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THE CIVIL SERVICE AND CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Civil service is the government workforce that covers all the ministries and the departments of the state and people who work in them in the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes. It is against this background that the paper examines the contemporary challenges of civil service in Nigeria. It is relevant to stress that the Nigerian Civil Service has become so tolerant that a considerable number of civil servants get themselves involved in politics which in turn is making the Service lose its actual essence. The paper therefore concludes that challenges facing the Nigerian Civil Service are poor attitude to work by civil servants, poor remuneration, indiscipline, undue politicization/political interference, corruption, ineffective service delivery among others. Hence, it is recommended that government, as a matter of concern, should deploy ways in which civil servants can be properly remunerated and serious matters relating to bribery and corruption should be treated with high sense of responsibility and accountability.

Keywords: Civil Service, Civil Servants, Corruption.

INTRODUCTION

Civil Service is the body of employees saddled with the responsibilities of formulating and implementing development policies and programmes in government ministries and departments. The myths of neutral instruments of policy implementation have become the most accepted norms of the Nigerian successors to the colonial administration apparatus (Ogochukwu, 2014). In spite of its role in shaping the Nigerian policies, it still remains in its shell of anonymity, sharp malpractices and above all, high level of indiscipline. Fika (2009) puts it that the Nigerian Civil Service was trapped in inefficiency and virtual breakdown of discipline, disregard for financial accountability and probity, uniform structure of ministries which contributed to bloating of the civil service, low morale and frustration of civil servants as a result of the appallingly low remuneration, insecurity, absence of basic working tools, prevalence and virtual institutionalization of corruption at all levels of service. The civil servants that are supposed to be politically neutral involve in

partisan politics and could as such not discharge their official duties faithfully to all people or government they are serving. This in fact is contrary to the established Public service rules.

To put it differently, it is instructive to stress that one of the challenges bedeviling the present civil service is the outright disregard civil servants have for the ethics of the service. This specifically is the frequent involvement in politics which is at variance with the Public Service Rules (PSR) that clearly stipulates that a serving civil servant should be politically neutral. It is distressing to express that civil servants of today have got themselves entrenched in politics. This, no doubt, has great effect on the manner in which government business is being conducted. This however brings unfair treatment of events in the service in favour of the politicians whose primary aim is to use the civil servants as their tool for achieving their goals. It is in this respect that such unethical tendency and moral weakness breed corruption, impropriety and vices that are

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capable of destroying the building block of the civil service.

The present scenario drawing inferences from its operational activities in ministries and departments calls for proper rethinking and radical changes. Frequent wrangling and conflicts come up with hasty decisions. This has not helped in achieving progress and development. It is believed that civil service operates with an impoverished concept of management which overemphasizes routine control and neglects other dimensions such as managing change and managing relationship within the organization (Orire, 2007). To this end, the civil service of today has been criticized and is facing a lot of problems that hinder its effectiveness in the discharge of its statutory responsibilities. It is against this background that the paper examines the concept and contemporary challenges of Civil Service in Nigeria. This paper is divided into seven sections; introduction, methodology, concept of civil service, main functions of civil service, challenges of civil service in Nigeria, conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

The data for the study were generated mainly from secondary sources which include text books, journals, dictionary, magazines, pamphlets, internet, etc. The data were extracted through readings. All these data were collected and analysed to the point of drawing all conclusions therein. Therefore, an analytical method is central to the approach utilized in treating all facts and opinions obtained from the said sources and the same method has been used employed in the thrust of this paper.

Concept of Civil Service

The civil service designates the entire body or a specialised part of the executive arm of government whose primary responsibility is the implementation of the policies and programmes of the government (Oyediran, Nwosu, Takaya, Anifowoshe, Badejo, Ogboghodo & Agbaje, 2005). The employees of the government who carry out these functions; that is the administrative and executive duties are called civil servants. A British scholar defines them as 'those servants of the crown, other than holders of political or judicial offices, who are employed in civil capacity and whose remuneration is paid wholly and directly out of monies voted by parliament'. This means that civil servants are 'servant of the government.' They are found in the various ministries

of government headed by political appointees called ministers or commissioners.

According to Encarta World English Dictionary (1999), Civil service constitutes all government departments of a state and the people who work in them. Adu (1967) stresses that the term civil service covers all staff of ministries and departments, from the permanent secretary to the daily rated employee but does not include armed forces personnel, magistrates or judges. Iyayi (2004) also asserts that the civil service does not however represent the whole of the Executive arm of the government. That arm of the government also includes the public service comprising the extra-ministerial departments of governments or government parastatals, e.g. the universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, the airways, ports authorities, immigration, customs, etc. He stressed further that people refer to public servants as civil servants because they perform similar functions within the same extant government regulations. Public servants also formulate and implement policies for their establishments. There are, however, differences mainly in structure and job schedule.

The role of the civil service from comparative analysis is similar globally, differences in structure and sizes notwithstanding. Generally, the civil service formulates and implements policies for governments. It identifies programmes, sets goals and targets, plans and designs strategies for achieving set goals. Adamolekun (2002) states that the civil service is commonly used as the synonym of the machinery of the government. This is same in Britain and most Commonwealth countries of Sub-Saharan Africa. In the British conception, the civil service is used to refer to the body of permanent officials appointed to assist the decision makers. The civil service according to the 1999 constitution, section 318 (1) is: "The service of the Federation (state) in a civil capacity, staff of the Office of the President, (Governor), the Vice President, (Deputy Governor), a ministry or department of the federation (state), assigned with the responsibility for any business of the government of the federation (state)" (FRN, 1999).

Ipinlaiye (2001) asserts that the term civil service is normally used when referring to the body of men and women employed in a civil capacity and non-political career basis by the Federal and state Governments primarily to render and faithfully give

effect to their decisions and implementation. Such career officers normally derive their appointment from the Civil Service commission which also exercises power of delegating duties and responsibilities to department in accordance with laid down rules. He further stresses that the civil service has come to be regarded as modern institution bequeathed to mankind in the process of revolutionizing an efficient way of organising any large human organization. It is in this respect that the civil service is defined as a bureaucracy. The civil service can also be seen as a complex organization with a body of seemingly permanent officials appointed in a capacity to assist the political executives in the formulation, execution and implementation of the government policies in Ministries and Extra-Ministerial Departments within which the specific government works are carried out. Shaiye (1998) views civil service as the term used to describe the departments of the state which are saddled with the responsibilities and functions of implementing the policies and programmes of the government. It is an extension of the executive arm of government, whose personnel perform purely administrative and executive duties. The personnel called civil servants are responsible to the chief executive of the state through the various departmental heads.

In a similar vein, Johnson (1994) opines that the civil service is a body or a department in the executive arm of the government responsible for the execution of the policies and programmes of the government. The civil service and its workers known as civil servants perform purely administrative and executive functions which entail formulation and implementation of government policies. According to him, the civil service is divided into departments and each department carries out specific functions. The departments called ministries are headed by ministers or commissioners who serve as both the political and executive head. The Armed forces, the police, local government officials, public corporations and government owned enterprises are not included in the civil service but are collectively called public services and their workers including the civil servants are called public servants.

Furthermore, Ahmed (2007) sees the civil service as "determination of policy and functions of ministries, and once a policy is determined, it is the unquestioned and unquestionable business of the civil servant to strive to carry out that policy with

precisely the same good will, whether he/she agrees with it or not." The civil servant is expected to perform his/her functions without fear or favour with rules and regulations in accordance with approved procedure. For civil servant to be able to do this, the civil servant must be assured that his political boss would not get at him for taking the correct actions that might not be politically correct or palatable to the powers that be. In fact, the Civil Service Handbook (1997) is more emphatic; it describes civil service as a body or organ which enjoys continuity of existence. Its members are not limited to a short term of office. When a civil servant relinquishes his office for whatever reason, his place is taken by another person who similarly enjoys security of employment. Civil servants according to the Handbook command a pool of experience and know-how for implementing government policies. It recognizes that while the civil service is the instrument of the government of the day, the service and its members are not permitted under the law to be partisan of any political party. The civil servant is also required to assist in formulating and implementing the policies approved by the government irrespective of its personal or private opinions or attitudes towards such policies. Another feature of civil service is that it is indispensable irrespective of the type of government in power (whether military or democratic regime).

In agreement, Ibiyemi, Michael and Bodun (2004) maintain that the civil service (being a part of the public service) is a body of employees responsible for planning, giving advice, and implementing policies in government ministries and departments. These employees are called civil servants. Government ministries are headed by ministers or commissioners and assisted by directors general (permanent secretaries), as well as other departmental heads. A committed civil servant is the best vehicle for carrying out and explaining to the people, the policies and intentions of the government. There is no better and ready instrument available to a government to influence the moral tone of the state than a well-motivated civil servant (Public Service Rule, 2009). The civil service of any country is mainly concerned with the efficient provision of social amenities, protection of life and property of the citizens. It is the crux of any government. The civil service therefore includes all institutions that are primarily geared towards the provision of the basic needs of man in society including the protection of life and property (Ovwas, 2004).

Admittedly, the above submission is right but does not cover all the basic ingredients of civil service such as their involvement in policy formulation. Therefore our working definition conceives the civil service as the government workforce covering all the ministries and departments of the state and the people who work in them. It could be described as natural body which constitutes civil servants as its adherents, to aid in formulating and executing government policies for the benefit of the public.

The Main Functions of the Civil Service

- i. Civil service ensures the smooth execution of the policies and programmes of government.
- ii. The civil servants assist the government in drafting of bills for legislation.
- iii. Civil servants act as advisers to the ministers/commissioners in charge of their ministry, and they can do well because of their training and experience.
- iv. The civil servants helps to formulate the policies and programmes of the government, and these are presented to the ministers/commissioners for consideration and final decisions.
- v. The civil service drafts and prepares the annual budget and estimates of government ministries, departments and corporations.
- vi. The civil servants gather and provide useful information on which government policies and programmes are based, and keep such information or records for day-to-day or future use.
- vii. The civil service makes bye-law, regulations and orders under powers granted it by the parliament (i.e. delegated legislation).

Challenges of Civil Service in Nigeria

The Nigerian Civil Service today has been on a mixed grill and on a precipice of crises and confusion arising from the way it is being conducted. The challenges of the present civil service is very enormous as there is the urgent need towards building a caring, united and economically strong nation of our dream (Orire, 2007). This objective cannot be realized except the entire civil servants remain focused and articulate in the discharge of their statutory responsibilities. The challenges are as follows:

- i. **Bad attitude to work:** The aspiration of all is that the attitude of staff to work must change. The ugly behavior of civil servants has clearly manifested in many forms such as absenteeism, delinquency, lack of commitment, negligence, indiscipline, lack of courtesy, low productivity, divided loyalty, etc. With a rededicated effort and strong commitment to work, government will reciprocate the gesture with appropriate remuneration together with intensive training of staff to enhance their productivity. Government would in addition improve welfare scheme, introduce policies practices which also include appropriate deployment of staff and equitable treatment of all, among others.
- ii. **Lack of probity or integrity:** The nation is desirous of having a bunch of civil servants with high sense of integrity and responsibility, unquestionable and high moral character especially civil servants who are honest, upright and morally sound. An officer with high integrity is not likely to misappropriate or embezzle public funds, cheat, steal, report to work drunk, or indulge in immoral acts. Whenever these acts are prevalent, the authorities would normally visit such shortcomings with severe sanctions. Civil servants should by all means be loyal, cooperative and support all their superior officers, but they should never compromise civil service rules and regulations and participate in any unlawful activity.
- iii. **Corruption:** It is a common knowledge that our society has suffered serious harm because of deep-seated corruption. Corruption is a malaise that has affected our national ethos and the way foreigners see us. Internally, corruption brings about economic stagnation as officials fail or are reluctant to provide service expected of them without some form of gratification. Chief Ernest Shonekan, the Head of the 1993 Interim National Government that succeeded General Ibrahim Babangida also made a serious statement on the level of corruption in Nigeria:

We can no longer ignore the issue of corruption which is now believed to be quite endemic in our country ...

People abroad now believe that it is virtually impossible to undertake any form of transaction successfully in Nigeria today without bribery ... Government is specially concerned with increasing cases of white collar corruption including advance fee fraud codenamed '419', bank thefts, insider dealing, product counterfeiting, etc. (The Guardian February 28, 1993 cited in Olowu, 1996).

The challenge of the present civil service is to ensure civil servants are rid of all forms of corruption and in this direction; the government of the day enacted the Anti-corruption law. All agencies of the government are expected to establish anti-corruption units to secure the commitment of public servants in the war against corruption. However, the seemingly reluctant attitude of civil servants is practically responsible for the unsuccessful implementation of the laudable scheme.

Civil servants should also start looking at the possibility of introducing some innovations especially that which has to do with feasibility of paying junior workers every two (2) weeks, rather than monthly as this could make it easier for staff to manage their earnings prudently and perhaps this would reduce the temptation to dip their hands into the public coffers.

- iv. **Poor service delivery:** It is important for all civil servants to realize that every organization is created for a purpose. For instance, the National Power Holding Company was established to generate and distribute electricity. Similarly, the Security Printing and Minting Company was set-up to print and sell currency and security papers. The Ministries of Health and Finance were created to perform some specific functions. National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) was also established as an organization charged with the responsibility of eradicating poverty in our land. In service delivery, civil servants must be conscious and

be ready to offer total quality management (TQM) as a major strategy in performance enhancement practice. In doing this, four (4) factors must seriously avoided:

- a) Failure to meet deadline;
- b) Wastefulness;
- c) Lack of requisite skill; and
- d) Poor and outdated equipment.

- v. **Unavailability of jobs and high level of poverty:** Nigeria is in the league of the poorest countries of the world and therefore, it is obvious that poverty is one of the most pressing challenges of the civil service. For a country where it is estimated that 54.4% of the population cannot meet their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing, medical and basic education, the situation is indeed deplorable. The low disposable income of the average consumer and high resale market prices depressed the demand for goods and services resulting in mounting stocks of unsold goods.

For this singular reason, it is essential that civil service should assist the government to identify policies and programmes that could efficiently improve the lot of the masses, focusing on the short and long term needs of the people. Employment creation and provision of basic necessities: food, shelter and water in addition to health and education should be the primary targets.

- vi. **Indiscipline:** Indiscipline has become pervasive in most ministries, parastatals and agencies of government. Indiscipline is evident in many forms such as disrespect and utter disregard for laws, rules and regulations, lack of self control, courtesy and good manners. Coming to the office very late and closing before the actual time are put together as irresponsible behaviours.

- vii. **Lack of accountability and transparency:** Civil servants falsify documents, fake receipts, licenses and cheques all in the mad rush to make money. These anti-social and to a large extent criminal behaviours have persisted without formal steps taken to tackle them. To ensure respect for rules and regulations, persons in authority should not lack the will to punish wrong doing. A World Bank (1995) report stated that, "Nigeria's public sector lacks transparency and accountability." This is further confirmed by a publication of Transparency International

which rated Nigeria as the second most corrupt in the world (*Nigerian Tribune*, October 3, 2002). Civil servants on a very sad note see themselves as owners rather than custodians of the resources they administer. For instance, contrary to regulations, financial transactions are often treated in loose minutes or temporary files that may result in fraud. Financials returns are not rendered in good time.

viii. **Poor monitoring, evaluation and supervision:** For effective conduct of government business and also as a serious challenge, there must be close monitoring, evaluation and supervision of projects. For instance, the time it takes to complete a given task, the quality of the service, or the output, the cost effectiveness, the value added, among others. The challenge is to set up a realistic target or objectives to be met and sustained by the work force. Such targets where possible, are quantifiable. Monitoring will help to identify equipment that would be needed to be repaired or replaced as well as staff to be trained to deliver quality service. Although parastatals are allowed a measure of autonomy, they are all subject to ministerial control and supervision. Regrettably, this important responsibility that translates to close supervision is often neglected. This has adverse consequences for performance, prudent management of resources, transparency and accountability.

ix. **Due Process Certification:** The word due process featured most prominently in financial transactions, but it is a mechanism that must apply to all activities of government in order to attain some level of efficiency and effectiveness in the conduct of government business. Timely procedures must be upheld and contracts in certain respect should be awarded involving the relevant tender boards to comply with required guidelines and regulations (Orire, 2009).

More so, in the view of Tolu and Abe (2011), the Nigerian Civil Service has over the years been facing myriads of challenges (problems) that have also made it difficult for the system to function effectively as agent of development. Some of these challenges are analyzed below.

- **Poor remuneration:** Despite the increment

in salary, the civil service salary in Nigeria is still very low. Because of low salary, most civil servants are engaging in sharp practices, most of them keep business letter-head papers, invoices and receipts of various companies owned by them and because suppliers and contractors even to their own offices. This affects their contribution to development.

- **Corruption:** This has become more or less a permanent problem in the Nigerian civil service. Bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria continues to grow in leaps and bounds. So many civil servants have defrauded and embezzled government money earmarked for developmental purposes. Most of them would demand for money before performing their routine duties to the members of the public. This has made development difficult via the civil service (Omotoso, 2001). Most of the civil servants are living above their income.

- **Over bloated civil service:** The Nigerian Civil Service is over bloated as many are employed without doing anything. Apart from this, incessant state creation exercise is also contributing to the problem. When new state is created, civil service is also expanded, therefore, the urge to fill the necessary positions in the civil service by the new state always leads to urgent and compulsory promotion, and so, in the process, many civil servants are promoted above their level of efficiency and productivity.

- **Political instability:** The political instability that characterized the Nigerian nation has caused a fatal blow to the development and growth of the civil service.

- **Inadequate training and retraining:** This affects the productivity of the civil service and consequently development of the nation. Training is not adequate in the civil service, even when it is carried out, it is politicized.

- **Lack of planning and vision:** Most civil servants do not have genuine interest for development. They are not committed to the course of development. They are mostly interested in what will benefit them and their immediate family. They are less concerned about the overall development of the country.

- **The use of old and obsolete equipment:** Today, most government ministries and parastatals at federal, state and local

government levels are still working with typewriting machine in this age of computer. The funny aspect of it is that most civil servants are not computer literate. They do not know how to work with modern machines. As a matter of fact, this will affect their efficiency and productivity.

The Nigerian Public Service appears to have lost its glory and seem to have fallen into decay. This decay is captured vividly by Obasanjo (2003: 5-6) in his observation that:

(I) Public Offices are the shopping floors of government business. Regrettably, Nigerians have for too long been feeling short-changed by the quality of public service delivery by which decisions are not made without undue outside influence, and files do not move without being pushed with inducements. Our public offices have for too long been show cases for the combined evils of inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments to effective implementation of government policies, Nigerians deserve better. And we will ensure they get what is better.” (ii) “.....Let me state right from the outset that I strongly believe that without an efficient, effective, dedicated, well - informed and technology - powered civil service, the goals of stability, growth and development could be easily compromised. Any dedicated and forward-looking public service must, at all times, identify with service delivery, innovation, motivation, transparency, accountability and development.” (iii) “Service is what we offer ourselves for. And service is what the people are entitled to expect from us. In this simple equation lies our great concern when the people feel short-changed in their expectations of the standard of service provided by government institutions. This situation has damaging effects on the amount of trust the people have in our ability to govern as their elected government. In the circumstances, we as responsible and sensitive government, are obliged to take steps to thoroughly examine what the real trouble is with service delivery and determine how best we can remedy it.....we were like most Nigerians, well aware of the unpleasant manifestations of the appalling standard of service delivery in the country.

Generally stating, the respective challenges as enunciated are serious and such need to be taken with sense of seriousness for an improved civil service. Issues such as corruption, indiscipline, inadequate

training, poor remuneration, disloyalty, lack of probity or integrity, etc. could be resolved when there are proper reforms in the civil service which could translate to implementation, thus leading to efficiency of the system. With this however, the challenges (problems) would be at minimal level and a virile civil service is guaranteed.

Conclusion

It has been carefully examined that the Nigeria Civil Service has so far not been managed properly by its employees otherwise known as civil servants. And this in return must have contributed to its respective inefficiency when viewed from the whole aspect. This however calls for general overhaul of the system. As evident in the perceptions of different authorities of public service, it is clear that the challenges facing the Nigerian Civil Service are enormous which undoubtedly call for urgent and well thought out plans as regards ways on how the situations can be brought to its expected state of operation; issues relating to attitude of civil servants to work which does not exclude negligence, corruption, improbity, ineffectiveness of service delivery, problems of transparency and accountability, poor remuneration, indiscipline, lack of politeness, political interference among others are major challenges militating against the Nigerian Civil Service. It has to be noted that until the challenges are properly tackled once and for all, the civil service will continue to face these problems which of course negatively affect the state of our general affairs internally and externally.

More importantly, civil servants as employees carrying out government policies should, as matter of fact, portray themselves in a manner that truly bears a representation of what the civil service should stand for, bearing in mind that it is through their collective effort, mostly in practical approach, that the service can gain its expected status. Additionally, the civil servants should perceive themselves as a body that builds the construct of the civil service. This can be justified with proper tackling of the challenges head-on. A civil servant should not wait to be told what is expected of him to do before carrying out such assignment; for instance, he must understand that his performance has a great deal to do with the overall activities of the service.

By way of specification, bribery and corruption, embezzlement, insubordination, among other

misconducts are inimical to the service and thus, destabilize its operational system. The civil servants should therefore refrain themselves from such. It is by doing so that the Nigerian Civil Service can locate its rightful position as one looks up to a virile, refined, effective and efficient system with a body of persons who are determined and conscious of their actions and inactions.

Recommendations

- i. Government as a matter of concern should deploy ways in which civil servants can be properly remunerated. Civil servants should be encouraged to have courage, wisdom and passion to carry out their duties earnestly irrespective of the prevailing circumstances.
- ii. Serious matters relating to bribery and corruption should not be lightly treated; offenders, no matter how highly placed should be made to face the wrath of the law. The issue of "sacred cows" in the service should no longer be tolerated.
- iii. As observed, the state of the operational standard of the Civil Service in Nigeria is low in term of its use of tools. In this sense, there should be provision for training and retraining of the civil servants so as to keep track with modern ways of operation in terms of technology.
- iv. The frequent interference of political office holders in the affairs of the civil service should be outrightly discouraged. Civil servants are expected to see themselves as government officials who are not to be involved in partisan politics as long as they remain in the service. Adequate punishment should therefore be meted out on persons who engage in such act to serve as deterrence.
- v. Civil servants of the present day generation and the future must distance themselves from acts of sycophancy, greed, indolence, graft and immorality that inhibit their capacity to deliver quality service to the people.
- vi. As it is common knowledge that the civil service is reserved for persons of high intelligence with great skills in their respective fields and who are capable of formulating policies and programmes that can contribute meaningfully to the wellbeing of the country, it is recommended that the civil service be made fully professional with emphasis on administrative skills and

modern management techniques for greater effectiveness and responsiveness in the discharge of their statutory responsibility.

- vii. Finally, the business of the government would be better managed and efficiently conducted if substantial elements of private sector business culture are implanted into public service management. All these radiate round cost consciousness, value for money, and ensuring that adequate and qualified work force engaged to do the work of government.

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