

Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria

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Abstract

Adequate and effective management of the civil service are critical to sustainable socio – economic development of any nation. In Nigeria, as in most countries in Africa, the civil service has declined in proficiency, probity and morale in the past decades. Consequently, the State’s capability and potential to fulfill its responsibilities as service providers to the citizens has declined and progressively a crisis developed in the Nigerian civil service. In order to improve service delivery, successive post – independent governments have undertaken various civil service reforms to reposition the skills, capability, influence and morale of the civil servants. Yet, the civil servants have remained ineffective, demotivated, have low morale, limited training, low capacity and capability to perform their functions. This study reviews the various civil service reforms in post – independence Nigeria and their short comings. It also considers the challenges encountered by these reform initiatives. The secondary means of data collection was employed. The study concludes that civil service reforms have remained difficult to implement due to strong institutional, political, administrative and psychological hindrances. The study recommends that the government should collaborate with various stakeholders like political leaders, the media, civil society organizations, private sector and the international community. Their cooperation and synergy are highly needed for reforms to be successful. Government should also invest in human capital development by organizing capacity building programmes and also implement good welfare packages that will motivate workers to put in their best to see that government’s business and reforms are well implemented among others.

Keywords: Service delivery, development, political elites, professionalization, corruption

Introduction:

Civil service for long has been recognized as the active side of government. The civil service is an establishment charged with the responsibility of formulating and implementing government’s policies in a systematic and effective manner. Civil servants play pivotal roles to see that the Government performs one of its most crucial functions which is provision of welfare services to the teeming population. In fact, without these

professionals, the government cannot adequately and efficiently carry out many of its functions. It is from these bureaucrats that all the other organizations acquire their diverse approvals, permits and licenses to operate. Government’s apportionment of resources must go through them either directly or secondarily to other segments of the society. Despite the crucial roles the civil servants play, they are bedeviled by multiple

problems, which include, low capacity, red tapism, lack of accountability, corruption and wastages, lack of control, oversized staff, low professional standards and redundancy. The ineptitude and unprofessionalism of these civil servants have jeopardized development efforts and plans. The government is daily accosted with increasing citizen's complaints and discontentment over service delivery, globalization and technological challenges. In order to have a goal - oriented civil servants, successive governments have carried out different reforms which were aimed at repositioning the civil service to become of greater benefit to the country. Yet, the civil servants have remained inept, lacked devotion, are unprofessional in conduct and have become outmoded. Many of these reforms only thrived in addressing the symptoms rather than the cause of the ills. Civil service reforms are usually introduced to tackle the deficiencies, problems and challenges of the civil service and to also reposition it to perform its services more efficiently. It is against this background that this study reviews the various civil service reforms in post - independence Nigeria and their shortcomings. It also considers the challenges encountered by these reform initiatives. The secondary means of data collection was employed.

Literature Review:

Civil servants are citizens that work in government ministries and departments, which are given the directive to execute government policies. Imaga (2003) sees civil servants as people engaged in the government civil service, who operate in the ministries and departments. Adamolekun (2002) points out that civil servants act as agents of the government. Ipinlaye (2001) submits that civil service is the body of people engaged in civil capacity and non - political basis by the government to implement government decisions. Olalekan, Olayinka and Omotayo (2016) maintain that civil service is the management of public programmes; the transfer of politics into reality that is of assistance to the people; the study of government decisions making; and assessment of the policies. Nwanolue and Iwuoha (2012) argue

that civil service is a body of government employees empowered with the administration of the country and required to carry out the programmes of government of the day. Shimawua and Iorhemen (2018) note that civil service is the machinery used by the State to administer and supervise all aspects of the society. Arguing further, they submit that the state of a society is to a great extent determined by the public or civil service. The World Bank Encyclopedia (2004) observes that civil servants consist of people engaged by the State to handle their public service. Murana, Salahu and Ibrahim (2016) posit that the productivity and efficiency of any government is to a large extent affected by the civil service; even as they remain the only feasible instruments for policy formulation, implementation and advice. Magbadelo (2016) sees reform as the act of accomplishing change in order to improve or make things work better. It is an organised and methodological interposition directed at introducing a fundamental change involving introduction of new methods, modernization and attitudinal re - orientation in terms of values and service delivery (Abuja, Bureau of Public Service Reforms, 2005). Olaleye (2001) points out that reform is a deliberate attempt to restructure administrative structure and transform operational mechanism and strategies capable of upgrading organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Kwaghga (2010) maintains that reform is a deliberate change introduced to enhance the ability of a given organization to reciprocate to changing demand. Igbokwe (2017) contends that reform is the process of regulating public service structures, systems and procedures, human and material resources to government policies, targets and plans. Jose (1976) cited in Iyayi (2010) contends that civil service reform is a calculated endeavour to use power, authority and influence to modify goals, structure and operation of the bureaucracy and therefore change the behavior of its personnel. Magbadelo (2016) maintains that the dividends of governance would elude the citizens when the civil servants are debilitated or deficient. Ayodele (2004) points out that the problems of growth and consistency of the polity depends greatly on the

adequate, dynamic, effective and accountable public service system. Shand (1997) pin points that there is a general agreement that public sector performance has remarkable influence on overall economic performance. Brosmale (2012) posits that reforming the civil service looks like a herculean task because success stories are scanty. Eme e tal (2011) perceive that the introduction of federal character system to civil service added to the problem of inefficiency and unproductiveness of workers in the Nigerian civil service.

Theoretical Underpinning:

This study explored the New Public Management (NPM) Theory. NPM was first introduced by Christopher Hood in 1991. The main thrust of NPM is to establish market – oriented strategies and more management techniques that will make public services reactive, profitable and customer oriented. It makes a citizen – friendly administration from an inflexible, hierarchical and disciplined bureaucratic administration. The key themes in NPM are financial control, increased capacity, monitoring of performances, setting targets, value for money etc (Biswas, 2023). NPM concentrates on three Es which are Efficiency, Economy and Effectiveness. Civil service reform is one way of injecting efficiency, effectiveness, financial prudence and probity to public service.

Overview of Post – Independence Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria:

The Nigerian civil service was created in 1862 with the motive of the survival and consolidation of the capitalists who were the colonialists. The main functions of the colonial civil service was collection of taxes and sustenance of law and order (Ogundiya, 2007). Arguing in the same vein, Ekeh (1978) stressed that greed and material gain were the motives of the colonizers. Therefore the civil service had a limited objective which was maintenance of law and order so as to facilitate a favourable environment for exploitation. Nigerians, therefore were bequeathed with administrative structures which were more interested in exploiting the people and their natural resources than in economic and human

development. Therefore, the civil service bequeathed to the nation by the colonialists lacked competence, accountability, resourcefulness, innovativeness and transparency. There was need to reposition the civil service from the colonial heritage of tax collection to the path of socio – economic development and nation building. Therefore, in 1964, the Morgan Commission was inaugurated to extensively overhaul and reposition the weak and incompetent civil service.

Morgan Commission of 1964: This commission was inaugurated in response to the 1963 general strike. The commission was charged to probe the subsisting wage, salary and conditions of service of workers. The commission obtained different petitions from workers, trade unions and private employees. They convened between October 1963 to April 1964 and advocated in their final report, the break - up of the country into four waged zones. They also advocated for substantial increment of workers' salaries and the creation of wage boards to act as agency to implement the salary increase. The failure of the State to release white paper on these proposals brought about another strike which was announced on June 1st 1964. On 3rd June, the Federal State issued a white paper where most of the proposals of this commission were rejected. They were accused of increasing the salary by 58% to 100% instead of 15% to 20% (National Record, 1968). The Morgan Commission reassessed the salaries of junior staff and for the first time a minimum wage was instituted for each region in the country. This commission's proposal however, provided for inconsistency in salaries between workers in the same cadre and grade, and who also perform the same functions.

Elwood Commission of 1966: This Commission was commissioned to look into irregularity in the grading and other conditions associated to all posts in the Public Service of the country with the purpose of establishing a suitable grading system and attaining consistency in the salary of workers performing identical duties. The growing hostility between workers due to labour activism gradually pervaded into the already degenerated social activities which include theft of public funds,

ethnic politics, ineptitude and electoral misconduct.

Adebo Commission of 1971: It concentrated on salary review and better condition of service for workers. He also advocated for uniform pay package for both private and public service workers (Abba, 2008). It recommended salary increase for both junior and senior staff, which was 30% and 12% respectively. It also advocated for the establishment of National Board on Productivity, Prices and Incomes (PPIB) with a mandate to discuss growing issues pertaining to variation in wages and salaries of both private and public employees. The wide gap between the percentage increase between the junior and senior cadres encouraged internal crisis among them. The wage increase also brought about inflation which drastically reduced their purchasing power. Attempt to synchronize the salaries of both private and public servants could not be achieved because of the contrast in their objectives, scope and capital.

Udoji Commission of 1972: this commission has the broadest terms of reference when compared with the commissions before it. It commendably introduced new management styles known as Management by Objectives (MBO), Open Reporting System (ORS) and Planning Programming and Budgeting System (PPBS). Aduba (2010) and Ogunka (2012) opine that the scope of this commission was too wide and that some of their propositions fail to reach or consider the prevailing social challenges. The categorization of the whole public service sector was protested by some professionals like medical personnels and University staff. The salary increase also encouraged inflation which eroded the supposed gain to the workers. The reform led to retrenchment of about 12,000 workers in 1975 (Adebayo, 2004).

Dotun Philips Commission of 1985: the task assigned to this commission include to examine the form, make - up and techniques of operation of the civil service, identify the cases of over concentration and suggest solutions to it, find solution to constant problem of grading, in appropriate staff deployment etc. To also find solutions to problems of corruption, primeval

recruitment and guarantee job security. This Commission was inaugurated by General Buhari as military Head of State but was submitted to General Babangida after he took over power from the Buhari Administration in 1995. This commission advocated for the politicization of the office of the Permanent Secretary and that the name be changed to Director – General. The Minister will act as both the Chief Executive and accounting officer of the Ministry. It also advocated for the scrapping of central pooling system whereby staff would spend his/her career for long in his/her ministry or extra ministerial department. The recommendations of this commission were not executed but rather it midwived the initiation of the next commission or panel.

Koshoni Panel (1988 Civil Service Reform): the report of this committee was noteworthy because it acquired legal backing and was declared Decree No. 43. The expostulation of the panel was majorly grounded on, The Minister will double as the Chief Executive and accounting officer of the Ministry, professionalization of the civil service, making the office of the Permanent Secretary to be political, the name was changed from to Director – General which became tenured and the appointment will expire with the expiration of the government in power. The reform also gave more responsibility to the office of the Director – General (Olaopa, 2008). It also scrapped the Office of the Head of Service and its responsibilities shared between the Secretary to Government and the Civil Service Commission. The reform standardized corruption and threw up very rich bureaucrats. The appointment of the Director General (DG) was condemned because the person appointed, will show more loyalty to the person who appointed him than to his job. The DG might be enticed to steal public funds because he does not enjoy security of tenure. The abolition of the Office of Head of Service introduced upheaval in the civil service because they lacked leadership.

Ayida Panel of 1994: this panel made the following suggestions, that the office of the Head of Service should be reinstated, employment into the civil service should be through merit and

federal character, persons identified to be involved in corrupt practices should not be re – appointed again, there should be annual review of salaries due to inflation and the fight against corruption should be deepened. The annual review of salaries introduced inflation, thereby reducing the value of the new salary. The suggestion that those who are found in corrupt practices should not be re – appointed is not good reasoning and does not introduce any punitive measure.

Obasanjo Civil Service Reform of 1999 - 2007:

this reform concentrates on many areas which include monetization policy, pension reform, downsizing of workers in the public sector, anti – corruption campaign and the establishment of Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practice Commission (ICPC), financial regulation, quality service delivery etc. About 35,000 workers were retrenched without due process. The anti - corruption agencies were not given free hand to operate and were therefore used to witch hunt opponents. The pension reform was condemned for being corrupt and illusionary

Steve Oronsaye Committee of 2007:

this committee was given a discrete assignment which was to examine and overhaul the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) and their personnel makeup. The Committee was later reappointed by Goodluck Jonathan Administration in 2012 and re – named The Presidential Committee on the Rationalisation and Restructuring of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies. It advocated for the discarding and merging of many departments, thus, 541 MDAs should be reduced to 163 through mergers. It also recommended the retirement of many Directors and Permanent Secretaries who have been in the position for more than 8 years (Oweh, 2013). The suggestion of retirement of experienced civil servants, who have vast knowledge of the job, was criticized. The suggestion of merging many MDAs was rejected as it will introduce untold hardship to many families.

Adamu Fika Committee of 2012: the mandate of this Committee was to ascertain the implications of

implementing Steve Oronsaye Committee report. The panel suggested that the office of Permanent Secretary (PS) should not be tenured. The PS should remain in office until he/she is 60 years or 30 years in service as it will rob the service of experienced and competent men. It also noted with trepidation that the Revenue Mobilisation Fiscal Allocation Commission (RMFMC) fixes salaries and wages and bloat the recurrent expenditure of government erratically.

Challenges of Civil Service Reforms:

Despite the many civil service reforms recommended and implemented by successive governments, the Nigerian civil service has remained inefficient, ineffective, weak and not able to realize their objectives. The reasons these reforms have refused to make the required impact include:

- **Lack of Political Will:** The government lacks the political will to adopt some of the good recommendations suggested by these reform committees. This has impact on civil service reforms. Bolaji, Gray and Campbell – Evans (2015) rightly maintain that the lack of political will and dedication to office at all levels of government has become evident through unproductive political leadership, devotion and firm resolve, which are essential for government policies to succeed. Sekwat (2002) rightly surmises that most post – independence Nigerian leaders are bereft of tactical vision, avoided taking necessary risks to execute fundamental reforms and flipped – flopped on implementing of approved reforms.
- **Politicization of Civil Service:** This was introduced into the Nigerian civil service and it has great negative impact. It encouraged corruption, abandonment of meritocracy and has encouraged political patronage. Nwatu (2012) rightly contends that politicization of the civil service leads to more concentration on benefits and rewards than addition towards increased productivity and economic development. This has serious implications on civil service reforms as it encourages low

productivity and redundancy of civil servants. Dueze and Chibuzo (2019) argue that the Nigerian civil service has been greatly politicized due to many factors which include, the form of government in power, federal character, god – fatherism etc.

- **Over Bloated or Over sized Bureaucracy:** one reason for this, is that every government that comes to power always wants to employ their own people without recluses to qualification and merit and this has affected efficiency and quality of services. . Nweke (2013) rightly contends that the type of politicians that we have now, are not interested in development of the country but in what they can gain from their party. Therefore, recruitments are done based on quota from the political party in power. This has adverse effects on government reforms because these crops of civil servants were not employed based on merits and therefore are not fit to do the job. Localism and vested interest imperatives have led to wrong decisions as it relates to development.
- **Poor Working Conditions:** Civil servants still use obsolete and out dated tools to work. Their offices, chairs and general office equipments are usually in bad shape. This reduces morale and motivation to work. Igbabee (2024) rightly submits that many government offices in Nigeria suffer from paucity of basic infrastructures, resources and equipment that are essential for effective job performance. Arguing further, he posits that poor working conditions, including inadequate facilities, obsolete equipment and inadequate access to essential resources can negatively impact the work environment and add to job dissatisfaction. This, in no small measure can affect civil service reforms.
- **Lack of Adequate Remuneration and Finance:** civil servants salaries have remained low and this demotivates them. Many of the reforms suggested payment of good salaries so as motivate civil servants to put in their best and to attract good hands into civil service. This has always been difficult

for government to implement. Nwanolue and Iwuoha (2012) rightly observe that the Nigerian civil servants are the most disheartened and disadvantaged earners in Nigeria, as their salary is very poor when compared to rising cost of living in the country. Lack of resources has remained a major challenge to civil service reforms in Nigeria. Decline in oil revenue which is the country's main source of revenue added with the downturn in tax collection have negatively affected the composition, introduction and execution of these reforms.

- **Corruption:** Many civil servants engage in sharp practices due to the fact that their salaries are meager and cannot pay their bills. Before they do their jobs, some of them will always expect inducement from people. Corruption in civil service manifests through bureaucratic use of official position for individual gain through receiving of bribe, engagement in fraud and theft and payment of kick backs. Olateju (2015) succinctly maintains that the country cannot achieve significant and sustainable development if those committed with public office consistently sows the seeds of corruption and partake in its proceeds. Arguing further he opines that no politician can conclude and perpetrate corruption without the connivance of the civil servants; who gives information on where or how politicians can steal funds. This has negative implication for the country and civil service reforms.
- **Aging Workforce:** Due to poor and inefficient ways of pension administration in the country, many civil servants are afraid to retire. They have fear that if they retire, they are not sure of getting their monthly pension and gratuity. Due to this, they falsify records in order to avoid retirement and suffering that might follow. This has encouraged old and aged workforce who don't have the strength and much to contribute, to continue to remain in service; and at the same time block opportunities for vibrant entrants. Corroborating this stance, The Abia State

Head of Service, Mrs Ngozi Obioma, noted with chagrin that some civil and public servants manipulate court affidavits and approach National Population Commission workers who fraudulently issue them fake birth certificates to falsify their age. She warned that they should desist from such behavior or they will be summarily dismissed from service (Chibuike, 2024)

- **The Dominance of Ghost Workers:** this has implications for the welfare of civil servants. People use fictitious names and identity to collect multiple salaries and this affects the recurrent expenditure of the government and also what is available to genuine workers. In order to curb this, government conducts physical exercise atimes to verify their workers. Magbadelo (2016) rightly submits that the Office of the Head of Service undertook physical verification of workers in 2001 which lasted for 2 months. According to him, the objective of the exercise which was ejecting the ghost workers was not achieved. This is because some people alleged that the exercise was conducted so as to sack workers from the North. There was therefore no follow – up action after the exercise as the Committee was headed by Alhaji Mahmud Yayale Ahmed, who is a Northerner, from Bauchi State. The government also introduced the Integrated Personnel Payroll Information (IPPIS) to help fish out ghost workers from the pay – roll system. Olowu and Adeyemi (2021) argue that IPPIS is faced with some challenges which include delayed response to complain, corrupt practices perpetuated by the handlers, lack of technological transfer, inadequate infrastructures etc. This menace has continued to affect civil service reforms.
- **Absence of Training:** this has encouraged capacity gaps in the civil service. In order to reposition workers to render quality service and improve their performances, in this era of globalization, there is need to expose them to new trends in their fields. Fapohunda (2012) rightly maintains that lack of relevant training

of workers remains one of the reasons for low quality service delivery. This has negatively affected civil service reforms.

- **Erosion of Public Service Values:** some of these values include honesty, transparency, accountability, neutrality, impartiality, discipline, loyalty, professionalism, probity etc . The loss of these values have affected the workers attitude to their jobs and has made attempts at reforming them unworkable. Mr. Jimoh Folahanmi, the Director of Human Resources Management, Ministry of Youth, Sport and Development rightly maintains that the induction training of new entrants is due to the belief of the Permanent Secretary that proper information about the values, rules and regulations guiding the civil service is key to a successful career in the civil service. He also argues that lack of training has encouraged indiscipline, and other attitudinal problems (Public Service Institute of Nigeria, 2019). Yet, this gesture has not yielded much fruit as the civil servants still lacked these public service values and this has affected civil service reforms.

Conclusion:

A proficient and motivated civil service is very necessary for preservation of good governance, production and distribution of public goods and services, fiscal administration and sustainability, and efficient and effectual performance of government. Ideally, civil service reform should focus on creating a work force with the size, expertise, culture and responsibility necessary for delivering quality public services and perform vital governmental functions. Despite the many obstacles to civil service reforms, there is room to reposition Nigerian civil service to become of greater benefit to the country at large.

Recommendations:

- Government should establish a strong system and support structures in the form of setting – up a strong and virile civil service commission headed by a competent administrator

- Government should collaborate with various stakeholders like political leaders, the media, civil society organizations, private sector and the international community. Their cooperation and synergy are highly needed for reforms to be successful
- Proper formulation and proper timing of the different phases of implementation of reforms is germane for successful reforms
- Government should invest in human capital development by organizing capacity building programmes and implementing good and attractive welfare packages that will motivate workers to put in their best to see that government's business and reforms are well implemented
- There is need for government to develop high ethical standard and eliminate endemic corruption. Stiff penalties should be meted out to those who are found engaging in corrupt practices

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