

## CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA FROM 1960 – 2018

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### ABSTRACT

Nations all over the world are currently in the struggle to better their existence through the process of good governance, and responsible civil service for effective and efficient service delivery. Nigeria is one of such countries. However, the kind of civil service bequeathed to Nigeria by her colonial master was alien and narrow in scope, and so not development oriented. At Nigeria independence in 1960, the federal civil service had a Staff strength of only 30,000, this increased steadily to the level of 200,000 in the late 1990s due to political patronage. Many unqualified personnel joined the Civil Service which resulted to oversized workforce that absorbed about 87% of the total government revenue. The paper examined the civil service reforms in Nigeria from independence to the present and how they affected efficient and effective service delivery in the country. It is the position of paper that the kind of civil service reform that would tackle these problems should be evolutionary and pragmatic in nature to meet Nigeria developmental needs and the challenges of the modern world.

**KEYWORDS:** Government Reforms, Civil Service, Public Service, New PublicService Management, Transparency & Transformation

### INTRODUCTION

The global Civil Service Reform cutting across continents is a general phenomenon driven partly by economic policy reform and partly by democratization. It is a reform which is very much in line with global trends or what Ketti (2004) called “The Global Public Management Revolution”. This revolution essentially involves the transformation of governance in a manner that addresses “core issues of the relationship between government and society” as a means of enhancing service delivery and generating trust.

Indeed, it will be correct to state that administrative reform is one of the major international phenomena of the twentieth century. Notable examples outside Sub Sahara Africa include the comprehensive state reforms in New Zealand, from the mid 1980s throughout early 1990, the radical transformation of Administrative culture in the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher (1979-1998), the Government performances and Results Act (1993) in the United State of

America, the total quality management movement initiatives is Several Latin American Countries. In Africa and Nigeria, the major Administrative Reforms were inspired by experiences of Advanced Countries.

Nigeria's civil service experience dates back with the introduction of British rule between 1864-1900. During the period the colonial masters introduced a dual system of administration: direct rule in the South and indirect rule in the North. However, a more formal civil service emerged only in 1914 when the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated to form the present geographical space called Nigeria. This, however, did not immediately lead to a unified civil service until 1945 when significant changes were introduced, based on the recommendations of the Walayn Committee.

These changes included the admission of Africans into higher grades of the civil service and the creation of the Central Public Service Board. In 1954 the Federal Public Service Commission was established and granted full powers to appoint, promote, dismiss, and discipline junior civil servants. At Independence, on 1 October 1960, the power of the renamed Federal Civil Service Commission Were extended to cover all civil service grades.

The Public Service in Nigeria refers to all organizations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policies decisions and delivering services that are of value to citizens. It is a mandatory institution of the State under the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as outlined in Chapter VI of the Constitution under the title: the Executive, part 1 (D) and part II (C) which provided for a public service at the Federal and State levels of government. The public service in Nigeria comprises of the following: (i) The civil service, often referred to as the core service, consisting of line ministries and extraministerial agencies. (ii) The public bureaucracy, or enlarged public service made up of the following: (a) Services of the state and national assembly's (b) The Judiciary (c) The Armed Forces (d). The police and other security agencies (e) The paramilitary services, immigration, customs prisons, etc (f) Parastatals and agencies-including social services, commercially oriented agencies, research institutions, educational institutions, etc. These bodies are expected to be professionally competent, loyal and efficient. Nonetheless, it is now denounced, as elsewhere in Africa, for being corrupt, poorly trained and poorly attuned to the needs of the poor.

## **CONCEPT OF THE REFORMS**

In his classic work on the Origin of Species British Scientist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) expounded the theory of evolution and the notion that nature was constantly changing in form and function. This framework explains the dynamism of human societies which usually ignite changes in the needs and value of societies. These changes are induced by reforms at different levels notably, global, national (government), institutional and socio-cultural.

Caiden (1968:18) however distinguishes administrative reform from administrative changes which could result from a normal process of administrative development or modernization. To Caiden, administrative change is a self-adjusting (no a result of deliberate effort) response to fluctuating conditions. Consequently, administrative reform results from the manufacturing in the self-adjusting processes of administrative changes (Matahaba, 1989: 25).

The concept of administrative reform in Nigeria had generally implied periodic reviews of a part of or the whole of the machinery of government. Such reviews always produce a blueprint that is the basis of a white paper. Reform could however, be simply a management maintenance, intervention or organizational health check, while it could also be a turnaround maintenance to re-engineer the structure, management, and functioning of the administrative system, with improved service delivery as the overall objective. Reformers usually ask such questions as, "What features of our current

structures, culture, systems, processes or skills-set, etc get in the way of what we are trying to achieve? Conversely, the same question can be restated as, “What sort of strategy do we need to take advantage of, in order to be able to exploit our existing strengths and opportunities.

This had been approached through the setting up of commissions, review teams or panel or study groups to review the structure, management and methods of government operations with a view to making recommendations for improvement as might be appropriate (Bentil, 2004:33). Some of the Commissions set-up by the government were:-

- Margan Commission of 1963-1970
- Adebo Commission of 1970-1972
- Udoji Commission of 1972-1974
- Cookery Commission and Onosode of 1981 and
- Dotum Philipps Commission of 1985-1988, to mention but a few.

For purposes of ongoing reform in Nigeria, reform refers to the process of aligning public service structures, systems and processes, human and material resources to government policies, targets and plans (SEEDS Manual, 2005: 209). The underlying principles which must be followed is ‘form follows function’ which means that it is only when comprehensive plans have been prepared, will it be possible to determine the appropriate configurations of public sector organizations to implement them in other words, reform is essentially changing the way government does it, is work in view of current or anticipated reality or a desired state.

Today’s reforms, no matter the origins of the driving force, are more than an offshoot of the old issues of efficiency, effectiveness, responsibility, and accountability. We are in new times of dispensable and recyclable not of repairable goods and services. We are in new times of information technology, mass media, and electronic finance with new languages that cannot translate into the old concept of a secret, secured and permanent career public service. We are in new times that require a redefinition of the concepts of nation states, democracy, human rights and many other fundamental concepts with new meanings and realities of living in a global village.

The public service is beyond reforms. If they were simply matters of competency and democratic control of public service, then, Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) prescriptions of how the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector in their famous Reinventing government would be appropriate and adequate. Osborne and Gaebler have both been overtaken by John Banham, who in 1994 in the anatomy of change: blueprint for a new era has wholly advocated the current private sector principle of re-engineering.

In the case of Britain, for example, Banham has called for the creation of a Department of Commerce to fill the power vacuum that the abolition of a Treasury will create Whitehall. He also called for strengthening the Cabinet Office. Banham’s publisher describes his call for the abolition of the Treasury as one of his ‘revolutionary programmers for change’.

The debate about public service reforms have moved back to the fundamental dilemma and question: what is the civil service for in a democratic nation-state? Do we need a public service at all? What form should it take? Reform simply means to make or become better by the removal of faults and errors’ Reader’s Digest Oxford complete word finder 1993:

1287. It appears we are going beyond the stage of talking about public service reform. The distinctiveness of the public service is fading away and is being overridden by the more powerful entrepreneurial philosophy. We need to shift our debate, from reforming to re-creating public service re-engineering public service.

In 1990 the International Institute of Public Administration held a symposium in Canada on Career Public Service and Administrative Reform, the proceedings of which were published in volume fifty-seven of the *International Review of Administrative Sciences* in September 1991.

The symposium addressed generic issues about the concept of the public service and the implications of the emerging culture of Managerialism for the morale and confidence of the public service. De Mont richer in the paper on the problems and prospects of the career public service in France began with: 'Morale is low among France's government employees' (1991: 373), while in the United States, in his introductory editorial comments to the volume Kernighan noted that: 'The erosion in the reputation and the morale of the public service was described by the Volker Commission in 1989 as a "quiet crisis"' (1991: 325). Peters also began his general review of morale in the public service with, 'The public service of most industrialized democracies has been in a state of at least minor turmoil for the past decade or more' (1991:421).

One core observation that came up frequently from the symposium and from other reports on public service reforms in both the industrialized democracies and the developing nation states was that since the 1968 Fulton Committee Report in Britain reforms have challenged what Halligan (1991:345) describes as 'a particular philosophy which supported and reinforced a distinctive conception of the public service'. The ethos of public service that characterized the famous reforms of the nineteenth century and the first half of this century seems to be fading away with the fine line that separated the public from the private sector of today's liberal economies.

Perhaps in discussing public service reforms, we may need to pay particular attention to the influence of the United States on the rest of the world. 'America leads; these days no country is the closing gap,' wrote Robert H. Waterman, Jr (1995), the famous co-author of *In Search of Excellence* and author of *What America Odes Right*.

He reported that research on industrialized nations shows conclusively that American workers out-produce workers in Germany and France by about twenty percent, workers in Britain by over thirty percent, and Japanese workers by over sixty percent.

Researchers have concluded that the American lead could not be attributed to differences in technology, capital availability, the marketplace, and degree of unionization, economies of scale, production process, capital intensity, or employee skill. Such factors are more or less the same across industrialized nations or, if not, quickly come into balance: capital, technology, and ideas, for instance, flow these days like quicksilver across national boundaries. The process of elimination led the researchers to conclude that the main reason America outperforms the others had to be a difference in American organizational arrangements: less government regulation and ownership and greater flexibility in the way companies and people are managed in the United States.

Waterman noted that these researchers came to their conclusions not just by looking at the economy in general, but by looking at individual industries banking, retailing, airlines, and so on in depth. In identifying the differences in the way American businesses manage people he found a number of common factors, including the employees' need to feel in control, to believe in the value of their work, to be challenged, to engage in lifelong learning, and to be recognized for their

contributions and that top-performing companies seem to honour these needs.

Public service reforms on both sides of the Atlantic in the last fifteen years like those of earlier times have been driven by rapid and radical changes in the worldview of how to conduct government business and what part career public service should and could play.

There may be differing opinions, beliefs and convictions often based on ideological perspectives about how to conduct government business, but there is consensus over the need for a new approach to run the government machinery.

A new approach to attaining a balanced budgeting to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund means a package of structural adjustment of the political economy aimed to check wastage and excessive deficit. This involved rolling back the government and allowing the private sector to over the delivery of public services. In plain language it simply means that by late 1970s living on borrowed money was no longer healthy even for nation states, hence there are needs both for new forms of policy strategies and a new form of public service to implement the new public policies.

Hunter identified three dominant characteristics of today's public policies that make them different types of planning challenges from those of earlier eras: they are global, they are long-term and they are cross-cutting (1990:516). These three characteristics demand co-operation and networking among nation-states, and time. But there is no long-term either in politics or in today's volatile electronic finance markets.

The new trend and changes and their demands on the public service are as enormous as those of the New Deal and the post-World War II Keynesian fiscal policies, hence it is now appropriate to talk in terms of a new public service culture, a culture that breaks, for example, the monopoly of the state in rendering detention, prison, policing, safety and security, refuse disposal and transport services. The global context of reforms makes it necessary to consider the following issues in democracy and development:-

- Administration for socio-economic and political development and especially about decentralization and people's involvement in public affairs (Rondinelli, 1987);
- Overloaded states such as Nigeria, which Joseph (1987) describes as a swollen state in that it is at once too large and too weak;
- The debate about bureaucracy and democracy (Held & Pollitt 1986, Dauda 1991); and
- The changes in the nature of public sector management in that issues are global in scope; require long-term approaches. and they cut across and are beyond the continents

Larbi (1999) asserts that in the case of most developing countries, reforms in public administration and management have been driven more by external pressures and have taken place in the context of structural adjustment programs.

He adds that other drivers of New Public Management type reforms include the ascendancy of neo-liberal ideas from the late 1970s, the development of information technology, and the growth and use international management consultants as advisors on reforms.

## CHALLENGES OF THE REFORM

Arguing from a similar perspective, the Economic Commission for Africa, (ECA) (2003), states that:-

*“Public sector management reforms in Africa face a number of challenges that have limited the scope, speed, and quality of services rendered. For example, corruption constitutes by far one of the biggest challenges in the public sector. Other challenges include multiple accountabilities, lack of due process, lack of legal framework inadequate resource utilization and institutional capacity. African governments, therefore, need to increase their efforts to address these challenges through effective public sector reforms. However, reforms also need to keep an open mind as to what they work and whatnot, and be guided by the needs of the situation. While the New Public Management approach may not be a panacea for the problems of the Public sector in Africa. A careful and selective adaptation of some elements to selected sectors may be beneficial”.*

In the view of Amoako (2003), the earlier reforms aimed at shaping a public administration that could lead national development, and was based on the same institutional peculiarities inherited from the colonial period. He states that more recently, the World Bank and other donors in Africa have been concerned with finding alternative ways of organizing and managing the public services and redefining the role of the state to give more prominence to markets and competition, and to the private and voluntary sectors.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE REFORM

O’ Neal (1994) agrees that there is no question that government reorganization has now become an international, phenomenon on a vast and growing scale:-

- On knowledge sharing spread by improving information technologies and interpersonal contacts between public sector administrators has led to a certain degree of uniformity among the government responses to a set of common problem. O’ Neal (1994) also states that the collapse of global trade barriers has
- To intensified economic competition among nations. He insists that among other things, this has led both the private and public sector to view the administrative apparatus of government in a different light.
- The entire economies are restructuring, a process in which government, as a significant contributor to the Government of New Public Service of most countries, is inextricably involved. He insists that as a consequence, the structural reforms in the public sector of many nations are based in part on a new recognition that the public sector is “a vital agent of structural reform as well as being itself an object for reform. An efficient public service is now also seen as a key element enabling nations to compete.

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (2003) suggests that recent reforms, under the influence of the New Public Management, have been driven by a combination of economic, social, political and technological factors, which have triggered the quest for efficiency and for ways to cut the cost of delivering public services. It reiterates the core paradigm which can be discerned as influential in the development of public sector reforms in the 1980s and 1990s was that public sector provision was inefficient and often ineffective; that it led neither to cost containment nor to quality improvement. The contention is that with the problems so defined, the paradigm extended to a belief that the public and private sectors did not have to be organized and managed in fundamentally different ways. Indeed that it would be better for the public services if they could be organized and managed as much like the private sector as possible.

The focus of the New Public Management movement, therefore, was on creating institutional and organizational contexts which are to mirror what is seen as critical aspects of private sector modes of organizing and managing.

Perhaps as a manifestation of the rapid changes that is often associated with the information age, while the New Public Management served useful purposes in analyzing public sector management and reforms in the past decade, no sooner have scholars begun to imbibe the lessons that wave of theorists have emerged to challenge the concept of the New Public Management.

Thus, the opinion of Dunleavy (2005), although the “New Public Management” wave in public sector organizational change was founded on the themes of ‘desegregations’, competition, and ‘incentivisation’ with its effects still working through in countries new to New Public Management this wavenow largely stalled or been reversed in some key “leading-edge” countries. According to him, thus ebbing chiefly reflects the accumulation of adverse indirect effects on citizens’ capacities for solving social problems because New Public Management radically increased institutional and policy complexity. The character of the post-New Public Management regime is currently being formed. We set out the case that a range of connected and information technology centered changes will be critical for the current and next wave of change, and we focus on themes of reintegration, needs-based holism, and digitization changes. He submits that the overall movement incorporating these new shifts is toward “digital era governance”.

According to Dunleavy, Digital Era Governance involves reintegrating functions into the governmental sphere, adopting holistic and needs-oriented structures, and progressing digitalization of administrative processes.

Digital Era Governance offers a perhaps unique opportunity to create self-sustaining change, in a broad range of closely connected technological, organizational, cultural, and social effects. He admits, however, that there are alternative scenarios as to how far Digital Era Governance will be recognized as a coherent phenomenon and implemented successfully.

## **FAILURES OF PREVIOUS REFORMS IN NIGERIA**

Over the last sixty years, administrative reforms have been carried out by successive Governments in Nigeria to transform the Civil Service into an instrument of modernization with varying focuses and complexities of coverage, in terms of their attempts at installing more appropriate structures and conditions of service and the need to improve the efficiency of service delivery, but in spite of all these numerous administrative reforms carried out in the Nigerian Civil Service, the integrity and transparency of the service remained ineffective and inefficient in responding to the needs of the society.

The Performance of the Civil Service was often perceived as corrupt with very low work ethics, outdated in technology, lacking in creativity, slow in responding to issues, excessive bureaucracy, structurally weak and lag behind planned target resulting to the poor condition of service, poor remuneration, and job insecurity.

A close look at the set up of the Bureau for Planning Research and Statistics gives the impression that for once, the attempt at effective reform of the service might succeed. The basis for this assumption is the fact that rather than an ad-hoc committee or commission, a permanent body has been set up to implement and monitor the proposed reforms. But the same kind of optimism trailed earlier reform efforts. The questions to ask therefore are why have so much effort come to waste? Why have the reforms not been successful? Have the recommendations of previous commissions ever

implemented? And how can we ensure that the current reforms achieve the desired results where others failed.

Yaqup (2006:1) noted that “explanations for the abnormal failure of public service performance in spite of the government effort to reform still remain problematic. From colonial period and all reforms were geared towards achieving maximum service output from the bureaucrats. In spite of these efforts, there has been a progressive decay in term of service delivery”. An important explanation for the failure of previous public service reforms can be traced to their implementation. The Udoji Commission has often been described as one of the better attempts in terms of public service reforms. However, the decision of the government to implement only a part, rather than the whole recommendations of the commission meant that it was doomed. The 1988 effort which sought to implement part of what was in reality; the Udoji Commission’s recommendations in isolation also had negative consequences for the service.

Makinde (2005) posits that implementation problem occurs when the desired result on the target beneficiaries is not achieved. Such problem is not restricted only to developing countries. He adds that “wherever and whenever the basic critical factors that are crucial to implementing public policy are missing, there is bound to be an implementation problem. These critical factors are communication, resources, depositions or attitudes and bureaucratic structure”. According to the writer, other serious problems are that of bribery and corruption which have contributed to the failure of policy implementation in developing countries. For example, implementation problem may arise in a situation where huge amounts are embarked on a project but officers in charge of implementation steal such amounts. In Nigeria, the euphemism is “misappropriation”.

The Failure or inability of the numerous reforms attempts of the public service in Nigeria can be seen from the following which are by no means exhaustive:-

- Failure of government to effectively implement the recommendations of the various reforms commission and panels
- An unwillingness of the senior cadre to implement the reforms
- The absence of constituted authorities to monitor and evaluate the reform agenda
- Inadequate information on the intentions of the reforms as well as modalities for implementation
- Inadequate financial resources to carry out the aims of the reforms
- The unstable political climate in the country
- An absence of merit system in appointment, promotion and discipline
- Some of the reforms failed to predict the changing economic climate in Nigeria
- The massive growth of the service beyond the point where reforms could have any significant impact
- The three-tier nature of Nigeria’s political system and the unwisely public administration systems that follow:-
- The absence of institutional mechanisms to oversee effective implementation; and
- Institutional and personal corruption in the public sector.

Having noted the above drawbacks to the effective implementation of public service reforms in Nigeria as responsible for discontinuity and collapsed of the civil service, the Obasanjo administration on assumption of office in 1999 introduced series of reforms to restore the lost glory of the civil service but to no avail.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reform is a journey, not a destination it requires planning and diligent implementation according it a high priority by the Government.
- For reform to succeed, it requires building new capacities for effective management broad collaboration and broad support from all actors.
- To introduce more probity, accountability, and transparency into the conduct of doing government business.
- To fully minimize the benefits of Public Service reforms, there is the need to develop a new cadre of professionals in the Federal Civil Service for the implementation of the reforms.
- It is also necessary for Government to work out an appropriate scheme of service to be adopted by all levels of Government in the country.
- Capacity building and training at home and abroad workshops, seminars and short duration courses should be encouraged enhancing professionalism in the Public Service.
- It should also be emphasized that for effective procurement system through due process, a lot still needs to be done.
- There is a need for institutionalizing, internalizing and building ownership for the multiples or reforms within the public sector so as to ensure that it sustains the changes in the anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria and Africa at large.

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