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CIVIL SERVICE AND CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS FOR EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

FRIDAY F. NCHUCHUWE AND DAVID ADEJUWON

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the Civil service, its reforms and performance in Nigeria. It reveals that though the civil service in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive, became refocused for development after independence, the performances of the services have become a cause for worry by various stakeholders. It took a historical development of the civil service and its various reforms in Nigeria and concludes that its performance is still a far cry from the peoples' expectations. It therefore recommends an adoption of the New Public Management approach in the civil service and the training of the workforce along this line to help make it efficient and effective in the 21st century among others.

Key words: Civil Service, Civil Service Reforms, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Public Management, New Public Management

INTRODUCTION

The civil service is pivotal to the existence of a state or nation and no nation or state anywhere in the world has been able to advance without its civil service. The ills of the Nigerian civil service and by extension the public service have been identified at different times and in various fora. A few years ago, some commissions were instituted to review the past public service reforms in Nigeria with a view to identify the major ills of the service, which needed to be corrected and proffer measures to further reinvigorate the service, for dynamism and effectiveness. The reform of the public service therefore became the ultimate strategy for repositioning it for the realization of its vision

as part of a multi-sect oral approach to promoting good governance, ensuring sustainable democracy and accelerated transformation (Adegoroye, 2005:1-2). The public services in most developing countries are central to the economic and sociopolitical development of such countries, because of the relative weakness of the private sector. However, there is increasing evidence pointing to the deterioration of the public service's performance in Africa (Mutahaba: 1989). Nigeria is not left out of this. As Oyebode (2009), puts it: The Nigerian Public Service is paralyzed.... Life is getting worst by the day and the people are getting despondent, disillusioned and completely having the impression that Nigeria is looking more and more like a failed State. Following independence, many African states attempted public service reforms in order to improve their socio-political and economic performances for the benefit of their people. Studies have shown that some independent states were able to provide quality services to the populace immediately after independence particularly in the period from 1960 -1970. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Nigerian civil service was regarded as one of the best in the commonwealth, and up till the mid-1980s (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2006:13). However, the reverse has been the case in recent times. In Nigeria, various policy initiatives and legal instruments were put in place for the effectuation of the multisectoral reforms by the immediate past administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, as encapsulated in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). The articulation and adoption of the charter for the Public Service in Africa in Windhoek in 2001 fitted into Nigeria's Public Service Reform Agenda in terms of the objectives of re-professionalizing the service and ensuring a sound ethical culture in the Public Service (Adegoroye, 2005:2). Public Service Reform is also one of the major domains of the present Federal Government's seven point Agenda. The Mission of the Public Service Reforms according to the Bureau of Public Service Reforms (2006:1) is to build a public service that is performance and results oriented, customer-driven, investors-friendly, professional, technologically sensitive, accountable, fostering partnerships with all stakeholders and committed to a continuous improvement in government business and the enhancement of overall national productivity. Public service reform is a complex process that may involve profound changes in the policies. strategies and programmes of Government to make them more responsive to the demands of the people. Unfortunately, successive reforms have not made significant impact to engineer the desired managerial revolution in the public service (Olaopa, 2008:5). It is evident that Nigerian Public Service like many others in Africa needs more radical changes. The Government needs to respond to widespread poverty and income inequalities in the country by improving its service delivery to the citizenry, and promoting a system of transparency and accountability (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka, 2006:14). The Nigerian Civil service needs reforms to improve its performance and promote transparency and accountability. Most of the past bureaucratic reforms that have taken place in Nigeria were externally influenced though some were home-grown. Their essence was to return professionalism, accountability and transparency to the civil service. They emphasized such issues as restructuring the civil service, introduction of performance productivity related pay, review of performance appraisal of staff, reevaluation of the information management system, improvement in record keeping, professionalization, and training. Current studies have discovered that reforms have led to the politicization of the service and the gradual erosion of the old public service ethos of meritocracy. Instead of enhancing the performance of the civil service, the reforms led to more ineffective formulation, coordination and implementation of government's policies. It is for this reason that this paper is geared towards a recommendation that will help to invigorate the service for efficiency and effectiveness in the 21' century. Apart from this introduction, the paper is divided into (i) the Historical development of the Nigerian Civil Service (ii) Reforms in the Nigerian Civil Service (iii) Towards efficiency and effectiveness in the performance of the Nigerian Civil Service and (iv) Conclusion

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

The history of the Nigerian Civil Service can properly be understood in the context of Britain's colonization of Nigeria. The scramble for Africa by European powers no doubt brought Britain to Nigeria. Such colonization preceded and consequently paved way for administrative set up... in Nigeria (Bamgbose, 2000:140). The Nigerian Civil Service therefore evolved from the colonial service which was established by the British authorities as the administrative machinery for governing Nigeria. The amalgamation of the then Northern and Southern protectorates as Nigeria in 1914. under Lord Fredrick Lugard, led to the establishment, for the first time, of what seemed like a unified service (Adegoroye, 2006:3). Olowu et al (1997:2) observes that three features characterized the colonial phase of the civil service. The first was the domination of the upper echelon of the civil service - so called senior service posts - by Europeans. In 1948, 245 of 2,541 and 1952, 685 Of 3,679 senior positions were held by Nigerians. In June 1960, a few months before independence, the number of Nigerians occupying senior service positions had increased to 2,308 out of 4,057. The reason for this was very clear in the sense that it was near their exit. Also, there was concentration of all power (executive, judicial and legislative) in the hands of appointed European officials to run the affairs of the colonial territory. Thirdly, the colonial service co-opted the traditional rulers in administering Nigeria. The Governor - General headed the public service and was responsible to the colonial secretary in London while the colonial secretary coordinated the whole service which was divided into two significant parts, the Departmental and the Political administration (Bamgbose, 2000:142). From 1954 up to independence, each of the four civil services acquired a number of characteristics unique to their circumstances. However, Olowu, et al (1997:3) opined that they all exhibited certain common features. Firstly, there was a common commitment to Nigerianization of the civil services even though the pace was uneven among the various governments. Secondly, they all relied to a very great degree in expanded training programme as a vehicle for bringing Nigerians into the professional and administrative grades. Thirdly, there was commonly

shared commitment, if not rigorously enforced, to the concept of a career civil service. At independence, the role of the civil service shifted from a colonial mould of maintaining law and order to that of facilitating the realization of the nation's development aspirations. Consequently, the civil service became more visible and active both in the formulation and execution of development policies and programmes (Adegoroye, 2006:3). From independence and thereafter, the Federal civil servants served as professional public servants. However, Adamolekun (1986) observes that during the period 1960 - 1966, the civil service operated under the protective shield of the politicians earning the civil service institution the enviable title of the country's real achievement since independence. During the first phase of military intervention lasting 1966 - 79, two patterns emerged in regard to the role of the higher civil servants. Between 1967 and 1975, the higher civil servant dominated the policy process, leading to virtually loss of the attributes of political neutrality, anonymity and impartiality. By contrast, from 1975 - 79, the role of civil servants in the policy process was less pronounced. The reason for this was not borne out of the fact that it was the period of preparation for transition from Military to Civilian rule. The immediate post - military regime was faced with the challenges of repositioning and reforming the civil and public service so as to make it an active participant in the new democratic project. Thus, the Question of building a democratic culture falls essentially on the crest of the public service (Ayodele and Bolaji, 2009). Years of military authoritarianism took its toll on virtually all sectors of governance in Nigeria. The public service was not insulated from the maladministration of the military regimes (Ayodele and Bolaji, ibid.). The new dispensation makes it compelling that the trend of policy formulation and implementation must follow the norms of democratic practice, coupled with the challenges of Globalization and democratization (Ayodele and Bolaji, ibid.).

REFORMS IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

With increased awareness of political developments leading to demands for self-rule, Nigerian workers through various labour movements started to agitate for better working conditions particularly pertaining to remuneration. In response, the Nigerian government instituted various committees and commissions. These were the beginning of reforms in the civil service (Adebayo, 2000:212). The Nigerian Civil Service has witnessed series of bureaucratic reforms since then. The under listed are some of the major Nigerian indigenous civil service reforms undertaken from 1934 - 1995.

- Hunts Commission 1934
- Harragin Commission 1945
- Foot Commission1948
- Milne Levy Commission 1951
- Philipson-Adebo Commission 1954
- Gorsuch Commission 1954
- Mbanefo Commission 1959
- Nevins Commission 1959
- Morgan Commission 1963
- Elwood Commission 1966
- Simeon Adebo Commission 1971
- Udoji Commission 1974
- Dotun Phillips Commission 1988
- Ayida Commission 1994

Source: Oyelaran-Oyeyinka (2006:170) and Bamgbose (2000:145)

Since 1934, Nigeria has undertaken many different reforms as indicated above. The majority of these reforms focused on salaries, wages and conditions of service, such as the review by the Adebo Commission of 1971. The Udoji commission of 1974 was more

comprehensive and developmental in nature, and is also known as the Public Service Review Commission. This commission articulated far reaching suggestions for a result oriented public service. Its report became a basic reference document to various aspects of the public service including training, wages and salary reviews. It examined structural defects in the civil service that could impede its efficiency and effectiveness (Oyelaran - Oyeyinka, 2006:170). The Udoji report aimed at settling the age-long dispute between the professionals and the administrators by making it clear that the executive leadership of a ministry was open to any officer irrespective of professional qualification or administrative skill. It is no wonder then that after the Udoji reform of 1974 that was set up to put the Nigerian public service back on the course of productivity and efficiency, the service was near total collapse. The federal government had to institute the Dotun Phillips Commission to review the public service in 1988.

The objectives of the 1988 reforms were to:

- Enhance professionalism, decentralization and delegation of functions:
- Institute checks and balances:
- Promote general modernization:
- Enhance the combination of responsibility with authority:
- Align the civil service with the spirit of executive presidentialism: and
- Enhance efficiency, effectiveness and speed of operations.

One thing this reform succeeded in doing was to unify the executive and administrative cadres, with everyone classified from level one to seventeen (Odidi, et al 1999:19). Despite its lofty ideals of efficiency, 'professionalism, accountability, and checks and balances, the 1988 civil service reforms did not achieve its desired objectives. In fact, it was reasoned that the harm done during the reform was so much and so deep that it would take time, patience and determination to restore the lost glory of the service. This led to the Ayida Review Panel on the civil service reforms of 1994. The Allison Ayida

Panel's report among other recommendations, led to the restoration of the office of the Head of Service as separate from the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) and the restoration of "accounting officers" position once again to permanent secretaries. After studying a total of 39 ministries and extra ministerial departments, the Ayida Panel came up with the report that the civil service was a bloated structure and that there was the need to prune it down by 50 percent. The panel observed that the unwieldy number of junior staff contributed largely to the continuing drop in the efficiency of the service, adding to the red tapism responsible for the sluggishness associated with the sector. Recommendations were also made on the urgent need for upward review of remuneration and other working benefits to staff so to secure their loyalty and personal fulfillment. The Ayida reforms of the civil service went to the roots of the ills militating against efficiency and devotion to duty in the service (Odidi et al 1999:19; Adebayo, 2000:220). Despite the different reforms I ntroduced and implemented by different Governments in Nigeria, the civilian government that came to power in 1999 inherited a civil service that is highly regimented and militarized; characterized by poor work arrangement, highly hierarchical operational structure, un-streamlined organizational structures; lacking in financial and material resources to perform its functions and fulfill its obligations; corrupt in virtually all its affairs because of disregard to financial accountability, probity and transparency, insecurity of tenure and means of livelihood during and after service etc. In sum, Olowu et al (1997:5), however noted that civil as well as public service reforms in Nigeria have sought to improve the performance of the Nigerian administrative system through managerial reforms. The pattern of diffusion has also been largely hierarchical with reform ideas coming mainly from the top rather than the society. Even when inputs are made by members of the civil society as to what should constitute the substance of reforms, the political regimes found it easy to alter these at the level of formulations.

TOWARDS EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

The problem which arises in thinking about efficiency and effectiveness in the public service is that it is far more complicated to value and determine than in commercial organizations where the criterion is largely guided by profit objective. In public administration, the value, which public services seek to realize are seldom expressible in concrete terms of quantification. In spite of this difficulty, the public administrator must still apply the criterion of efficiency to his work if the civil service must be result oriented in the 21' century. Indeed, there is a growing concern by the populace that the public service should be more efficient as well as effective. In fact, many people would like to see the public service adopt the principles and practices of business management which are regarded as far more efficient than those of the public service. For Nigeria to attain the position of the leading economy in Africa, Oyelaran-Oyeyinka (2006:190) suggests that the civil service needs to raise transformational leaders, promote committed citizenry and build sustainable and effective institutional capacities by adopting the following:

- Promote meritocratic bureaucracy /civil service
- Develop viable political institutions
- Build capacity for state and non state institutions, and
- Develop strong legal state institutions,.

Adebayo (2000:180) also listed the following for improving efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service.

- Need to define objectives
- Constant review of programmes
- Need for success seeking approach

- Use of delegation
- Optimum use of talent and ability
- Reporting
- Special merit promotion.

To promote effectiveness and efficiency in the public service, Adegoroye (2006:29) also suggests the underlisted measures

- Organizational restructuring
- Rightsizing or service cleansing,
- Review of public service rules and regulations
- Service wide capacity building
- Tracking corruption, and
- Pension reforms.

In the views of Ola (2004:42-44), the civil service will have to consider and implement the following ideas if It must remain a neutral civil service, devoid of politicization and service oriented.

- It must jealously and deliberately guard its privileges to serve the nation.
- The civil service must keep its code of ethics and insist on the Weberian ideal rather than regard them as irrelevant. .
- The civil service must strictly embrace the differentiation principle.
- The civil service should have nothing to do with harsh repression of the masses or the press or with curtailing their rights and with many antidemocratic programmes
- The civil service must be forward looking, not reactionary or out to strangulate innovation.

• The public service should set up an agency or a standing committee that should be looking at ways and means of improving the productivity and output of its services regularly.

As Olaopa (2008) puts it, there is an urgent need to evolve a new career management system, which will involve the acquisition by officers of capacities and skills in more specialized fields of knowledge. This, in his view will facilitate efficiency in the civil service. Lofty as these ideas may be, it is our view that in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service, there is no doubt that a new style of public service, a new concept of management, providing a more production or result - oriented approach to public service is required. As Adebayo (2000:169), puts it, it is now generally recognized that public administration, in order to serve the needs of modern times, must adopt some of the modern management principles and techniques. This brings to the fore the idea of the New Public Management (NPM) approach to the civil service as against its present disposition of waste full service. The whole idea of the New Public Management is borne out the need for efficiency and effectiveness in line with the private or business sector approach. Indeed, since its debut in the 80's, most developed countries have embraced it and it has recorded huge success in such countries as New Zealand, the United States of America and Britain, Australia, to mention a few. Some less developed countries in Latin America and East Asia like Singapore, Malaysia have also embraced the New Public Management in order to improve their civil service. The New Public Management is a Management philosophy and its main hypothesis is that more market or business orientation in the public sector will lead to greater costefficiency for Governments without having negative side effects on other objectives and considerations (Wikipedia, retrieved Jan., 2009). NPM, compared to other public management theories, is more oriented towards outcomes and efficiency through better management of public budgets. It is considered to be achieved by applying competition, as it is known in the private sector, to organizations in the public sector emphasizing economic and leadership principles. New Public Management addresses beneficiaries

of public services much like customers, and conversely citizens as shareholders (Wikipedia, retrieved Jan., 2009). It aims at 3Es – efficiency, economy and effectiveness. It emphasizes on performance appraisal, managerial autonomy, cost cutting, financial incentives. output targets, innovation, responsiveness, competence, accountability and market orientation. It emphasizes on the vital role of the 'market' as against the 'state' as the key regulator of society and economy (Laxmikanth, 2005:34). It also requires discipline and high commitment to duty or put in another way, a complete change of attitude to work by the civil ser' ants. Thus, the new public management suggests a series of shifts of emphasis in the way in which the public sector should be organized and managed to meet the new challenges of liberalization. globalization. and privatization. The New Public Management rejects the various concepts and principles of traditional public administration for example, Hierarchy ridden organization. Over centralization of power. rigidity in administrative processes supremacy of rules in administration among others and embraces the creation of autonomous public organizations, reduction in the size of Government, corporatization of Government organizations, decentralization of authority to lower levels, contracting out services to private agencies, promoting openness and transparency in administration, encouraging peoples participation in administration among others. The approach is simply a private sector mentality embraced. Osborne and Gebler (1992) described ten new features of government emphasized in the new public management as follows:

- 1. Catalytic Government: Steering rather than growing
- 2. Community owned Government: Empowering rather than serving
- 3. Competitive Government: Injecting competition into Government
- 4. Mission Driven Government: Transforming rule driven organizations
- 5. Results oriented Government: Funding outcomes not inputs
- Customer Driven Government: Meeting the needs of the customer(people), not the Bureaucracy

- 7. Enterprising Government: Earning rather than spending
- 8. Anticipatory Government: Prevention rather than cure
- 9. Decentralized Government: From Hierarchy to Participation and Teamwork
- 10. Market-Oriented Government: Leveraging change through the Market

Having said this, it may not necessary be all uhuru for the New Public Management. For example, it has been argued that encouraging an entrepreneurial spirit in administration goes with necessary costs since it will require a willingness to take risk with public resources. However, the advantages or benefits far outweigh the disadvantages. Another practical way in which efficiency can be promoted in the civil service and by extension our public services is for government to provide public servants with the requisite tools and equipment to carry out their job. Nothing can be more frustrating to a skilled and enthusiastic worker than to know what to do and be willing to do it, but have no tools and equipment with which to do it. Also, the public should avoid unwarranted and unfair criticism of the public service as a whole, because it dampens enthusiasm and destroys morale. Instead constructive criticism, which is good for the development of any institution, should be imbibed (Adebayo, 2000:226).

CONCLUSION

No doubt, the various reforms that have characterized the Nigerian Civil Service were aimed at improving the civil service. These reforms were targeted to keep the service abreast of development. Up till now the general consensus appears to be that the public service operates with an impoverished concept of management which overemphasizes routine control and neglect other dimensions such as managing change and managing relationship within organizations. It is now generally accepted that the business of government would be more efficiently conducted if substantial element of the private sector business culture were implanted into public service management (Adebayo, 2000:224). Attempt has been made in this paper to examine civil service reforms and civil service performance in Nigeria. This is done with a view to examine the effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service as a purveyor of development in the 21st century. For the socio-economic development of Nigeria in this century, the New Public Management and a well-trained, dedicated and properly motivated civil service is inevitable. Achieving improved public service delivery in Nigeria requires that public service which plays a vital and indispensable role in planning and managing the state moves to the next level with regards to efficient and effective service delivery. The civil service has been and must continue to be an instrument and indeed a virile partner in Nigeria's march towards national development and will become very efficient and effective in the 21' century, if it could embrace the New Public Management and train its workforce along this line.

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