

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA. A CRITIQUE

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***Abstract:** Public Service Reforms in Nigeria and beyond are prosecuted, in the effort to improve management in governments by increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and the delivery of quality services to; the people. However experience has shown that the public service reform recommendations in Nigeria have not been properly implemented and therefore have negated both the spirit and the philosophy that motivated the reform efforts. As a result the public service in Nigeria is far from achieving the goals for which it has been established. This paper has therefore look closely at the public service reform efforts from the colonial period to the present day and identified the draw backs that have militated against their implementation. Through the scrutiny of the abundant literature on the public service reforms efforts in Nigeria, recommendations on the way forward have been made. Among others, it has been recommended that an independent institution should be established and empowered with the necessary legislation to handle the task of monitoring and ensuring that the recommendations to the government towards the achievement of the goals of the reforms are accomplished. The reforms from the inception to implementation should be democratic in order to be people-oriented and achievable.*

***Keywords:** Public Service Reforms, Scrutiny, Independent Institution, Task of Monitoring, Goals Achievement and People Oriented.*

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INTRODUCTION

It is trite and of universal concurrence that changes in every being and state of affairs is sure and obvious. What remains for us to do is to ensure that change occurs for the better and not for the worse. This is because the efforts of opposing forces to change often times result to dismal failure with dire consequences. Hence it is usually said that the only sure thing about any (state of affairs is that it would change some how, some day. The state of affairs in the Nigerian Public Service have accordingly under gone a

number of reforms by the various governments in the past decades aimed at enabling it to achieve better status in its various aspects. These efforts were initially made from the days of the colonial administration with News Commission of 1959. This was followed by Chief Simeon Adebayo Commission in 1971; the 1972 Udoji Commission, Dotun Phillips Commission and the others after them. The mission of these various commissions was to change the Nigerian Public Service for the better in terms of achieving the goals of the governments as contained in various government policies in the various sectors of the economy. Most of the Public Service Reforms by the Governments were therefore very well intended as they aimed at achieving the most efficient and effective system of service delivery to the people. What remains however is to inquire into the efficacy of the methods and manner in which these reforms were prosecuted. Were these reforms able to achieve their lofty aims? If they did not, why did they fail? And finally what would be the panacea for future endeavours by these governments to attain their goals? The aim of this paper therefore is to appraise the Nigerian Government efforts towards the reforms of public service, their successes and failures and the way forward. Before delving fully into the subject matter of discussion, it is indeed necessary to look at the meanings of some of the concepts involved.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Let us first look at the meaning of the term public service and try to distinguish it from civil service. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, International Students edition, (2000:1185) defines public service as a service such as transport or health care that a government or an official organization provides for people in general in a particular society. In its own definition of the public service, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (1995:1142) explains that, it is a service or product that a government provides, such as electricity, transport, etc. Similarly, the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, International Student's edition (2010:255) defines civil service as the government department in a country, except the armed forces, and the people who work for them. In its own version the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:234) explains that the civil service is the government departments that manage the affairs of the country.

From the above definitions it is deductible that while all civil servants are public servants, all public servants are not civil servants. In the Nigerian context specifically, civil service refers to the service within government departments and ministries charged with the responsibility of implementing government policies. On the other hand, public service refers to both those in the civil service and other parastatals, police force, and the armed forces. What is also the meaning of reform? The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary International Student's edition, (2010:1236) defines reform as to improve a

system, an organization, a law etc. by making changes to it. Similarly the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1995:1193) defines reform as to change a system, Law organization etc so that it operates in a fairer or more active way.

In his own version, Abueva Jose, (1976:56) notes that reform is a deliberate attempt to use power, authority and influence to change goals, structure or procedure of the bureaucracy and therefore alter the behaviour of its personnel. Aligning with this definition Quah Jon, (1976:58) while describing reform as efficiency and effectiveness engineering in the public service, adds that it is a deliberate attempt to change both the structure and the procedure of Public Bureaucracies involved in order to promote organizational effectiveness and attend national development goals. Lee Harm-Been (1970:130) defines reform in the public service as an effort to apply new ideas and combinations of ideas to the administrative system with a conscious view to improving the system for positive goals of national development. Lastly it is pertinent to seek to know the meaning of Development. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, International Students edition (2010:400) defines development as the gradual growth of something so that it becomes more advanced, stronger, etc. In turn, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (1995:374), defines development as the gradual growth of some thing, so that, it becomes bigger or more advanced.

Todaro, M and Smith, Stephen (2009), see development as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes, and national institutions, as well as acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty. Similarly, the National Economic Council in their earliest official statement on Nigerian National Development plan in 1959 said interalia, at their tenth meeting that the objective of development is the achievement and maintenance of highest possible rate of increase in the standard of living and the creation of necessary conditions to this end. Huntington (1965) states that Development is a situation where a traditional society becomes modernized, dropping "all its traditional characteristics. For him; development is signified by:

- i. Democratization of the polity,
- ii. Industrialization of the economy and
- iii. Rationalization of the cult system

Inferring from the above definitions, it would seem right to say that development have taken place where a well-ordered society is in place and where there is upliftment in all facets of societal needs and requirements.

THE PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS IN NIGERIA

It is without argument that the institution of public sector Reforms presupposes the existence of some deficiencies in the system. Such has been the case of Nigeria even during the colonial Administration in the country. The paper shall look at the various public service reform efforts in Nigeria since the days of colonial administration to the most recent times and see how they have affected the development of the various sector-targets.

According to Yehezkel Dror, (1971:240) the goals which public sector reforms are set to achieve are:

- (i) Traditional administrative efficiency, in the sense of saving money through form simplification, procedure change, duplication reduction, and similar organization and method approaches,
- (ii) Reduction of perceived weakness such as corruption, favoritism, political spoils and so on; and
- (iii) Changing particular main component of the administrative system so as to meet some ideal image. This includes a large variety of main goals such as: introduction of a merit public service, planning programming budgeting system, moving towards automated data and information banks, and increasing the utilization of scientific knowledge.

Pre-Independence Reforms

The Harragin Commission of 1945

Named after its chairman, Justice, Sir Walter Harragin, this commission was set up to look at 'poor financial rewards to public servants after the world war II. After its deliberations, this commission was able to recommend that the titles, 'European posts for whites' and 'African posts for blacks' be changed to 'Senior Service' and 'Junior Service' respectively. It also went further to recommend that expatriates would be entitled to expatriate pay; the senior service were entitled to car allowances, -first class travel, European style quarters with rent fixed at ten percent of their' salary. For the blacks the commission recommended shorter vacations, bicycles and motor cycle allowances and among other things fixed voluntary retirement at age 45. It would be recalled that the senior service was mainly made up of the European expatriates while the junior service were mainly Nigerians. The result of these recommendations was that Nigerians were discontented. To worsen the situation, Anthony, Kirk-Green (1965:219) explains that there was no plan to allow Nigerians to enter the upper cadre of the civil service. To add to this was an earlier writing by Dame M. Perham that one branch which Africans should not be allowed to experience is the administrative service.

However in 1948 the Foot Commission set up by Sir J, Macpherson to study the possibility of getting Africans into the senior service, thereafter recommended inter alia, that No non-

Nigerian should be recruited into the senior service unless no suitable and qualified Nigerian was available. The commission added that scholarships should be provided for the education and possible advancement of Nigerians. This was followed by Phillipson-Adebo Commission which came into effect in 1954 to review the Nigerianisation policy of the government. It recommended a Unitary and central civil service that did not see the light of day as a result of the 1954 constitutional changes, creating four separate civil services. The next was Gorsuch Commission of 1954-55. This commission was mandated to look at the structures and remuneration of the new civil services. This commission recommended the classification of the service into Administrative and professional groups. The Mbanefo Commission of 1959 reviewed the salaries of the Federal, the Northern, the Eastern regions and Cameroon's. It recommended inter alia minor increments in salaries and allowances of those working in Lagos and environs and prayed, that Government should examine the possibility of bringing federal and regional rates into line as soon as it was practicable. A perusal of the public service reforms in Nigeria before independence shows that they mainly centered on the efforts of the government from 1949 to Nigerianise the services and review salaries. It would be said that this partially started taking shape as a result of the depletion of the expatriate staff during the World War II and Revolutionary action of Sir J.S. Macpherson who became the Governor of Nigeria in 1948. There was therefore little success in this phase as a result of the prevailing circumstances of colonization.

Post Independence Reforms

Following the general demand to review salaries and wages in the post independence Nigeria as a result of high cost of living, the "Morgan Commission was set up in 1963 to review salaries and wages in order to avoid the looming general strike. The commission recommended that the question of grading should be kept under continuous review, and that the uniformity of conditions of service and remunerations for officers performing the same duties in their regions as their counterparts in other parts of the federation should be looked into by the appropriate government agency. Immediately following the Morgan Commission was the Simeon Adebo Commission of 1970 which was similarly charged to look into the issue of salaries and wages. This commission made recommendation for salary and wage increases in both public and private sectors of the economy. Then, came the Udoji Public Service Review Commission of 1972 to 1974. This commission which was motivated by the quest for the development and optimal utilization of man-power for the increase in the efficiency and effectiveness of the public services in meeting the challenge of a society which is development oriented; had the following terms of reference:

- (i) To examine the organization, structure and management of the public service and recommend reforms where desirable;

- (ii) To investigate and evaluate the methods of recruitment and conditions of employment and the staff development programmes of the public service and recommend such changes as may be necessary.
- (iii) To examine all legislation relating to pension as well as various superannuation schemes on the public services, and also between those services on the one hand and the private sector on the other while at the same time, providing for the retention in the service of qualified and efficient personnel.
- (iv) To Undertake, with the aid of appropriate grading teams, the regrading of all posts in the public service, establish scales of salaries corresponding to such grades and as a result of job evaluation of posts, recommend salary scales to be applicable to each post in the service; and
- (v) To enquire into and make recommendations on any other matters which in the opinion of the commission appears to be relevant to the foregoing and therefore ought, in the public interest to be inquired into.

From the foregoing terms of reference, Udoji commission was the most comprehensive public service review ever attempted in Nigeria's History. No wonder March J.G. et al (1983:281) described it as being characteristic of twentieth century bureaucratic and political life. Among other things the commission recommended that, there should be a new style public service which was to be result oriented in outlook and performance as well as in its capability to meet the challenge of development in the decade of the 70's and beyond. The commission added that the service would need to recruit and train specialized personnel and use scientific knowledge to a much greater extent. Therefore the commission recommended further that the public service had to employ suitable management techniques, such as, Project management, Management by objectives, and Programmes and Performance Budgeting as tools.

Among others there was also Dotun Phillips Panel of 1985 which led to the promulgation Civil Service reorganization decree of 1988 by the Babangida Administration. It would also be recalled that there were other panels and committees set up to look into the problems of the public service with the aim to reform and reorganize it. Even as at the time of writing this paper, the Federal House of representatives was restive, demanding that if President Goodluck Jonathan did not complete the implementation of the 2012 budget by September of the same year, he would face impeachment proceedings. This was contained in the News bulletin of 25th July 2012 by the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria. This illustrates the endless need for Public Service Reforms in Nigeria. The question would now arise, as to how efficacious the previous attempts on public service reforms in Nigeria have been. What problems have been confronting these exercises? What is the way forward?

Assessment of the Reforms

Of all the public service reform Commissions set up by the Nigerian government, the most comprehensive in its coverage was the Public Service Review Commission headed by Chief Jerome O. Udoji. It would be recalled that this commission made very detailed recommendations that if implemented would -have moved the Nation's public service to an enviable level. However this was not to be. This, was because according to Akinusi A, (1984:13) preliminary interviews and personal observation of the reform environment, suggest a very low degree of implementation of the reforms ten years after.

Apart from the recommendations on salaries and wages which were implemented to some extent, the areas dealing with the Introduction of modern management techniques were given little attention. Such tools as Project Management (PM), Management by Objective (MBO) AND Performance Programme Budgeting System (PPBS) which if it had been applied would have helped the public service in achieving its targets. But they were indeed neglected. It would be recalled that Dotun Phillips Panel in 1985 repeated some of the far-reaching recommendations of the Udoji Commission which resulted in the Decree No 43 of 1988. Under the above recommendations, the Public Services were to be operated and managed like Businesses in the private sector. For instance the Permanent Secretaries were to be changed to director general both at Federal and State levels of the services. These Director Generals, especially in the government Ministries were to go with their masters i.e. those Governors, Presidents, Commissioners or Ministers with whom they had worked.

Moreover government companies and parastatals were to start applying profit-oriented techniques. The poor application of these recommendations was re-echoed when Fatile and Adejuimon (2010:1) state that by mid 1980s, the Nigerian public sector was far from being ideal. To arrest the seeming lethargy in the implementation of the recommendations of the Public Service reforms in Nigeria, a few years ago Ayida Panel was set up to review past public service reforms in Nigeria with a view to proffering measures to further reinvigorate the service. As a result this panel identified the following set backs which included, politicization of the top hierarchy of the civil service, lack of financial accountability and probity, perpetual, breakdown of discipline, virtual institutionalization of corruption at all levels and segments of the service, disregard for rules and regulations, loss of direction, and general decline of efficiency.

Causes of the Failure of Public Service Reforms by Nigeria

The innovative nature of some of the reform recommendations conflicted with what hitherto existed in the service. This caused some difficulty as it was not easy for operators of the policies to adjust. Regarding the recommendations of the Udoji Commission, Bryson and Delbecq (1979) state that it conflicted with the

existing value system. To add to this was that Udoji reform for instance demanded radical change from existing technological tradition. Closely related to this was that the bureaucratic tradition had made the practitioners at the top echelon of the service who had been benefiting from it reluctant to absorb the change. Moreso when they were supposed to make the change to take meaningful effect. There was also absence of high level political support to enable the implementation of some of the reforms. It would be recalled that most of the reforms that took place during the military administration, including the Udoji Commission lacked the philosophical and technical appreciation by the powers that be. Commenting on this, Ebong and Nze, (1989:92) state that the approval of pay increase for civil servant, and the generous endorsement of the nine months arrears of salaries should not be taken for the interest and political commitment to the reforms. Another impediment to the implementation of the public service reforms is inadequate organizational arrangements. The governments have not been able to set up special bodies to handle the issue of implementation of the recommendations of the commissions, This is a complete negation of one of the recommendations of the Udoji Commission, that there should be established, top steering committees and implementation secretariats at both federal and state levels, to give leadership and direction to the total implementation effort. In affirming this claim, Ebong and Nze, (1989:96) state that public service review created in the Federal Ministry of Establishment was ineffective.

There is also general apathy within the reform environment. Apart from the usual interest in the various salary increases by some of the reform commissions, the followership is usually apathetic to other aspects of the reforms in Nigeria. Commenting on this state of affairs, Quah Jon (1989:94) states that society in general and the polity in particular can hinder administrative reform efforts. He adds that society could be an obstacle to reform in insofar as an attitude of indifference to administration prevails among the general population. It is true that a good number of Nigerians may not be aware of the reforms and its implications, but the same cannot be said of a good member who are very literate but passive. This problem has affected the implementation of the reforms as the top echelon who are charged to implement them take the advantage of the passivity of the elites and had their way in scuttling the aspects of the reforms that would not operate in their favour, if implemented. It is indeed pertinent to also recognize that most of the ideas postulated by the reformers have not been completely novel, they are bought and borrowed management ideas and techniques from outside the Nigerian environment. This was done without inquiring into how specific ideas and techniques entered into by the nations of their origin, in order to see if they would work in the Nigerian environment. According to Fatile and Adejuwon (2010:5), this would have made the operators of the reforms appreciate the motives of the international donor agencies in conscripting the country to embrace the public sector reforms.

Current Trends in Public Sector Reforms

The current wave of reforms in the Public Sector in Nigeria is as it were during the previous years. It is driving towards the improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness with which the delivery of quality services to the public is done. This is because the government would not be able to achieve its goals and objectives without well structured and constituted public service. In the words of Agagu (2008), this explains why the relationship between the government and the public service had endured in spite of the various forms of government the country has been experiencing since independence. To buttress this trend President Olusegun Obasanjo (2005) noted inter-alia that the reform of the civil service is one of the central themes of the government's agenda. However the problem of the current public service reform programmes is that the donor countries and agencies had made Nigeria to accept externally induced programmes. This smacks of the intention of these countries and agencies to tie the freedom of Nigeria and make her accept humiliating conditions in the conduct of what would have been entirely domestic affairs. Much of what makes up the public sector reforms nowadays are imposed on Nigeria by international agencies who persuade her that government should not be Father Christmas. This has led to the Nigerian government perceiving public sector reforms as the commercialization of state-owned enterprises and other sectors of the economy. These include, health, education, electricity, agriculture and others. This is irrespective of the fact that these sectors are heavily subsidized in these countries who impose commercialization of public sector organizations on Nigeria. Affirming this notion, Fatile and Adejumo, (2010:7), state that the imposition is an accidental policy by the world bank and the United Nations Development Programme to protect their loans and credit facilities granted to the country for development programmes.

However, part of the reasons for the imposition of public sector reforms is to enable the operators of the development programmes to imbibe the concepts of transparency and accountability, due process, probity, and efficiency in the conduct of public affairs. The idea is that Nigeria being part of the enthusiasts for New Public Management, she has to embrace the ethos that forms the basis for the latter. This is what Gaebler (1992) describes as reinventing government. The idea is that governments should be able to act as entrepreneurs in order to achieve eminence in the management of public affairs with the moneys borrowed from international agencies like the World Bank. The establishment of anti-graft agencies in Nigeria as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the ICPC are part of the New Public Management to minimize corruption and enthrone transparency in the conduct of public affairs. Similarly the recent impeachment threat against president Goodluck Jonathan by the Federal House of Representatives, if he did not implement the 2012 budget to the letter come September 2012 is part of an indirect way of bringing the public service reform

to bear on the conduct of those whose duty it is to implement the budget. It would be recalled that programmes performance Budgeting system was part of the recommendations of Udoji Commission. However the threat is a sign that all is not yet well with conduct of public affairs in Nigeria. It is also an indication that some adjustments need to be effected in the New Public Management efforts of the Federal government. What is then the way forwards?.

The Way Forward to the Achievement of Reform Targets

It has become abundantly transparent and a truism, that the old and new generations of public service reforms have not attained the expected success level as a result of the reasons already discussed. What this paper would now address is the ways forward to enable public service operators achieve reform targets. What is aimed at is optimal reasonable achievement of those targets as a perfection is usually farfetched. The government should set up a monitoring institution on a permanent basis that shall be charged with overseeing the implementation of the recommendations of public service reform commissions, panels or committees as the case may be. This institution should be given all necessary powers in form of legislation and support to carry out the monitoring job properly and without let from any quarters. It would help to prevent the manipulation of the reform recommendations by the public servants at the top echelon who in the past picked and chose the aspects of the recommendations to implement. There is also great need for the reform ideas to be indigenous to the environment in Nigeria, This is because the borrowing of management techniques from other parts of world had not worked in the past; partly because the environment in Nigeria is not suitable for them and because the operators do not understand the workings of the principles proposed.

Reform Proposals would work better if they are treated in piecemeal form to enable the monitoring body to achieve success and make amends where necessary, than trying to implement all at a time and muddling up matters. For instance if a proposal is meant for both Federal and State governments to implement, it would be better to start from one sector and develop to the other. Public service reform proposals should not be exclusive property of government. There should be conscious efforts towards involving the people during the discussion and the implementation. It will enable the people to participate in the reform process and its eventual acceptance. It is unacceptable to allow the reforms to start and end with the government. There can only be a partial success in such a situation. For Public Service reform to succeed in Nigeria to reasonable level, the Nigerian government should have the capacity to analyze and understand the intentions of the international agencies and other foreign creditors in order to avoid their neo-colonial ambitions on the country's sovereignty. Secondly, the interest of Nigerians should always be the prime factor in public service reforms. For the reforms to

survive, the government of the day should intensify genuine support for the anti-graft agencies to enable them deal with corruption and achieve transparency in the implementation of the reform recommendations. It is pertinent to comment here that the EFCC and ICPC are currently achieving some success in their anti-corruption efforts.

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