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ISSN (Online): 2455-7838

SJIF Impact Factor (2015): 3.476

EPRA International Journal of

Research & Development (IJRD)

Volume:1, Issue:7, September 2016



Published By :
EPRA Journals

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REFORMING THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE VIA NATIONAL ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (NEEDS): A DECADE OF POLICY FAILURE?

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenal growth in the size and responsibilities of the Nigerian public service and in particular, the realities of the social, economic and political situation within which it operates have made the institution become embroiled in many serious problems. These have made it a subject of inquiries right from 1945, all in an attempt to make it efficient and effective. In spite of all these efforts, the service still shows several undesirable features hence the introduction of the reform programme, NEEDS. This paper therefore, sets out to reflect on the reform with a view to identifying achievements, challenges, and offering suggestions for improvement. The study reveals that Bureau of Public Service Reforms (BPSR) which drives the reform programme has recorded some modest achievements in its attempt to improve the service but many challenges abound which include poor coordination, and limited ownership of the reform process by the service. The paper then goes on to recommend, among others, the broadening of the ownership of the process and the introduction of e-government for good governance.

KEYWORDS: Public Service, Reforms, Management, Bureau, Transparency

INTRODUCTION

By convention, economy is divided between the public and private sectors. The public sector is usually engaged in providing services and in some cases goods, whose scope and variety are determined not by the direct wishes of the people, but by the decision of government. In other words, it is the result of public, political decision-making, rather than involving markets processes. Governments are command-based- they can force people to comply- whereas markets are voluntary.

Public administration is therefore, often referred to as the activities which deal with management of government business. It may also

refer simply to the study of activities which are concerned with the management of public affairs.

According to Rosenbloom (1986) public administration is the use of managerial, political and legal theories and processes to fulfill legislative, executive and judicial governmental mandates for the provision of regulatory and service functions for the society as a whole or for some segments of it. This is a comprehensive, overarching definition, putting within public administration every conceivable part of the public sector. This definition helps to differentiate public administration from private sector administration. Nigeria is one of the countries that have, until recently, maintained a distinction between public and private sector administration. For our purpose, let us define public administration as the entire machinery of government, or state apparatus

encompassing the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, as well as the military and other security agencies put in place to fulfill governmental mandates. This paper therefore, sets out to reflect on the reform with a view to identifying achievements, challenges, and offering suggestions for improvement.

EVOLUTION OF THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVICE

The evolution of the modern civil service in Nigeria can be traced generally to close of the Second World War. Specific landmark events in the evolution started with the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 which was a response to the independence movement, and forces of regionalism and ethnicity. By this time, the need for the establishment of regional governments and consequently, regional civil services was recognized and accepted. This period also marked the beginning of the process of dismantling the colonial civil service in Nigeria, which hitherto, as in all other British colonies then, was composed of two broad classes: the senior service, covering all posts reserved for the European and the junior service, embracing all posts to which Nigerians were appointed (Abdulsalami, 1990).

Gorsuch report of 1954 recommended the division of the service into four broad classes corresponding to the general educational standards of the time. These were the sub-clerical and manipulative, clerical and technical, executive and higher technical and the administrative and professional classes (Anyebe, 2003). The system was claimed to have been modeled on the civil that existed in Britain.

During the period of decolonization, however, the public service began to undergo some significant changes both in its complexity and in the responsibility assigned to it. In 1948 for example, there was a general directive from the colonial office in London to the colonial governments instructing them to expand the tasks of government to include reforms of local governments as a means of mobilizing the local human and material resource for socio-economic and political development. Along with this development, there was the expansion of the bureaucracy and establishment of public corporations.

The post-independence era witnessed the expansion and contraction in the size of public bureaucracies in Nigeria which were in response to political as well as economic factors. Whereas the colonial administration had concentrated on the limited objectives of maintaining law and order, the attainment of independence compelled the government to embark on broad socio-economic development objectives - requiring expansion of existing bureaucracies, and the establishment of new agencies.

Being a vital national institution, public service must be systematically organized to enhance the effective execution of policies and programmes of government. However, the phenomenal growth in the size and responsibilities of the Nigerian public service and in particular, the realities of the social, economic and political situation within which it operates have made the institution become embroiled in many serious problems such as red tapes, rigidity, corruption, nepotism, ineffectiveness and inefficiency, and incessant conflicts between cadres (Anyebe, 2014:152). These challenges have made the service a subject of many inquiries by government, all in an attempt to improve it. Such inquiries include Tudor Davis Commission, 1945; Gorsuch Commission, 1954; Hewn Committee, 1959; Morgan Commission, 1963; Elwood Grading Team, 1966; Adebo Salaries/ Wages Commission, 1971; Udoji Commission, 1974; Dotun Philips Reform, 1988; and the Ayida Panel, 1994.

In terms of internal structure, the civil service, until recently, does not differ fundamentally from that left behind by the British colonial administration in Nigeria. Thus, as the Udoji Public Service Review Commission found out in 1974, the Nigerian Civil Service was patterned on the British model and remained basically "a class and closed" system. The classes are the sub-clerical and manipulative, clerical and technical, executive and higher technical, and administrative and professional classes. According to the Commission Report each class is further divided into many cadres. For example, the professional cadre includes the following cadres: engineering, architecture, education, law, agriculture, accountancy, etc. The engineering cadre is further divided into civil mechanical, electrical, agricultural, hydrological, marine, etc. Each cadre in the civil service has from four to eight grades or promotion levels and each defined by specific rules and regulations. The result is a multiplicity of cadres and salary scales.

The Civil Service met in 1974 by the Udoji Commission was almost a caste like system, status conscious and breeding class conflict. Particularly pervasive was the perennial tension between administrators and professionals (Anyebe, 2003).

The career structure is closed because it has no adequate provision for the admission of outsiders (no matter how qualified and experienced the persons may be) into the higher grades of the hierarchy. Such a career and closed system does not provide enough incentives for changes, modernization or the achievement of excellence and can lead to inbreeding and obsolescence. Obsolescence affects not only the structure but also organization and management.

Because of the superior status, greater opportunity for advance, and other privileges enjoyed by the administrative cadre, they became objects of envy, complaints and resentment by other cadres, particularly the professionals. The relationship

between administrative cadre and others in the Nigerian Civil Service before 1974 was as close to that in the Indian Civil Service as depicted by Arora in 1974 (Arora, 1974). The resulting grudges and grievances as expressed by the professionals in the Nigerian Civil Service were well documented by Udoji in his Commission Report in 1974.

The Udoji Commission's solution to this state of affairs was the introduction of a unified grade structure, which would place all jobs of substantially equal difficulty and complexity in the same grade and the same salary scale. A unified grade structure was expected to offer opportunities for vertical, and lateral mobility within the service, where the lowest employee would have an opportunity to rise to the top of the ladder, provided he or she had what it takes to get there.

The Udoji Commission met a civil service ridden with corruption and it made the following indictment that we live in a society in which corruption is generally believed to be, and no doubt is widespread... it is unrealistic...for Nigeria to say that government will eliminate corruption completely from its public service, but it must make it one of its prime objectives to control corruption... (Udoji Report, 1974).

Other innovations include the replacement of the confidential reporting system by the open system of reporting, and the introduction of a new code of conduct for all public officers. A major goal of the Udoji reform was to introduce modern management style, techniques and culture to the Nigerian civil service. In retrospect, this goal was not really achieved but it held out an ideal, if ever fulfilled, would offer the prospect of a significant change in the Nigerian civil service.

To a great extent and in many ways, the public service reform announced by President Babangida in his 1988 Budget Speech was a reiteration of the ideas proposed by the Udoji Commission. Thus, the salient features of this reform include the following:

- (i) The minister (or the commissioner in the state) became a member of the administrative class of the ministry, to the extent that he was both the chief executive (i.e. the administrative and political head) as well as the accounting officer of the ministry.
- (ii) The position of the permanent secretary then designated director-general was politicized, as he would hold office at the pleasure of the president (or the state governor) and would retire with the government, which appointed him, unless an incoming administration decided to re-appoint him. He was to act as the deputy to the minister (commissioner), and the latter

would exercise his powers in full consultation with him.

- (iii) The civil service was "professionalized" in the sense that:
 - (a) posting of officers from one ministry to another would cease;
 - (b) each officer whether administrator or specialist would make his career entirely in the ministry or department of his choice;
 - (c) with respect to recruitment, appropriate pre-entry qualifications would be uniformly applied;
 - (d) the principle of federal character would guide entry into grade levels 07 to 10 while experience guides entry into higher grade levels.
- (iv) In addition to its operational departments, each ministry had the following departments: the department of personnel management; the department of finance and supplies, and the department of planning, research and statistics.
- (v) each ministry assumed the following internal structure:

Unit	Headship
Department	Director-GL 17
Division	Deputy Director, GL 16
Branches	Asst. Director, GL 15
Section	Chief X Officer, GL 14

- (vi) Administrative officers, who until then had been generalists were to specialize in one area of management e.g. personnel planning, budgeting, finance, research, statistics, etc. and were to bear functional titles (e.g. planning officer, personnel officer, etc) (1988 Reforms).

The successful implementation of the reforms would mean the end of class system in the Nigerian civil service, and particularly the end of the concept of generalist administrative cadre in the service and all that it stands for. The structural changes enunciated in these reforms were expected to do away with the established civil service system, derived from the British colonial model characterised by a class and closed career service. The 1988 Reforms took a tough stance on accountability by saying that the accountability of an officer shall not cease by virtue of his leaving office as he could be called at any time, after leaving office to account for his tenure. This sounds like a pious homily as no real positive results were realised.

The criticisms that trailed the discarded 1988 reforms were enormous (Anyebe, 2001). This criticism, among other things led to the setting up of the Ayida Panel in 1994 to review the existing system. The 1994 Ayida Panel whose recommendations the government began to implement incrementally in

1997 reversed most of the changes introduced by the 1988 reforms. For example, the dropping of the director-general title and the restoration of the old order. The Panel also addressed the issues of federal character and bureaucratic corruption. Since most of the civil service reforms have been initiated by military regimes, it has followed that the structure and system of management at both federal and state levels that have evolved over the four decades have enjoyed a degree of uniformity. In other words, the organisational structure at the federal was usually duplicated at the state level with minor modifications.

In spite of all these well-meaning efforts, the Nigerian public service was far from being ideal. It was largely tradition-bound, somewhat ponderous and showed signs of deterioration and several undesirable characteristics, of which the following were the most prominent: over-centralization, incessant conflicts between cadres, little emphasis on results and concrete performance, a counterproductive separation of authority from responsibility at the topmost hierarchy, dangerously low staff morale and productivity, inappropriate staff development practices (Adegoroye, 2006:41) This reinforced the widespread disillusionment with the public service and therefore, made another reform necessary. The NEEDS which was consequently adopted, was targeted at addressing the dwindling public service values, ageing workforce, inadequate succession planning, inappropriate organizational structure, poor culture of innovation, inconsistent planning methodology, non-productive work operations and systems, absence of professional management of human resources, non-conducive working conditions, and incompetent and discouraging leadership.

BUREAU OF PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS (BPSR)

In response to the need to place the civil service at the centre of the various public sector reforms of government, the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation proposed to President Obasanjo in September 2003, the creation of BPSR within his office. The President, in approving the creation of the Bureau, directed that its head must be a man or woman of impeccable character and integrity, reform-minded and broad-minded (Adegoroye, 2006: 52). The BPSR and the Office of the Civil Service of the Federation (OHCSF) with the support from the DFID put in place a team of experts whose terms of reference include, to put together a national strategy to improve the performance of public services. The vision of the strategy was to guide the public service reform programme for the following three years.

The national strategy put in place to attain the reforms objectives includes Vision 20-2020 and the public service transformation nexus which seeks to position the country in the league of the twenty leading economies in the world by 2020. This is in

consonance with the seven- point agenda of the Yar'adua administration which emphasized the rule of law, good governance, improved economy and poverty reduction. This was connected to the NEEDS-2 which postulates a professional and result-oriented public service. Does the public service really need reforms? The answer lies in the fact that the service needs a change for efficient and effective service delivery.

Quality public services were the striking features of the first Nigerian-led governments in the early 1950s to the mid-1960s as shown in roads regularly maintained by a functioning public works department with a network of maintenance posts, effective train services, quality primary and secondary/technical/university education as exemplified by the University College, Ibadan. Governance was stable, resulting in high standards of living. Before the military intervention, civil servants were recruited on merit. Subsequently, the standard fell and hence the efforts to salvage it, such as the recommendations of the Udoji Commission of 1974, and Dotun Philips-led Study Group's recommendations in 1988 on accountability and professionalism (Suleiman, 2008).

The civil services, both at federal and state levels in 1999 were structurally weak, politicized, corrupt and demoralized. Also public universities were almost uniformly of mediocre standards, parastatals were in shambles and local governments were just an avenue of sharing monthly allocations with no service delivery.

To salvage the battered civil service, initial reform actions were embarked upon. Retreats were organized for ministers, presidential advisers and permanent secretaries. This was followed by a two-week orientation programme for 1,900 directorate-level officers under the coordination of Professor Adebayo Adedeji. Several overseas trips were also undertaken to sensitize civil servants on public service modernization. Following a directive from Federal Executive Council to the OHCSF in 2001 to evolve a comprehensive strategy on reforming the civil service, a pilot study of some ministries and agencies was undertaken with these startling findings:

- an ageing service in which about 60% of the staff are within the age bracket of 40 years and above;
- the preponderance of unskilled staff within levels 01-06 who constitute about 70 per cent of the entire workforce;
- the prevalence of ghost workers, symptomatic of the poor keeping of personnel records and payroll control systems;
- stagnation at the higher levels, especially at the directorate cadre, reflective of poor succession and career planning;

- absence of mission and vision statements, work programmes, corporate and individual schedules of functions;
- under-sourcing of key institutions;
- absence of working tools;
- erosion of professionalism and esprit de corps;
- abandonment of training courses to sharpen skills for service, further accentuated by decay of all training institutions;
- ad-hoc responses to policy making devoid of vigorous long-term policy analysis, consultation and monitored control;
- near-absence of an IT-enabled system of work operations;
- unproductive rule-based hierarchical system which stifles individual and corporate creativity, as well as accountability; and
- a fundamentally flawed performance management system totally devoid of objectivity (Adegroye, 2006).

This led to the production of a Strategy Document for the Nigerian Public Service Reform Programme entitled: 'Towards a Public Service that Works for the People' in July 2003. It proposed refocusing and redefining the vision, mission and functions of the public service and of every ministry, department and agency; delegation, devolution and decentralization; extensive use of opportunities for privatization and partnership with private sector and non-governmental organizations; fight corruption and promote accountability. The core reform issues include developing the leadership of the public service, public expenditure management, human resource management, records management and ICT, improved accountability and adoption of a new civil service law and regulations (Suleiman, 2008).

The federal government in 2004 formulated NEEDS with the agenda to undertake public service reform, economic management reform, governance and institutional strengthening, transparency, accountability and anti-corruption reforms. The BPSR was assigned to drive the public service reform (PSR) domain of NEEDS with the thrust to right-size the service, rationalize and strengthen institutions, privatize and liberalize the public sector and reduce waste and improve efficiency of government expenditure.

By the second quarter of 2008, some achievements had been made in areas of PSR, such as right-sizing, elimination of ghost workers, monetization of fringe benefits, introduction and implementation of strategic training and re-orientation for disengaged workers, review of public service and financial regulations, introduction of consolidated salary structure and pay adjustment, institution of SERVICOM to refocus the public service,

articulation of the Nigerian Public Service ethics to promote ethics, introduction of new tenure system for federal government secretaries and directors (Anyebe, 2014).

Though BPSR has recorded some modest achievements, there were challenges. For example, in spite of a series of sensitization workshops held, when SERVICOM Office carried out its first and second rounds of quality service compliance evaluation exercise and released the results, many agencies performed poorly with the Nigerian Police Force ranking lowest, falling into the ranking category of 'shameful', meaning that the Force scored one point or below out of 4 points (Ideogu, 2008). Other categories are 'fair' meaning 1.1 to 2 points, 'commendable'- 2.1 to 3 points, and 'praiseworthy'- 3.1 to 4 points. Other nagging issues and challenges abound such as allegation of lack of transparency in disengaging staff, limited ownership of the process by civil service, personality focus and an uncoordinated merger of some ministries. As the Steering Committee of Public Sector Reform directed, the BPSR with DFID then stipulated a review of reform strategies among its 'deliverable' for 2008 in what was termed the National Strategy for Public Service Reform (NSPSR). NSPSR was tasked to among others, develop reform leaders, institute good practices, build national coalition and ensure a value-based public service. The NSPSR had as its policy thrust, according to seven point agenda, to right-size the public sector (in a fair manner) and eliminate ghost workers, restructure and strengthen institution, restore professionalism in civil service, privatize and liberalize the sector, fight corruption and enhance economic coordination.

This effort recorded some successes, however, there were challenges and issues in public service transformation especially on leadership of reform, getting the basic rights, adoption of a comprehensive approach to strategy, enhanced building implementation capacity to strategy, and appropriate coordination of implementation methodologies (Anyebe, 2014). The effective strategic process should be characterized by a commitment to reform by political and administrative leaders, enhanced participation by broad spectrum of public servants, stakeholders' engagement and timely information, education and communication.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One inescapable conclusion from this analysis is that the attempt to reform the Nigerian public service through the NEEDS is characterized by a mixed bag of limited success and continuing challenges. BPSR, no doubt has recorded some measure of achievement but some nagging issues and challenges abound. These challenges include allegation of lack of transparency in disengaging staff, limited ownership of the process by civil service,

personality focus and an uncoordinated merger of some ministries.

To address these issues and constraints identified, there is the need to improve coordination and collaboration in the service, evolve a sustainable reform management, broaden PSR ownership and partnership, and embrace e-government which uses electronic means to stimulate and promote good governance.

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