

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY

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Abstract: The civil service is charged with the responsibility of providing a diverse range of services to the masses, in other words the civil service activities are directly connected to the lives of people. There is therefore need for optimum productivity and efficiency so as to meet up with the various responsibilities to the public. It's against this background that successive Nigerian governments have embarked on several structural and functional reforms of the nation's public service in order to align it onto the right path towards efficient service delivery. This paper therefore critically analysed some of these reforms and how they impact on service delivery in the country.

Keywords: **Public service, Civil Service, Colonialism, Military, Corruption**

Background

The role of the public service in promoting sustainable development cannot be over emphasized. It occupies a central role in the political system of nations. Its effective management is therefore a prerequisite for national economic growth and development.

The Civil Service can be seen as the body of government officials who are employed in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial. Similarly, Bezzina [1994] cited in Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka [2012] opined that Civil Service refers to employees selected and promoted on the basis of a merit and seniority system, which may include examination.

According to Abba and Anazodo [2006], the civil service in Nigeria comprises workers in the various ministries or departments apart from those who hold political appointments.

According to the Public Sector Reforms [2009], a genuine reform can be defined as a change that either produces a measurable improvement in services or a noticeable change in relationship between institutions of the state and the citizens; hence a reform that changes the way in which civil servants are paid that has no impact in services or on the way those civil servants relate to the citizens would not be counted as a genuine reform.

Public service reforms therefore deals with issues of fiscal stability, managerial efficiency, capacity building and public accountability [Bangura, 1999].

While commenting on Public sector reforms, Adegoroye [2005] and Mikail [2013] opined that such reforms are directed at the structure, operations and procedures of the public service with the purpose of inducing its transformation as multi-faceted agent of change as well as an instrument of national cohesion and socioeconomic development.

Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka [2012] opined that the Nigerian civil service has its roots in the colonial system of government. They contend that the colonial civil service model was narrow in structure and objectives. Instead of being used as a machinery to foster social and economic development in the nation, it was rather used as a tool for exploiting the financial and material resources needed by the controlling metropolitan powers.

After independence in 1960, there was increased state dominance in economic and social development. Though this trend had recorded massive success globally, it wasn't the case in Nigeria. The Nigerian state lacked the required administrative capacity to deliver goods and services in the most cost effective manner [Olukemi and Babantunde, 2013].

Due to the unfavorable balance of payments situation in the country caused by over reliance on the oil sector, the country just like many other African nations at the time adopted the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP). SAP had three key roles to play in stabilizing the economy; to improve the nation's monetary and fiscal policy, to reduce the state's intervention in the economy and reform state owned institutions [Dia, 1993]. It was the later role that served as a spring board for public service reforms in the nation.

Statement of the problem

Immediately after independence, a few Nigerians took up managerial positions in the civil service but adopted the colonial system of management which was mainly aimed at exploiting the masses. At that point in time, there were still more expatriates in the public service than nationals especially in the top management echelons. This led to the agitation for the policy of Nigerianisation. This policy was meant to stop expatriate dominance thereby giving Nigerians an opportunity to manage their own Public service [Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka, 2012].

It is important however to note that the introduction of the policy of Nigerianisation did not help curb the problem of sectarian dominance in the civil service as it brought about the problem of regionalization of the civil service where Northerners adopted the Northernisation policy which gave priority to Nigerians of Northern descent during the recruitment process regardless of their qualifications.

Prior to the reforms, the public service was dominated by unclear mandates, appointments were made based on political connections instead of merit which further led to an increase in the numbers of civil servants. The rising number of personnel within the public service strained the nation's financial resources as large chunks of the budget were directed towards paying their wages. [Olukemi and Babantunde, 2013].

The Nigerian Public service was seriously affected by a series of crises immediately after independence. The western region crisis followed by the much disputed 1963 census and the eventual take over by the military in 1966 were all issues that stressed the public service to almost to its breaking point [Bolaji, 2012].

Public service reforms in the first republic

Immediately after the January 15 coup d'état, the new head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi attempted replacing the Federal system of government in existence with a unitary system [Akinsanya, 2002]. This attempt however didn't go down well with some sectors in the country especially

among the northerners and this eventually led to another coup some six months later by Gen Yakubu Gowon.

In the first few years of military rule in Nigeria, the military depended much on the public service for governance. This was mainly because of the inexperience of the military in governance and politics. This resulted in a close relationship between the military government and the public service. [Olugbemi, 1979]

The close relationship with the military and other political factors like the absence of political heads (and their lack of power when they were eventually appointed), the suspension of the constitution, absence of political activities and the full participation of public servants in resolving political crises at the time all combined to increase the dominance of the public service and earned it a hegemonic status in the country [Bolaji, 2012]

By July 1975, another military coup had taken place under Gen. Murtala Mohammed. The military accused the civil service of throwing the principles of public service overboard. This marked the beginning of public service reforms in a new independent Nigeria. First, the public service was purged and over 10000 public servants were laid off.

Prior to Gen. Murtala's regime, his predecessor, Gen Gowon had set up a public service review commission headed by Chief Jerome Oputa Udoji. The commission came up with several recommendations among which included a code of ethics guiding all the public servants, professionalization of the civil service through manpower training and development, a result oriented management system and a unified salary grading structure [Bolaji, 2012].

However due to controversies surrounding some of the commission's recommendations and the inapplicability of some of the recommendations, the desired results were not achieved.

Public service reforms in the second republic (1979-1983)

The public service in the second republic witnessed several changes which included the introduction of the presidential system of government at the three tiers of government which saw the President, Governors and local government chairmen attain the administrative status of 'Chief executive'. [Gboyega, 1987]. There was also the establishment of a code of conduct bureau and a tribunal to enforce the code of conduct principle recommended by the Udoji commission. There were also changes introduced in the appointment criteria which included the adoption of the federal character principle meant at fostering unity and reduce segregation in the recruitment processes, provisions for the appointment of a permanent secretary was made within or outside the civil service and his tenure would expire with the appointing government, similarly the appointment to the office of the head of service was limited to only serving civil servants [Bolaji, 2012].

Public Service Reforms in the third republic (1983-1999)

December 31st 1983 marked the end of Nigeria's second democratic experience as Gen Mohammed Buhari took the reins of power through another military coup.

Several measures were put in place by the regime to curb inefficiency and low productivity of the public service. These measures included the retirement and dismissal of corrupt officials, the introduction of the War against Indiscipline (WAI)

with the objective of instilling in the minds of Nigerians the noble ideals of national consciousness, mobilize their mind and gear them to a sense of nationhood, patriotism and above all, discipline [Bolaji, 2012]

As one would expect under a military regime, several corrupt and indisciplined public servants were investigated and the culprits punished severely without any due process. Also as Okunade [1993] noted, the military through various decrees assumed unlimited power to deal with politicians and public servants.

The regime also set up the Dotum Philips Commission to look into issues of inefficiency, transparency and accountability in the public service. However before the commission could complete its enquiry and file its findings, the regime was again overthrown.

The Babangida administration which took over power from Buhari accused the previous administration of insensitivity to the needs of the masses and therefore embarked on a comprehensive overhaul of the public service. Monumentally the regime introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) which was aimed at devaluating the naira, deregulation of salaries and wages, reduction in public expenditure, removal of subsidies and privatization and commercialization of public enterprises [Olukoshi, 1996].

The Dotum Philips commission set up by the previous government made several recommendations which formed the basis upon which several reforms by the Babangida administration were hinged. For example, the minister became the executive head and accounting officer of a ministry replacing the Permanent Secretary who was to be known as Director General. The Civil service was also three departments;

1. Personnel Management
2. Finance and Supplies
3. Planning, Research and Statistics

Also each ministry was to have at least five operational departments and the ministry as responsible for recruitment at grade level 1 to 6 while the civil service commission was responsible for recruitment at grade 7 and above.

However instead of solving the problems of the civil service the reforms under Babangida administration worsened the situation. The ministers who were the political heads assumed total control over the ministries thereby relegating the civil servants to the back [Okunade, 1993]. The administration further abolished the office of the Head of Civil service of the federation in favor of political appointees who turned out to be loyal to those that appointed them rather than the masses. With all these turns and twists, the Public service became an abode of corruption, inefficiency, instability, dishonesty and inefficiency.

Public service reforms in the forth republic (1999-Present)

May 29 1999 marked the return to democratic rule and the beginning of Nigeria's fourth republic. Key reforms were initiated by the newly elected president Olusegun Obasanjo to redirect the nation on the right track for growth and economic development. In 2005, the then president, Obasanjo declared that his administration will ensure that his administration was to conclude reforms that would save cost and

engender a new orientation and attitude towards public resources and public service [Ugwu- Oloto 2007]

One of the major reforms under Obasanjo was the downsizing of the public service which was aimed at minimizing personnel cost and redundancy in the public sector. In order to achieve the downsizing policy, about 4.8million Nigerians were retrenched nationwide from the public service [El-Rufai, 2006, Aluko, 2007].

The administration also in order to curb corruption, increase accountability, efficiency and integrity, several initiatives like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Due Process Unit in the Presidency were all introduced [Bolaji, 2012].

Another notable reform under President Obasanjo was the setting up of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU) which was responsible for contract award review, oversight and certification. This was to serve as a move against inflated contract costs which had become a bane to development. [Nnebe, 2006].

Furthermore the governments of the fourth republic have realized the role of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) in service delivery. Against this background, private investors have been given green lights to invest their fortunes within the public sector. The government has therefore commenced the commercialization and privatization of public corporations. Some of the government owned companies so far privatized include the Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL), NICON Insurance, Benue Cement Company (BCC), Peugeot Automobile of Nigeria (PAN), Port Harcourt and Kaduna Refineries, amongst so many others. [Nnebi, 2006]. It's however important to note that all the employees of such organizations have been left at the mercies of their new private owners.

One cannot talk of reforms in the public service in the fourth republic without mentioning the monetization of fringe benefits policy. This involves converting all the fringe benefits accruing to the public servants into cash. Such monetized fringe benefits include; provision of free accommodation and its maintenance, furniture, transportation and chauffeur-driven vehicles, payments for utilities in the official residences/quarters, meal subsidy, domestic servants' allowance, leave grant and reimbursement of medical expenses [Bolaji, 2012]. The essence of this monetization scheme was to reduce the cost of governance and increase available resources for public expenditure. However this may no longer be the case due to the large chunks of the nation's budget that goes into the pockets of top public servants all in the name of allowances.

Table 1 Annual Basic Salaries of SGF/Ministers/Ministers of State/ Chairmen and Members of Federal Executive Bodies

1	SGF	₦794,085.00
2	Ministers:	₦794,085.00
3	Ministers of State	₦783,085.00

4	Special Advisers to the President:	₦777,150.00
5	Chairmen and Members of Federal Executive Bodies	₦777,150.00

Source: Bolaji (2012)

Table 2. Monetized Fringe Benefits of Public Officers and Political Office Holders (1) – (5) Above

1	Accommodation	100% of Annual Basic Salary (Housing Allowance)
2	Transport	350% of Annual Basic Salary (Vehicle Advance)
3	. Utility Allowance	20% of Annual Basic Salary
4	Domestic Staff Allowance	75% of Annual Basic Salary
5	Entertainment Allowance	10% of Annual Basic Salary
6	Medical Care	Free
7	Furniture Allowance	300% of Annual Basic Salary (Once in four years)
8	Motor Vehicle Maintenance and Fuelling Allowance	30% of Annual Basic Salary
9	Severance Gratuity	300% of Annual Basic Salary. Once in a lifetime after full tenure of office with government

Source: Bolaji [2012].

It is important to note here that there are 472 Federal Executive Officers, 464 members of the Federal Legislature, 2664 State Executives, 1152 members of the State Legislatures, 3096 Local Government Executives, 8692 members of Local Government Legislatures 934 members of the Federal and State Judiciary making a grand total of 17,474 political/public office holders earning 1,126,614,434.38 per

annum. The total population of these public office holders account for less than one tenth of the entire Nigeria population yet their annual income is somewhere close to one third of the nation's budget. [Bolaji. 2012]. This trend is very disgusting especially given the economic hardships the nation is currently passing through.

Also a new pension reform that is contributory, fully funded by both the employer and employee and based on individual accounts that are privately managed by Pension Fund Administrators (PFAs), with the Pension Fund Custodians (PACs) has been set up [Public service Reforms and National Transformation, 2006].

Implications for service Delivery

The reforms within the public service have indeed achieved some positive results in the area of service delivery. Some of these achievements as articulated by Olukemi [2013] are;

1. A definite reduction of the cost of the bureaucracy
2. Transformational reform of our age-old pension system
3. Integration of information and communication technologies into the operations of our public service
4. The Monetisation program
5. The SERVICOM initiative
6. Service-wide efforts towards the right-sizing of the civil service, including the service-wide disengagement of certain categories of officers, and parallel engagement of young and vibrant officers.
7. The creation of the Bureau of Public Service Reform (BPSR).
8. Fight against corruption.

From the discourse above it is very clear that the Nigerian public service has gone through series of structural and organizational reforms since independence. All these reforms were aimed at improving efficiency, effectiveness, quality of services provided and reducing cost of governance. However there is still a very wide margin between the objectives achieved and the ideal objectives of these reforms.

There is still weak national consciousness which has been attributed to the early policies of Nigerianisation and regionalization which encouraged ethnicity and sectionalism in the service. [Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka, 2012]. There is still also duplication of grades which has considerably increased the number of public servants resulting in high costs of governance to the detriment of social and economic development of the nation.

In terms of effective and efficient service delivery, the public service is still far off the mark. Public corporations have become practical manifestations of inefficiency, poor or low quality services and gross negligence. The public has lost trust in these corporations and some of their offices/branches are literally deserted due to lack of patronage.

A uniformed centralized control structure left by the British is still in existence up to now. Such controls however have not achieved the goal of professionalizing the civil service and eliminating corruption. Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka [2012] have therefore argued that a decentralized civil service will to some extent solve developmental problems in the country.

Conclusion

All the major problems of the Nigerian public service are directly linked to corruption. Every successive administration has had tackling corruption as one of its key items on its agenda. The federal government has set up agencies like ICPC and EFCC to tackle this problem however their activities have not yielded much. Just like Bolaji [2012] noted, the fight against corruption must start right from the top hierarchy of the bureaucracy.

There is therefore a need to lay down a new management system that would impose strict sanction on abusers of public trust and also create a people centered and service oriented public service.

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