalties with some being prosecuted in courts for noncompliance.(Takor,2022). This initiative has enhanced the level of participation of employees in the informal private sector with a record of over 84,000 enrollees (Obienyi, 2022) .Other policies that seeks to encourage participation in the scheme include placement of Delta Steel Companys 3,542 pensioners on payroll after a 13-year wait and NITELs 9,216 pensioners placed on payroll, after more than a decade of neglect (thisday, 2019).

With the enactment of PRA 2014, Section 4 of the Act reviewed the minimum rates of contributions to the Scheme. The employer is expected to contribute a minimum of 10% and the employee a minimum of 8% of the employee's monthly emolument. This is to take effect from July, 2014. However, federal government did not comply with this provision which has accumulated in arrears. President Buhari approved payment of outstanding pension rights for verified and enrolled retirees of treasury funded Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs); payment of 2.5% differential in the rate of employer pension contribution for Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) Retirees and employees, which resulted from the increase of employer's contribution of 10% as provided for in the Pension Reform Act (PRA) 2014, with effect from 1st July, 2014 and funds made available for the settlement of the two stated liabilities(Takor,2022).In October 2017, 174 Biafran police officers dismissed by the Federal Government after the civil war but pardoned by President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000 were paid N571.56 million by the Buhari government. Former staff of the defunct Nigeria Airways also got N24 billion in September 2018. Some other initiatives of the administration, according to the factsheet, include the N54 billion released to settle outstanding 33 per cent pension arrears. Corroborating this feat, a pension fund administrator with premium pension, Danjuma Kakani (2022) stated thus:

> *On termination of appointment or self-resignation, employee can now assess their benefits within 4 months instead of the usual 6 months. On retirement, accrued right or bond always take close to two years but now within one year accrued right is released. Also, the payment of death benefit is faster than before. This is made possible because of the commitment of President Muhammadu Buhari commitment to pension matters*.

In terms of implementation of stiffer penalities, pencom under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration has become more alive to its responsibilities. This fact is contained in the commission's fourth quarter 2021 report which reveals that N984.23 million has been recovered from 36 defaulting employers. The penalty for this infraction, according to section 11(6) of the PFA 2014 is 2% of the total contribution that remains unpaid for each month (Business Day, 2021).

The quest for bridging the huge infrastructural gap in the country necessitated the provision of investment in the PRA 2014. The policy had envisaged about 15% of the total pension asset estimated at 12.34 trillion in Q1'21 would be deployed to critical infrastructure. However, available records indicated that infrastructure share of the allocation has stagnated far below 1 %.(Vanguard, 2021). Instead, Federal Government Borrowings in form of FGN Bonds took average of 68 %, indicating the need to leverage more on the opportunities provided in the act on critical infrastructures. Although, experts argued that the allocation pattern was informed by better security and yield in the FGN Bond %.(Vanguard, 2021).

Conclusion

Successive administrations have implemented series of pension reforms in Nigeria with the intention of ensuring better welfare for retirees without much success. The defined benefit schemes which was implemented from the periods after independence in 1960 to 2004 before the PRA 2004 was enacted were fraught with a lot of challenges which leaves retirees worse off at retirement. The 2004 PRA even though has provisions that improved the pension administration also has its own pitfalls necessitating the PRA 2014 with key provisions that widen the scope of participation and contribution; stiffer sanction and penalties against infractions and provision for investments. Even though the new scheme preceded the Buhari administration, actual implementation of the provisions were better observed in the period between 2015- 2022 when President Muhammadu reigns.

From the period between 2015 till date , President Muhammadu Buhari has complied with the provisions of the PRA 2014 through payment of the accrued arrears of bonds; payments of the new increment of 2.5% that makes up the new 10% of FG employers: launching of the new micro pension scheme for informal private sector employees among others.

It is therefore recommended that the current tempo which has seen employee gaining confidence in the new pension regime be sustained and government should also take advantage of the window of investment in critical infrastructure which the act provided for the growth of the Nigerian economy.

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