

CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA : A HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY

¹Ejigbo, A., ¹Achimugu, I, ¹Agbaji, H.E,
¹Kumije, D, ²Kirfi, I.M.I and ³Torna, S.S

¹Department of Public Administration, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria

²²Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja, Nigeria

³Department of Economics and Development Studies, Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria

(akojiejigbo055@gmail.com)

ABSTRACT

The article examined past civil/public service reforms in Nigeria, their objectives, , philosophies, key highlights and their impacts were also xrayed. The Hunt Commission, 1934, the Harriagn commission, 1945, the Foot Commission, 1948 , Gorsuch Committee (1954), Mbanefo Commission (1959) Morgan Salaries and Wages Commission (1963), Elwood Grading Team, 1963, Adebo Salaries and Grading Commission, 1971, Udoji Public Service Review Commission (1974), , Gammaliel Onosode Reform, 1984, The 1988 civil service reforms, the Ayida Review Panel (1994) and the Obasanjos decentralized reforms of 1999 to 2007 were examined. Generally it was observed that the many reforms did not make much positive impact on the civil service, mainly due to ulterior motives, partial and lopsided implementation, laced with corruption, nepotism, vendetta. The Udoji Commission of 1974 and the 1988 reforms were the most comprehensive, the Udoji reforms increased wages of civil servants fairly substantially and introduced the Grade Levels 1 – 17 grading system. The 1988 reforms was able to reduce the conflicts between the administrative and Professional cadre officers, it elongated the steps on the grade levels but on the other hand it politicized and encouraged corruption in the civil service. . Many minor reforms took place during the Olusegun Obasanjos Presidency between 1999 to 2007, which touched on monetization, pension, salaries etc, as against the usual integrated reforms of the past. It was concluded that we have had too many civil/public service reforms over the years but with little positive impact on the civil service. The article recommends sincere motives rather than ulterior motives in instituting reforms, as well as all round implementation laced with honesty and sincerity of purpose should and must be brought to bear in the implementation of reports of civil/public service reforms

Key words: Civil/Public Service, Reforms, Permanent Secretary, Udoji, Historical

1.0

INTRODUCTION

The civil service is a body of government officers who are employed in civil occupation that are neither political nor judicial , in most countries the term refers to employees selected and promoted on the basis of merit and seniority system , which may include examinations (Encyclopedia Britannica) , Civil Service reforms is a deliberate action to improve the efficiency , effectiveness , performance , representability and democratic

character of a civil service with a view to promoting service delivery with increased accountability. Civil service reforms is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, but it is a world wide phenomenon (Bagaji, 2002). With the emergence of modern states, the civil service evolved as the pillar of the executive arm of government. Its main task came to be the implementation of the policies decided by the executive. In accomplishing this task, the civil service has found itself involved in the formulation of policies and advising generally on policies. The civil service is also responsible for the management of the machinery of government and carrying out the day to day duties that the running of government demands. The civil service plays a vital role in formulation, implementation, evaluation and review of government policies and programmes. The civil service provides an enabling environment for civil servants to perform their duties in an undeterred manner for treatment of personnel and establishment of a demographically representative apparatus. Therefore as it stands today no government activity can go on without the civil service (Omale 2005; Bagaji 2002; Omale, 1996).

The organization and *modus operandi* of the civil service vary from country to country, but there are certain features which are common to them, they include:

Recruitment, permanence, Neutrality, Anonymity etc (Bagaji 2002). The civil servant should be seen but not heard, (Ocheja, 2005). According to Sekwat, (2002), a competent and motivated civil service is a prerequisite for maintenance of good governance, production and distribution of public amenities. Since the colonial era, successive governments in Nigeria had instituted various public/civil service reforms panels/commissions, such as the Hunt Commission 1934, the Harriagn commission, 1945, the Foot commission, 1948, Gorsuch Committee (1954), Mbanefo Commission (1959) Morgan Salaries and Wages Commission (1963), Elwood grading team, 1963, Adebo Salaries and Grading Commission, 1971, Udoji Public Service Review Commission (1974), Gammaliel Onosode Reform, 1984, The 1988 civil service reforms, the Ayida Review Panel (1994). Many minor reforms took place during the Olusegun Obasanjo's Presidency between 1999 to 2007, which touched on monetization, pension, salaries etc, as against the usual integrated reforms of the past. Civil service reforms are a continuous process with no general starting point and equally no end and how favourably disposed the public servants to making it work depends on its capacity to efficiently and effectively execute policies (Ake and Olowojola, 2016). The main purpose of civil service reforms is to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service, thereby increasing its capacity to provide economic and social development to meet the needs and aspirations of the citizenry (Corkery, 1995). In the process of reforms between 1999 – 2007 there were many controversies with the problems associated with the Nigerian civil service reforms that stems from the Max Weber model (Western) of bureaucracy that the Nigerian civil service adopted coupled with the lack of political will by the ruling elites and the nature of the economic system in Nigeria of capitalism that emphasis primitive and excessive accumulation of wealth. These factors together contributed to the failure of the numerous reforms in the civil service from pre independence till date (Ake and Olowojola, 2016). According to Sekwat (2002) many factors impeded the implementation of civil service reform reports, amongst which are corruption, nepotism, ulterior motives etc, According to Anazodo, the 1974 decree strengthening the powers of the administrative leader in each civil service gave the civil service more powers, as such the power of the bureaucracy grew over the years, it is believed in some quarters, especially the top civil servants that one of the motives (ulterior) of the 1988 civil service reforms was to whittle down the

enormous powers of the civil service, this the News Watch Magazine of 25th April 1988 alluded to. It is generally believed that the many reforms over the years did not yield positive results, Anazodo *et al* (2012) opined that the Nigerian civil service was modeled after the British system, it was narrow in scope, perhaps this may be one of the reasons why the civil service is inefficient and the many reforms did not yield positive results. The article therefore highlighted the various reforms from the colonial era to the reforms during the Obasanjo's Presidency but with more in-depth analysis of the Udoji reform report of 1974, the 1988 reforms and the Allison Ayida Review Panel Report.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Literature, data and information on the various civil/public service reforms carried out in Nigeria were sourced from books, journals, magazines, official documents etc, they were collated, analyzed, discussed and reviewed.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.1 Past Public/Civil Service Reforms

The Nigerian civil service has been bedeviled with many problems like corruption, politicization, inefficiency, poor remuneration, poor work environment, avarice, nepotism, factionalization, intra service conflicts such as the conflict between the Professional Cadre and Administrative Cadre officers.

The politicization of the civil service was well documented by Adamolekun (1986) in his book politics and administration in Nigeria.

The conflict between the Administrator and the Professional expert in the Nigerian public service was so serious that the Udoji reform commission of 1974 opined that "the relationship is one of acrimony and antagonism in a conflict, rather than partnership in an enterprise, with the resultant lack of team work necessary in modern management." Anthony (1965) also reported similar conflicts in the British civil and public service.

Adebayo (1978) reported that the solutions proffered by the Udoji public service review commission were not satisfactory. The Udoji commission however addressed the problem of poor remuneration to some extent in line with the economic realities then, but this problem kept reoccurring due to inflation.

The above are pointers to the fact that the Nigerian Civil Service is constantly in dire need of reforms for improvement, consequently we have witnessed many reforms in the past such as the Hunt Commission 1934 Harriagn Commission, 1945, the Foot Commission, 1948, Gorsuch Committee (1954), Mbanefo Commission (1959) Morgan Salaries and Wages Commission (1963), Adebo Salaries and Wages Commission, 1970, Elwood grading team, 1964, Udoji Public Service Review Commission (1974), the Gammaliel Onosode commission of 1984, The Prof. Philip Dotun panel of 1988, The Ayida Review Panel (1994) and the various micro and staggered reforms during the Obasanjo's presidency, 1999 - 2007.

3.2 The Udoji Reform Commission of 1972 - 74

The Udoji reforms increased wages of civil servants fairly substantially in line with the economic realities of that time and introduced the Grade Levels 1 – 17 grading system. It also made far reaching recommendations on total quality management as well as management development, but these were not implemented. Its recommendations on solving the conflicts between the administrative and professional cadre officers did not yield positive results.

3.3 The 1988 Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria

The main objective of the 1988 reform was to make the civil service virile, dynamic and result oriented, but other objectives were to enhance professionalism, alignment with the presidential system of government, decentralization and delegation, combination of authority with responsibility, enhanced accountability, enhanced checks and balances, general modernization and enhanced effectiveness, efficiency and speed of operation, the then head of civil service, the Permanent Secretaries and some other concerned experts felt it was a way of reducing the powers of the bureaucracy/civil service especially those of the Permanent Secretaries and other top civil servants which the military government felt were too powerful.

The position of Head of the civil service was abolished. The position of permanent secretary was redesignated Director General, and became a political appointment such that even non career civil servants were appointed and they had to leave with the government that appointed them, permanent Secretaries (now Directors General) were no longer chief accounting officers of ministries, the role was given to ministers/commissioners. This made the ministers/commissioners more powerful, with much more work to do and a leeway to be more corrupt. The ministers/commissioners were not regular in the office to carry out the new roles given to them, this led to inefficiencies and lower outputs. (Bagaji, 2002)

The civil service commission was stripped of some of its functions which were then given to the ministries, the title of Director General was also used for heads of Parastatals and Agencies, this resulted in confusion and conflict between the Directors-General of ministries and those of parastatals and agencies, in the area of superiority. The civil service commission could only recruit officers on GL 7-10 below and above GL 7-10 was to be done by the ministries, it was also stripped of its power of appointments, promotion, discipline, and only left with rules, regulations and interpretation such that the civil service commission only set the rules and played the role of observer during promotion exercises.

All the positions/ranks were redesignated, the ministries were to have a unified structure, ie eight (8) departments, so some departments were merged and others were split into two, for instance the department of Administration and Finance was split into two departments, personal management and finance and supplies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then had thirty six departments and had difficulty in merging them into eight departments. (News watch, '1988) The pool system was abolished and each officer was expected to build his/her career in a particular ministry.

The 1988 reform concentrated too many functions in the hands of the ministers/commissioners, this impaired efficiency and output, financial accountability was weak, since the internal audit was under the minister/commissioner who appointed, promoted and disciplined staff, there was continuity problem, a change in government will lead to the exit of the minister/commissioner and the Director General

The reform did more harm than good to the civil service

1. On the positive side, it created more career space for officers to rise to the rank of Director (GL 16 and 17 as the case may be)
 2. It also helped in reducing the conflict between the administrative and professional cadre officers.
 3. There was also elongation of the steps on grade levels
- on the other hand the civil service became more corrupt, factionalized, highly

politicized and more inefficient. It also promoted nepotism and tribalism. Merit, hard work, seniority, dedication to duty and honesty were eroded. Having the two top chief executives of a ministry as political appointees was damaging as it encouraged corruption. The minister and Director General could bypass a Director and work directly with a Deputy or even an Assistant Director, this can be demoralizing, this is even worse in the states. The 1988 reforms were however able to reduce the conflicts between the administrative and Professional cadre officers, it elongated the steps on the grade levels

3.4 The Allison Ayida Review Panel of 1994

Realizing the damage done to the civil service by the 1988 reforms, the Allison Ayida Review Panel was set up in 1994 to review the 1988 reform. Implementation commenced in 1997, Its recommendations were largely a blend of the old and 1988 styles but the damage had already been done and it seems irredeemable except something drastic is done, the positions of Head of the civil service and Permanent Secretaries were restored, and only career officers can be appointed, Ministries, departments and agencies were merged, the new nomenclature for the ranks introduced from the 1988 reforms were allowed to remain

3.5 The Reforms During the Obasanjo Presidency, 1999 - 2007

Many minor and staggered reforms took place during the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidency between 1999 to 2007, which touched on monetization, pension, salaries etc, as against the usual integrated reforms of the past. Monetization policy was introduced, salaries of civil servants were increased substantially with effect from May 2000, contributory pension was also introduced. Some government owned companies and parastatals were unbundled, some were privatized, and others sold off.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

There were about ten reforms within a span of 60 to 70 years all taking place in the twentieth century. The many reforms failed to impact the civil service positively due to ulterior motives, poor implementation, nepotism, corruption etc

4.2 Recommendations

- 1 There is need for a sweeping reform that will address the problems of corruption, nepotism, inefficiency, poor remuneration and politicization of the civil service
- 2 There is need to fashion out our own model of the civil service rather than adopting Western styles or allowing them to dictate to us
- 3 Implementation of reform reports should be done with sincerity of purpose, honesty professionalism etc

REFERENCES

- Adebayo, A** (1978) The problem of the Administrator and the Professional Expert in the Public Service of Nigeria. *The Quarterly Journal of Administration*, Faculty of Administration, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) Ile-Ife, July 1978 edition. Pp.3 – 6
- Ake, M and Olowojola, O** (2016). Nigerian Civil Service Reforms of 1999 – 2007: An Analysis of the Controversies. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 9(3):66 - 78
- Anazodo, R.O, Okoye, J.C and Chukwu, E.O** (2012) *American Journal of Social and Management Science*. 3(1): 17 - 29

- Anthony, S** (1965) *The Anatomy of British Civil Service*. Macdonalds and Evans Ltd 1965. London. PP 23-25
- Adamolekun, L** (1986) *Politics and Administration in Nigeria*. Spectrum Books Ltd/Hatchinson & Co U.K 1st edition. Pp 27-25
- Bagaji, A.S.Y** (2002) *Substance of Public Administration in Nigeria*. University Press, Ibadan, 1st edition. Pp. 25-78
- News Watch Magazine**, Volume 7, No 17, 25th April 1988
- Ocheja, D.H** (2005)) *Executive Techniques*, A paper presented at a Training for Local Government Council Chairmen in Kogi State, Organised by the Local Government Service Commission, Lokoja, April 2005. Pp.5 – 9
- Omale, I** (2005) *Theory and Practice of Public Administration*, Timaza Press, Zaria, Zaria, Nigeria. P. 16- 19.
- Omale, I** (1996) *Probes in The Nigerian Bureaucracy :A Case Study of Administrative Behaviour*. Tamaza Press, Zaria, Nigeria Pp 5 -8
- Sekwat, A** (2002) *Civil Service Reforms in Post Independent Nigeria: Issues and Challenges*. *Public Administration Quarterly* 25(4): 498 – 517 .
- Udoji, J** (1974) *Report of the Public Service Review Commission in Nigeria*, Mini Report, Para 112, Federal Ministry of Information, Printing Division, Lagos.
- White Paper Report** of the Ayida Review Panel. 1997. Pp. 3 - 17
- W**; <http://.euum.wikipedia>.