
CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIAN AND CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the civil service reforms in Nigeria and their implications for national development. The paper which adopts structural-functionalism as its framework of analysis reveals that the civil service is the life-wire of development in any nation owing to its critical functions of policy advice and policy implementation among others. We have discovered in this discourse that the Nigerian civil service which evolved from the colonial era has gone through several reforms but unfortunately the nation is still faced with monumental challenges of development. Against this backdrop, the paper recommends among other things the need for realistic and workable reforms that have human face as well as promoting sound policies on recruitment, training and retraining of civil servants for effective service delivery in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Right from the beginning, one needs to realize that the civil service is a key instrument to the survival of any governmental setting and indeed national development. In a general sense, the civil service provides the semblance of government. Thus, the effectiveness and productivity of any government is largely determined by the efficiency of the civil service. As the administrative and technical support to the governing apparatus, the civil service remains the only viable mechanism for policy initiation or formulation, policy advice and policy implementation. This probably explains why Q'connel (1981:164) aptly posited that "political leadership without administrative and technical support is power in a vacuum; and administration without political leadership is only tidiness in stagnation". It simply means that the civil service is a sine-Qua-non in any political system because it constitutes' the engine of development.

In Nigeria the civil service which evolved from the colonial era has experienced various reforms geared towards repositioning the service for effective service delivery and national development. This paper mainly interrogates these reforms and their implications for the nation's development.

CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION OF CIVIL SERVICE, DEVELOPMENT AND REFORMS THE CIVIL SERVICE

As used in this paper, the term civil service is mainly a reference to a body of men and women employed in a civil capacity and nonpolitical career basis by the federal and state governments primarily to render services in form of advice, as well a formulation and implementation of policies of the government (Anyaele, 1994). This means that as a body the civil service is responsible for the execution of policies and programmes that can engender development in the society.

THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

Development, like other concepts in social discourse, eludes a universally accepted definition. It is however, necessary to see development as a process that involves the progress of people in the society. Since people live within some form of social framework consisting of social, economic and political structures, development involves changes or transformation of these structures, (Burkey, 1996). Development is therefore a multi-dimensional and comprehensive transformation of the society.

From this conceptualization, we can consider development as, primarily concerning itself with the improvement in the living conditions of the people. In other words, development in this sense has to begin from the individual. This is the human conception of development, which looks at social and economic welfare of the people. It embraces a whole gamut of elements that have to change in the quest for development i.e technical, economic and political changes all geared towards enhancing, the welfare of the people. The point here is that the absences of basics like food, clothing, shelter, and good health tantamount to poverty which is the ugly manifestation of underdevelopment.

THE CONCEPT OF REFORMS

On many occasions, leaders undertake reforms in order to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. Olaleye (2001) sees reforms as an attempt to reconstruct administrative structure and revamp operational machinery and techniques capable of improving organizational effectiveness and efficiency. This definition shows that reforms may occur for the purpose of addressing problems arising in operation, structure and organization of an institution.

Reforms therefore refer to purposeful change introduced to improve the capacity of a given organization to respond to changing demands. To Adewumi (1988:20) reforms are usually embarked upon on the assumption that "it is possible and feasible to reach the optional level in the working of a given organization if the administrative process is fully equipped to provide such support." Reforms should be purposeful or goal oriented changes which are designed to improve the skills as well as the preparedness of members to satisfy the organizational set goals or objectives. In sum, reform involves identifying an existing problem and attempting to solve it. It has to do with policies formulated' and aimed at restructuring and transforming an organization from a bad condition to a better one. In analyzing the civil service reforms in Nigeria and their implication on the development agenda, the above conceptual clarification should serve as a guide.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This survey would be carried out within the theoretical framework of structural-functionalism. This theory is an offshoot of general systems theory and was popularized by Radcliff-Brown and Gabriel Almond (Olaniyi, 1997; Enemu, 1999). These scholars maintain that structural-functionalism is a methodology of analysis which examines a system in terms of the structures of which the system is composed, and the functions performed by those structures.

According to the proponents of this theory structural-functionalism can be described as means of explaining basic functions of the political structures in the political system and it is a tool investigation. In essence, it explains the relationships between the parts (structures) on one hand and between the parts and the whole (political system) on the other hands. The relationship is explained in terms of the functions of each. It is the contributions of each structure that help to sustain the system.

The structures are many and they can take any form. They include political parties, interest groups, business groups, religious groups, the bureaucracy or civil service, legislature, executive, judiciary, among other. For instance, the civil service or bureaucracy as a structure within the political system performs many functions including policy formulation, policy advice, policy implementation and such other functions geared towards national development. It looks as if though these functions are the monopoly of the civil service. However, it must be emphasized that other governmental structures like the legislature, etc concurrently helps in carrying out some of these functions to sustain the political system.

Elegant as this theory seems, it has been criticized for its over reliance on issues of stability and equilibrium or system maintenance. It looks at the society as a stable entity with everybody living together harmoniously, and with each structure performing its requisite function.

However, this contradicts the underlying principle of political studies which is premised on power relationships, producing more often than not conflict and instability. In essence, functionalism in a way is anti-Marxism which believes strongly in the existence of contradictions and change in society. The criticism notwithstanding, structural functionalism best explains the civil service in Nigeria and its contributions to national development.

THE EVOLUTION OF NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

Although the pre-colonial institutions existing in Nigeria might have had some form of service to be equated with civil service, the present Nigerian civil service can be said to have evolved from the onset of colonial rule (Tagowa, 1999; Balewa, 1994). It is a *deja vu* that colonial rule was the product of the insatiable appetite of the European economies for raw materials and markets for the processed industrial goods of Europe. Ekeh (1978) says greed and lucre were the motive of colonizers. Thus, the motive of colonial rule was essentially to maintain law and order and to create a conducive environment for exploitation. The colonial government established a civil service with a limited objective of ensuring peaceful administration of the colonized people. At that time the service was principally dominated by colonial officials as Nigerians were deliberately excluded in the service, especially the senior cadre. For example, by 1948 only 172 (representing 7%) of the 2,297 senior civil servants were Nigerians; the proportion hiked to only 19% at independence (Nicolson 1966).

The colonial civil servants were said to be men and women of high sense of mission, dedication, discipline and motivation who were prepared to make sacrifices. Their course was to achieve the goals of imperial policy and they did what they were expected to do

with the highest sense of dedication, enterprise, initiative and even risk." From the 1940s, however, the colonial administration started to admit Nigerians into selected senior positions in the service following some reforms of the local government (Native Authorities) as a means of mobilizing the native human and material resources for limited socioeconomic and political development, especially for the first ever colonial development and welfare plan. This period coincided with the nationalist's agitation of Nigerianisation of the senior civil service despite the imperialist propaganda that Africans were not ripe to be entrusted with senior positions and responsibilities. (Nicolson, 1966).

From that time the civil service witnessed phenomenal growth in number and service institutions, training and competence levels. There was also a shift in the role of the service from the control of decision making process to advising on policy matters and implementation of policy decisions until independence was achieved in 1960. In a similar vein, the period coincided with the time the unity of the service as a colonial institution was broken into Federal and Regional Civil services in the wake of the adoption of the Macpherson Constitution and the quest for the adoption of a "true Federation" in 1954. The federal and regional (and later the state) governments were to maintain sovereign civil services loyal and answerable to no other authority than the regional or state authorities. In this respect the regional/state civil servants considered themselves equal in role notwithstanding the needs for national integration.

In spite of the brake-up, the civil service of that period continued to remain the primary source of advice and policy ' implementation. And in terms of structure and role the service remained the same under the civilian administration of the First Republic. However, the specter of corruption among the politicians which accelerated from 1962 also found its way into the civil service and became a matter of concern when the military took over political leadership in 1966.

With the coming of the military there was the suspension of all democratic institutions, ban on political party activities and party bureaucracies. Secondly, during the early period of military rule, politicians were kept away from government with permanent secretaries taking over the mandate of decision-making in addition to their primary role of advice and implementation. The period also witnessed the dilemma of the civil war-whether Nigeria was to remain united or not. With the east poised for secession, the military and the civil service had cause to defend the unity of the country throughout the period of the war. Although civilian commissioners were appointed in June, ' 1967, some of them' felt their position anomalous; they looked forward to the earliest end of the civil war and an end to military rule. Since the role of the civil servants was to "patriotically serve the government-of-day to the best of their abilities, the situation led to mutual distrust between the military and the politicians in government. As a result the military rulers found convenient ally in the civil service. The top civil servants continued to maintain highly political positions which turned them political masters rather than civil servants (Tagowa, 1999; Balewa, 1999).

THE CIVIL SERVICE REFORM DURING THE FIRST REPUBLIC AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Generally, the political and administrative climate of Nigeria since independence was characterized by a variety of power coalitions between the civil service and the political leadership (civilian or military). In assessing the role of the civil service in the post-independence period and its contribution to national development, Olugbemi (1979) and Omoruyi (1991) conceived of the service as part of a National Dominant Coalition (NDC). This is a conception which denotes a configuration of whose interest is in hegemonic rule at a particular point in time. The civilian and military politicians are viewed in the NDC as other partners in the coalition:

... a coalition of equal partner~ with a dominant and dominated partners at a given historical period. The position which a partner occupies in the coalition is determined essentially by the balance of power struggle within the coalition (Omoruyi; 1991:10).

Between 1990 and 1965 the civilian politicians as the inheritors of political power from the colonialists were the centre power. The other partners in the coalitions (the military and civil services) were merely used to fulfill the specific interest of the civilian politicians. For example, while the civil service was used for implementation of policies of the politicians, the military was to stabilize their rule and to curb opposition.

In principle, the goal of this coalition was the same with the objective of independence, that is, the pursuit of unity and national development. But in reality the objective of independence was to some extent opposed to the dominant interest of the politicians themselves. They were more concerned with complimenting the political power they inherited with economic power. This led to the creation of various institutions and agencies through which primordial accumulation was ensured, the civil service became the "conduit pipe through which public funds were diverted to private hands (Omoruyi, 1991:11). This clearly arrested national development.

Within the trio coalition the civil service was the most junior partner between 1960 and 1965. It was junior to the military even though the military as a political institution was yet to appear on the political scene. Due to the way the military was used by the civilian politicians to quell civil riots or displace rival political factions (for examples, in the western regional crisis of 1962 and the Tiv riots of (1964), the military soon became politically relevant not only in the power coalition, but also by commitment on the political plane. This situation it was argued significantly altered the position of the military in the NDC. (Omoruyi, 1991:130). Consequently, the power of the civilian politicians was depleted in favour of the military and by extension increased the power of the civil services.

THE CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND THE MILITARY 1966 - 79

As noted above the military coups of January, 1966 shifted the centre of power to the military and the civil service became the trusted allies of the military in the NDC. While the various explanations (Omoruyi, 1991: 140). For this new alliance need not bother us here, it is instructive to note that the proscription of political institutions of state power created a power vacuum which was filled by the top civil servants. It was observed that the new coalition process which was initially began as incorporation by the military transformed into participation as of right as top federal bureaucrats became members of the federal

executive council (FEC) along with their commissioners. (Olugbemi, 1979:98). Basically the military had discredited the civilian politicians for failing to fulfill the task of securing national unity, political stability and socio-economic development. The military took over political power as a corrective regime to fulfill this task, thus the preponderance of the civil service in policy formulation and implementation and simply to fulfill the task. That was why the military saw the civil service as a worthy and capable ally. This capability seemed to have reflected in the ability of the civil service to provide the organizational and technical expertise for the post-war reconstruction programme and further socio-political development. The civil service thus gained ascendancy as a potent social force in the administration of the country. Its perception, interest and action became a determinant factor in shaping the strategies of administration under the military.

Following the emergence of super-Permanent Secretaries, too much attention was paid to the enhanced position of the top civil servants vis-à-vis their civilian commissioners. Although both the senior civil servants and their civilian commissioners were junior partners in the NDC under the military, the anger which greeted the inaction of the Gowon administration when it was displaced by the Murtala/Obasanjo government was meted on the civil servants through the 1975 purge. This was because the new military rulers saw the services as politically responsible for the drift and indecision of the latter years of the Gowon administration. Since the civil services was not longer considered neutral in the political decision-making process, the failure of their bosses was equally theirs, so the new military regime had to deflate the power of the top civil servants under Murtala/Obasanjo regime by barring the permanent secretaries from attending executive council meeting along with their commissioners.

THE CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS FROM THE SECOND REPUBLIC TO 1999

The 1975 purge and the new deflation of power of the top civil servants was seen in some quarters to have reverted the civil service to its proper place and to its proper place and to its traditional role of offering policy advice and implementation of already agreed policies by the political office holders. This has prepared the way for the perception of the second republic politicians of what the proper role of the civil service should be. This was because the major actors in the second republic were the prominent politicians of the first republic and the same crop of leaders who the senior civil servants relegated to secondary positions during Gowon regime. The situation again reverted the civil servants to the most junior partner in the NDC "at a time when a vibrant and result - oriented civil service was needed to complement the presidential system of government newly introduced by the 1979 constitution. (Omoryi, 1991:20).

The most unfortunate consequence of the 1979 purge which the second republic suffered was that the purge demoralized and killed the initiative of the civil service. Secondly, it also generated a feeling of insecurity in the entire service. Thirdly, the constitutional provision (section 159 (2) (d) of the 1979 constitution) empowered discretionary appointment of anyone outside the service as Permanent Secretary of a ministry. Despite the re-expansion of the service, the exploitation of this executive prerogative was viewed by career civil servants as undeserving and unprecedented politicization of the civil service. This further exacerbated the feeling of insecurity introduced by the 1975 purge.

In the wake of the Buhari coup in 1983, there was a renewed retrenchment. The new military government saw the retrenchment as a clearing process and a way of reducing government expenditure on overstaffed and inefficient civil service. This further aggravated the fears of insecurity in the service with the morale of civil servants sinking to its lowest ebb. This was a time emphasis was being shifted to the issue of revamping the ailing economy where the civil service ought to have been more useful.

Perhaps that was why the Dotun Philips Study Team was set up to review the civil services. Although the central focus of the team was to "examine the adequacy of the Federal Civil Service its "structure, composition and methods of operation to cope with the demands of government in the 1980s and beyond, (Omoruyi, 1991).

Attention was paid to how to enhance the moral of the service and make it efficient. The team submitted its report to the Babangida government in August, 1985. The main emphasis in the report was how to revamp the economy as a basis for a stable political order. Unfortunately the implementation of the recommendation of the Study Team started in 1988 when the Structural Adjustment Programme introduced as an alternative to the IMF loan was being implemented too. Secondly, the reforms were being implemented when the government had also introduced a political transition programme with various institutions in response to the political, cultural and economic needs of the country.

However, some aspects in the reforms which affected the relationship between the top civil servants and the political leadership merely represented the formalization of the existing practices which began especially after the 1975 purge. Examples of the practices are the requirement that permanent secretaries (Director Generals) as political appointees should retire with the governments which appointed them and the total submission of the Director General to the Minister or Commissioner (despite the de jure politicization of the former) who now became the accounting officer of the ministry.

Indeed, the new reforms provide an empirical validation of the nature of the NDC and the balance of power struggle within the coalition. The military as the dominant faction in the coalition was interested in pursuing policies and programmes which by their input promote its identifiable class interest. The pursuit of the Structural Adjustment Programme and the botched political transition programme as specific types of socio-economic-cum political structures formalized such class interest and underscores the logic of the various changes which the IBB administration imposed on the Nigerian class interest in the pursuit of governmental programme, the task of the civil service reforms was to redefine a civil service which is committed and subservient to political leadership (Omoruyi 1991). As put by Professor Omoruyi, the reforms demand an unequivocal commitment of the civil service: ... *to government policies and programmes under conditions in which control over the service is both desirable and expedient. Commitment here would seem to imply a 'neutrality' suggesting, in effect the abandoning of the time honoured but obviously pretensions tradition of a politically neutral civil service often used as a core by the civil servants in denying responsibility of the lapses of the administration of which they are part. (Omoruyi 1991:20)*

The imperative of the reforms which centre on accountability and responsibility of the political leadership and demanding the subservient commitment of the civil service, thus allows the ruling class to submit "itself to the temptation of dipping its hand directly into the coffers of government fund, This explains the open looting of government fund and property, and the acceleration and even 'legalization' of corrupt practices following the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme and the pretentious political transition programme of the Babangida administration between 1985 and 1993. The institution of the code of conduct bureau as an instrument for monitoring the action and behaviours of public officers to ensure that they conform to the highest standard of morality and accountability did not help matters. Thus the reconstituted code of conduct bureau during IBB's transition period remained like the one entrenched in the 1979 constitutions as low standard of morality resulting in open looting of government treasury following connivance of the factions of the NDC. Despite the junior partnership of the civil service in the NDC, it still remains the conduit pipe through which public funds were diverted into private hands. However, will the promulgation of the Failed Bank Decree and the 'establishment of the Failed Bank Tribunals by the military regime of General Sani Abacha in 1996, the civil servants have entered a state of fear or 'wait and see' despite their low moral exacerbated by very low pay and harsh economic conditions.

THE CIVIL SERVICE UNDER THE CURRENT DEMOCRATIC ORDER: IMPEDIMENT TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nigeria returned to a democratic presidential system on May 29th, 1999 after a long period of military interregnum. In fact, the presidential system as it is seems to have been consciously deigned to prune down the powers of the top civil service. Sections 17 (1) and 208 (1) of the 1999 Constitution gives the President and the Governors the power of appointment and removal over the following top civil servants;

- the Head of service
- Permanent secretaries or the chief executives in any ministry, department or agency of the government in Nigeria.

This is a clear departure from the previous arrangement or system where such positions are usually filled by career officials. Moreover, with the present democratic presidentialism, it means that the President or the Governor has direct personal responsibilities for the activities of government. It means also that one of the key values of this system is that the chief executive should be in charge.

Generally, there are certain definite changes in the Nigeria civil service deriving from the introduction of this presidential system of government. We have already stated that the presidential system of government gives the power of hire and fire over the top civil service.

Another major element in the present system is the introduction of the concept of federal character. According to Sorkaa (2000), this simply a reference to quest for a representative civil service. He maintains that the whole essence is to consciously have the composition of the Nigerian civil service to reflect the different major groups and geo-political units that make Nigeria.

The concept of federal character has been eloquently concretized in the 1999 constitution. For example, section 14 (3) says that: *The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria.*

This is meant to promote national unity by ensuring that people from a few states or ethnic groups do not dominate governmental affairs. The states, local governments and their agencies are supposed to also adhere to the federal character principle.

Over all, the rationale behind the introduction of the federal character concept is quite plausible. However, the main problem with it is the manner of its implementation. Many times, those appointed into the civil service positions are not even the best material from their areas, but are qualified due to their political affiliations. It shows that merit is sometimes neglected or relegated and nonentities found themselves saddled with responsibilities they could hardly perform. Clearly this undermines the development process.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that the civil service is a key machinery in the implementation of government policies towards accomplishing overall national development goals. Perhaps, this informs the government to embark on series of reforms of the service. However, as revealed by this paper, the intentions of the various reforms have failed to reposition the service for effective service delivery in the country. Today, the Nigerian state and people are still faced with the problem of development.

There is therefore the need to embark on realistic, workable and practical reforms that have human face rather than the usual cosmetic approaches. First of all there is need for the government to create enabling conditions of service. This has to do with ensuring adequate pay package and other economic incentives. If this is duly and religiously implemented, civil servants will be discouraged from using unethical means in getting economic benefits from clients and the public in general. In fact, the current national minimum wage of ₦18,000.00, should be increased to ₦50,000 as a starting point.

Another realistic approach in the reform process should focus on the restructuring of the public service sector to avoid unnecessary duplication of ministries, departments and agencies of government. This would definitely prevent waste of resources in the system.

Finally, there is also the need to promote sound policies on recruitment, training and retraining of civil servants for effective service delivery. These policies will contribute immensely to enhancing and promoting professionalism, and ethical, values of honesty, integrity, confidentiality, political neutrality, accountability, discipline and transparency in the conduct of government business. Recruitment and promotion or advancement on the Job should be strictly based on meritocracy, performance and achievement.

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