



The Nigerian Civil Service and The Advancement of Sustainable Human Development: a Critical Analysis

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Annotation. The notion of human development in a developing nation such as Nigeria has persistently presented significant obstacles from 1960 to the present. The pursuit of procedural rationality as a foundation for planning and executing governmental functions has been constantly expressed in relation to the advancement of public administration within a democratic framework. This research analyzes the degree to which the Nigerian civil service has facilitated sustainable human development throughout time. This involves concentrating on the theoretical analysis of sustainable human development alongside the issues of government and bureaucracy. This paper employs documentary examination of pertinent records as its methodological approach. The report emphasizes the necessity for bureaucracy to effectively promote sustainable human development.

Keywords: Civil Service, Reforms, Ministries, Appointments, Promotions.



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INTRODUCTION

The present civil service in Nigeria is significantly derived from colonial administrative structures, encompassing its genesis, organization, and efficacy. The Civil Service in Nigeria originated from institutions created by the British during the colonial era. The Nigerian Civil Service comprises government personnel responsible for administering the country and executing the current government's policies. The term refers to the collective of civilian personnel at any governmental level who are not susceptible to political appointment or dismissal, often recruited and advanced primarily through competitive examinations (Bade, 2009). Nigeria attained full independence in October 1960, as stated by Ali (2003), under a constitution that established a

parliamentary administration and granted significant self-governance to the nation's three regions. Subsequently, other commissions have examined and proposed reforms for the Civil Service, including the Margan Commission of 1963, the Adebo Commission of 1971, and the Udoji Commission of 1972-74. A significant transformation transpired with the ratification of a constitution in 1979, which was based on that of the United States. The 1985 Dotun Philips Panel sought to overhaul the Civil Service. The 1988 Civil Service Reorganization Decree issued by General Ibrahim Babangida significantly influenced the structure and efficacy of the Civil Service. The subsequent study of the Ayida Panel recommended reversing certain historical advances and reinstating the more efficient Civil Service of previous years (Ali, 2003). The Civil Service has experienced progressive and methodical changes and restructuring since May 29, 1999, following decades of military governance. Nonetheless, the public service is perceived as stagnant and ineffective, and previous efforts by panels have had minimal impact on advancing sustainable human development in Nigeria.

The ministries oversee many parastatals, including universities (Education), the National Broadcasting Commission (Information), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (Petroleum). Additional parastatals fall under the purview of the Office of the Presidency, including the Independent National Electoral Commission, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the Federal Civil Service Commission (Okoronkwo, 2008). Simultaneously, the aforementioned evolution has scrutinized the genealogical administrative framework of the Nigerian Civil Service from 1960 to the present. The primary question is whether the numerous civil service reforms implemented in Nigeria have significantly advanced sustainable human development. Consequently, robust human resource management, strategic manpower planning and utilization, effective organizational performance, efficient employee-employer relations within the establishment, and high bureaucratic stability have been absent in the post-colonial Nigerian Civil Service, adversely impacting the advancement of sustainable human development.

NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

The efficiency and efficacy of a country's Civil Service depend on the government's objective adherence to procedural capacity and bureaucratic stability, aimed at fostering sustainable human development. This significantly contributes to effective nation-building and economic stability. Akinyemi (2010) posits that the Nigerian Civil Service is an exception to this assumption. Administrative complexity has obscured the environment of Nigeria's public service, particularly over the nomenclature of senior civil workers in sensitive posts while in active service. Prior to the 1988 reforms, the Nigerian civil service was meticulously structured in accordance with British conventions: it was apolitical, civil workers were anticipated to serve every administration impartially, and the principles of impersonality and hierarchical authority were firmly established. As societal needs grew more intricate and the public sector expanded swiftly, a commensurate necessity arose to restructure the civil service. The Adebo Commission (1970) and the Udoji Commission (1972) assessed the framework and functions of the civil service to enhance its efficacy as a tool for fostering sustainable human development. Idris asserts that despite the commissions'

recommendations for reforming the civil service, the primary issues of inefficiency and bureaucratic obstacles persisted. In 1985, a study committee led by Dotun Phillips examined the issues. The 1988 changes, the latest initiatives addressing service issues as of 1990, were thought to be founded on this study, Idris (2009). By 1990, the civil service had undergone significant transformation compared to the 1960s and 1970s. The situation had been politicized to the degree where the majority of senior officials publicly endorsed the current administration. The implementation of a quota system for recruitment and promotion, compliance with the federal-character principle, and the persistent governmental interference in the daily operations of the civil service, particularly through frequent alterations in senior officials and extensive purges, indicated that political considerations, rather than merit alone, significantly influenced the civil service (Odeniga, 2007). The 1988 reforms officially acknowledged the politicization of the senior ranks of the public service and generated significant alterations in various other domains. The primary purpose of the reforms was "to establish a robust, dynamic, and results-driven civil service focused on advancing sustainable human development in the country." Consequently, ministers or commissioners endowed with comprehensive executive authority were entirely responsible for their respective ministries or commissions. The director general had transformed into a political appointee, with tenure contingent upon the current administration; hence, this implied that directors general need not be career civil officials, so diminishing the career possibilities of the latter. Each ministry has been professionalized, ensuring that every official, regardless of specialization, pursues their career exclusively inside a single ministry, in contrast to the former practice of officials transferring between ministries. A new department, the Presidency, consisting of senior government officials, was established at the federal level to coordinate policy formation and oversee implementation, serving as an intermediary between the president and all federal ministries and departments.

The changes established a novel civil service model, however the framework may evolve under subsequent administrations with varying agendas. Abdullahi asserts that previous governmental efforts to implement reforms in the public service resulted in numerous discontinuities (Abdullahi, 2010). Ministries have been perpetually reorganized, new ones established, and current ones dissolved. Nonetheless, the 1988 reforms may address certain issues within the public service, as the majority of civil officials typically retained their positions despite organizational changes. The relocation of the capital from Lagos to Abuja in the early 1990s will create new chances to use the federal-character concept in substituting Lagosian state personnel who are reluctant to relocate.

In 1990, the civil service comprised the federal civil service, twenty-one independent state civil services, the unified local government service, and various federal and state government entities, including parastatals and companies. The federal and state civil services were structured around government departments, or ministries, and additional ministerial departments led by ministers (at the federal level) and commissioners (at the state level), selected by the president and governors, respectively. These political leaders were accountable for policy issues. The administrative leaders of

the ministry were the directors general, previously referred to as permanent secretaries. The "Chief" director general served as the government secretary and, before the Second Republic, also functioned as the head of the civil service. The secretary, as the chief adviser to the government, facilitated communication between the administration and the civil service (Ibrahim, 2010). The primary role of the director general, like that of all senior civil workers, was to provide direct counsel to the minister or commissioner. The director general was anticipated to maintain neutrality.

Bamidele, (2007), stressed that the initial periods of military rule, these administrative heads wielded enormous powers. The military leaders declined to nominate civilian political leaders for an extended period. Despite the appointment of political leaders, it took years for the era of "super permanent secretaries" to conclude. Bamidele states that this occurred in 1975, following Gowon's downfall, when the civil service was purged to enhance its efficiency. Many of the super permanent secretaries lost their jobs, and the subordinate status of permanent secretaries to their political bosses was reiterated, (Bamidele, 2007). A further effect of the purge, subsequently reinforced, was the obliteration of the civil service tradition of job security. The destruction was achieved by the retirement or dismissal of many who had not attained retirement age. Since the reinstatement of civil democratic governance on May 29, 1999, the Government has implemented initiatives to restore the dignity and prestige of the Civil Service, positioning it to effectively fulfill its essential role in social development. The following measurements are included:

(a) De-militarization of the Civil Service through:

- i. Ensuring that the system is guided by the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Public Service Rules, the Financial Regulations and Circulars; and
- ii. Revisions of Rules, Regulations and Procedures in the Civil Service in a way that underscore Government "concern for discipline and proper conduct and practices by public officers in accordance with rules designed to enhance fairness, accountability and good governance".

(b) Reinstatement of the Pooling System. The new pooling method represents a qualitative advancement compared to those before to the 1988 Reforms in that it:

- i. Ensure that officers, regardless of their specialization, are assigned to positions that facilitate the maintenance and enhancement of their professional skills, hence fostering professionalism.
- ii. Enhance the coordinated creation and management of shared professional frameworks;
- iii. Advocate for the enhancement of ministry staffing, thereby infusing innovative concepts and new talent into the system;
- iv. Assist in the transfer of skills and expertise within the service;
- v. Broaden the world outlook and vision of civil servants and develop esprit-de-corps throughout the Service;
- vi. Promote national unity and integration by ensuring that staff of ministries reflect the ethnic, geographical, religious and other divides of Nigeria; and
- vii. To rectify the discrepancies in staff placement resulting from the 1988 Reforms;

(C) Rectification of the diverse distortions engendered by the 1988 Reforms:

In this respect, the Government is implementing most of the recommendations of the Ayida Review Panel on the Civil Service Reforms: Main Report, but with qualitative improvements to reflect the new political dispensation and emerging global changes;

(D) The restoration of the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation which is helping to:

- i Provide leadership, direction and favourable image for the Civil Service;
- ii Maintain the Civil Service political neutrality and cohesiveness;
- iii Promote high morale and esprit-de-corps amongst civil servants;
- iv Coordinate training policies and programmes;
- v Improve staff welfare and development;
- vi Manage common establishment matters;
- vii Foster professionalism; and
- viii Promote cordial and mutual relationship between the political officers and civil servants.

(e) The institution of centralized coherent and systematic training throughout the Civil Service to de-militarize the mentality of civil servants, polish their administrative skills and develop their professionalism. The new innovations in the training programmes under the new dispensation are that:

- i. The training and retraining of civil servants, including Permanent Secretaries, have been regularized;
- ii. It is now compulsory for all categories of staff to attend some training programmes;
- iii. Career progression in the Civil Service is now tied to the attendance of prescribed training courses;
- iv. There is extensive use of on-the-job and in-house methods of training by ministries to capture, reflect and address their specific requirements;
- v. Seasoned retired civil servants are now engaged, on contract basis, to train and retrain civil servants on time-tested skills and methods of Civil Service, as well as share their experiences with serving civil servants; and
- vi Training need assessments are undertaken before training programmes are embarked and after the training, evaluation of the impact of such training are conducted through different methods, including promotion examinations. This was not the tradition under military dispensation.

(f) Comprehensive restructuring of the entire system

the strategies the government has adopted to manage the reforms are:

Separation of the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation from that of the Secretary to Government of the Federation as provided in the 1999 Constitution.

Restructuring of the office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation into five distinct components in a mutually connected relationship.

Civil Servant – driven implementation of reforms.

Return to the restrict applications of extent rules and regulations concerning recruitment and due process in the conduct of Government business generally.

Streamlining and coordination of intra and inter-ministerial functions to achieve a common objective.

Liaison with other Public Services across the world (and also multilateral organizations like the Commonwealth, United Nations Development Programmes, World Bank, etc – A. S. M. Babura).

Revisiting the structure and functions of Strategic Public Service Departments such as National Planning Commission and other Professional Departments” (Bamidele, 2007).

CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS AND ITS PROBLEMS

The Nigerian Civil Service has undergone several reforms since its creation by the British colonial power in 1861. It is, however, the 1988 Civil Service Reforms that introduced profound distortions in the Civil Service. The objectives of the 1988 Reforms according to Waziri, 2010) are to:

- a Enhance professionalism, decentralization and delegation of functions;
- b Institute checks and balances;
- c Promote general modernization;
- d Enhance the combination of responsibility with authority;
- e Align the Civil Service with the spirit of executive presidentialism; and
- f Enhance efficiency, effectiveness and speed of operations.

The highlights of the 1988 Reforms are:

(i) The merging of ministerial responsibilities and administrative controls and their investment in the Minister as Chief Executive and Accounting Officers;

(ii) Replacement of the designation of Permanent Secretary with “Director-General”, whose tenure will terminate with the Government that appointed him/her and who will serve as Deputy Minister;

(iii) Greater ministerial responsibility in the appointment, promotion, training and discipline of staff;

(iv) Vertical and horizontal restructuring of ministries to “ensure overall management efficiency and effectiveness ...”

(v) Permanency of appointment, as every officer, is to make his/her career entirely in one Ministry; (vi) Abolition of the Office of the Head of Civil Service; and

(vi) Abolition of the pool system

In reality, however, the 1988 Civil Service Reforms led to the:

1) Conscious and deliberate politicization of the civil service;
2) Misuse and abuse of power by Ministers and Directors-Generals who saw their Ministries as a separate entity and run them as personal properties;

a) increase in the cost of running the civil service due to:
b) the imposition of uniform structures on ministries;
c) the proliferation of parastatals; and increase in human personnel without a corresponding increase in the productivity;

3) Absence of a coherent and systematic training policy throughout the Civil Service;

4) Glaring shortage of skilled manpower, especially in the technical and professional cadres in virtually all the ministries;

- 5) Prevalence and virtual institutionalization of corruption; and
- 6) Disregard for the rules, regulations and procedures resulting in arbitrary decisions and general loss of direction; and
- 7) Complete emasculation of the Federal Civil Service Commission regulatory role in the appointment, promotion and discipline of Federal Civil Servants.

1) Thus, the 1988 Civil Service Reforms despite its lofty ideals of efficiency, professionalism, accountability, and checks and balances, did not achieve its desired objectives, especially in the area of promoting sustainable human development, which is an irresistible panacea for a more enhanced and virile economic stability in any state.

In fact, “the harm done during the reforms was so much and so deep that it would take time, patience and determination to restore the lost glory of the Service”.

The Ayida Review Panel on the Civil Service Reforms was inaugurated on 10th November 1994 to, amongst others, re-examine the 1988 Reforms. The Report of the Panel was highly and constructively critical of the 1988 Reforms. Amua (2011), emphasizes that it reversed most of the reforms of 1988, namely, that the:

1) Civil service should revert to the system that is guided by the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Civil Service Rules, the Financial Regulations and Circulars;

2) The Ministers should continue to be the Head of the Ministry and should be responsible for its general direction but he/she should not be the Accounting Officer. Instead, the Permanent Secretary should be the Accounting Officer of the Ministry;

3) The title of Permanent Secretary should be restored. She/he should be a career officer and should not be asked to retire with the regime that appointed him/her;

4) The post of Office of the Head of Civil Service should be re-established as a separate office under the President and a career civil servant should be appointed to head the office;

5) The pool system be restored for those professional and sub-professional cadres that commonly exist in ministries /extra ministerial departments;

6) Ministries /extra-ministerial departments should be structured according to their objectives, functions and sizes and not according to a uniform pattern as prescribed by the 1988 Reforms. Each could have between two (2) to six (6) departments;

7) Personnel management functions in the Civil Service should be left to the Federal Civil Service Commission with delegated powers to ministries;

8) Financial accountability in the Civil Service should be enhanced through strict observance of financial rules and regulations;

9) Recruitment into the Federal Civil Service at the entry point should be based on a combination of merit and Federal Character, but further progression should be based on merit;

10) Decree 17 of 1984 which empowers government to retire civil servants arbitrarily should be abrogated;

11) The retirement age in the Civil Service should be sixty (60) years irrespective of the length of service;

12) Government should harmonize the pension rates of those who retired before 1991 and those who retire after 1991; and

13) Salaries, allowances and welfare packages of civil servants should be substantially reviewed upwards and should be adjusted annually to ameliorate the effects of inflation, and discourage corruption.

In continuation, Nwankiti, (2006), every sovereign state designs the kind of civil service that complements its statute and accomplishes its national mission. One of the clearest manifestations of the dire situation of Nigeria is the absence of mission in the character, orientation or perhaps the lack of it, in the Nigerian public service. The Nigerian civil service is terribly ossified. The civil service is normally the thinking arm of the sovereign nations, and often draws from a country's most unique talent pool; from its established centres of knowledge production - the universities, the research centres and the entire school's system. It generates ideas to create and continuously renew the charter and mission of nationhood.

In the case of Nigeria, reflecting the collapse of almost all its strategic national institutions - the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the police, the school's system, etc.- what we now have is a paradoxical service: ignorant, unimaginative, over bloated and careerist. In some very important respects, there is strength in that background, and in many other fundamental respects, there is weakness of the sort that can lead to a potential misreading that might end up misdirecting the necessary changes required to transform the Nigerian service for greater efficacy.

From 1957 when the first set of Nigerians were carefully recruited directly to the colonial Administrative Service then under the leadership of the English Chief Secretary, Sir Ralph Gray, preparatory to home rule, it was assumed that Nigeria would build upon the best tradition and values of its inherited service. But midway into the postcolonial state, that service lost its direction, and was further destroyed and corrupted by the buffalo soldiers who ruled and co-opted the civil servants into their buccaneering ways.¹³ According to Priskeley, what emerged, especially by 1970, after the civil war, with the forced removal of many officers among some of the more experienced and efficient of that generation, and compounded by the Murtala/Obasanjo shenanigans of 1975 was a cynical and careerist service, (Priskeley, 2011). Babangida's regime further attempted some reform, giving permanent secretaries new titles and new executive authority, revising the tenure principle of the permanent under secretary. The current reform plans by this administration, and announced by secretary to the federal government risks further politicization of the service. Destroying the tenure of the permanent secretary will create new avenues and incentives for even greater corruption.

Akallah, (2008) duly note the excuse Oronsaye gives for his reform plans. The top, he says, is too overcrowded, and too linear in its regional character. It goes right to the heart of the contradiction that has become the Nigerian public service.¹⁴ For long, officers were not recruited, promoted, and maintained per efficiency, but on selective quota - the so called "federal character" requirement. Many junior and inexperienced people, with varied and even occasionally ambiguous levels of skill, training, and preparations from so-called "disadvantaged" states were brought in and sometimes promoted and privileged over more tested and senior officers from other parts of the country.

FEDERAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION INNOVATION ON APPOINTMENTS, PROMOTION AND DISCIPLINE

The new innovations, which the Commission will hopefully bring to bear on the Civil Service Reforms, are:

Recruitment

- ⊙ That professional examination bodies and professional organizations should be involved in the recruitment exercises. This will bring about standardization, uniformity and transparency;

- ⊙ That transfer and secondment into the Federal Civil Service should be limited to critical areas of needs in order not to jeopardize the promotion prospects of serving officers; and

- ⊙ That a database inventory to determine the capacity and requirements of the Civil Service and utilization of such resources through a suitably designed pooling mechanism be established. This will help check the suppression of vacancies where they exist.

Promotion

- ⊙ That promotion in the Civil Service should be based on the attendance and successful completion of short time training programmes by civil servants on their professions, management and leadership;

- ⊙ That promotion in the Civil Service at certain Grade Level be tied to membership of professional organizations;

- ⊙ That officers on secondment to international organizations abroad should, on their return, be permitted to sit for promotion examination and if successful, should be granted appropriate notional promotion to enable them be at par with their colleagues;

- ⊙ That notional dates of conversion/upgrading of officers should be the dates of acquiring the relevant additional qualifications;

- ⊙ That officers who pass promotion examination but could not be promoted due to vacancy constraints should

- ⊙ not be subjected to repeat such examinations when vacancies become available. Such officers should be promoted in order of merit of their performance in the examination whenever vacancies are available; and

- ⊙ That officers who passes the required promotion examination should have their salaries upgraded to the next level and the salary be made personal to them.

Discipline

- ⊙ That the extension of suspension and interdiction of an officer beyond three months in the first instance must be approved by the Commission failing which the Commission reserves the right to recall such officers;

- ⊙ That Ministries/Extra-Ministerial Departments should respond to all disciplinary cases pending before them for review within four weeks and those for retirement from Service in public interest should be concluded within two weeks;

- ⊙ That Ministries/Extra-Ministerial Departments, in handling delegated disciplinary cases, should forward to the Commission minutes of deliberations to ensure standardization and uniformity and that all such actions are taken in accordance with the extant rules;

- © That all cases involving criminal offences and which attract legal proceedings like theft, embezzlement and fraud be allowed to go through the normal judicial process in accordance with Public Service Rules on charges of misconduct in the matter; and
- © That decisions of the Commission on all appeal cases be conveyed directly to the appellants through their Ministries/Extra-Ministerial Departments.

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE AND THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

There is no doubt; the post independent civil service in Nigeria has not adequately promoted sustainable human development in the bureaucratic setting. This has actually hampered the optimum goals of the entire administrative system, characterizing itself in poor organizational performance, required administrative efficiency and effectiveness in the day-to-day administration of both federal and state ministries as well as parastatals and agencies. Hence, experts in public administration have been busy theorizing impracticable ideas on Nigeria's civil service, without articulating the best practicable means of using the said civil service to promote sustainable human development in the country.

For emphasis sake, Sustainable human development is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come. The term was used by the Brundtland Commission which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Smith et al, 1998). Sustainable development ties together concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity. As early as the 1970s, "sustainability" was employed to describe an economy "in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems" (Stivers, (1976). The field of sustainable human development can be conceptually broken into three constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability and sociopolitical sustainability.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

The concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and

The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs" (DeSimon et al, (1997).

Conclusion/recommendations

The Civil Service of any country is a moving force that pilots its administrative machinery. The sixty four-year existences of Nigeria's Civil service, vis a vis, its promotion of sustainable human development has been critically appraised, with the conclusion that the civil service is still characterized by unequivocal sense of contradictory systemic malfunctions and profound character of administrative ineptitude, bureaucratic inertia and, personality decay. To this end, actualization of sustainable human development in the context of contemporary civil service in Nigeria is

a fundamental mirage. First both the military and civilian administrations have placed little or no premium on such efforts. Again, the Nigerian civil service truly needs bold and far-reaching reforms, not tepid, and arbitrary changes. We need to keep the permanent secretary, permanent. We need to create a lean, dynamic, and imaginative service. We need to recruit the highest quality of individuals to the service, and above all, instrumentalize the service as the delivery arm of government. We need to remove quota as a condition for the recruitment of the administrative cadre of the service, and base both recruitment and advancement on merit.

Accordingly, the problem of Nigerian Civil Service is not necessarily administrative reforms and their implementations, but how to assimilate the able-bodied manpower, who are graduates roaming the streets of the country searching for gainful employment on daily basis. The government should do something about this, otherwise, Nigerian bureaucratic system may end up producing what we do not consume and consuming what we do not produce. Hence, this is a serious challenge to public administration in the twenty-first century Nigerian Civil Service.

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