

PUBLIC POLICY MASTER CLASS

WITH

AG PARTNERSHIPS
Management Consultancy & Financial Advisory

Reforming the Civil Service

Today, one may dare to say that the Nigerian public sector operates with a different set of norms than the rest of society. Recruitments appear to be based on connections rather than merit; promotions tend to be based on tenure of service rather than performance; contributions are made on the basis of hierarchy rather than knowledge; processes are designed to be convoluted rather than simple and the concept of accountability is scarcely enforced. The civil service appears to be attracting those who want to do the barest minimum and exploit the system, some who cannot find employment in private corporations and others who crave the assurance of life-time job guarantees. This is in stark contrast to the 1960s and 70s when the civil service and education sector attracted the best minds in the country. The quality of governance today reflects this downward spiral in civil service norms.

The World Bank identifies six key indicators which can be used to assess governance in various countries. These governance indicators include: i. voice and accountability, ii. political stability and absence of violence, iii. government effectiveness, iv. regulatory quality, v. rule of law and vi. control of corruption. According to the worldwide governance indicators 2013 study by the World Bank, Nigeria consistently ranked below average on governance indicators between 1996 and 2012, alongside Zimbabwe, Somalia and Sudan amongst other countries. Key African peers such as Ghana and South Africa outperformed Nigeria on all parameters during the period.

What are some of the key issues with our civil service?

Politics: The British established our civil service to be non-partisan in order to effectively deliver on its mandate without interference by politicians. With this in mind, there came the emergence of Permanent Secretaries to demonstrate that unlike Ministers, who are political appointees and have shorter tenures, civil servants are career professionals with long-term offices. However, today's Permanent Secretaries are politically appointed and the civil service mainly does the bidding of the government of the day.

Unattractiveness of sector: In its current form, our civil service is more attractive to those who want to exploit inefficiencies in the system. Its people are typically slow and indifferent and its compensation structure is uncompetitive for today. The sector is therefore unable to attract the right calibre of personnel to inspire change. A competent and motivated civil service is important for government to effectively deliver its policies and programmes to society. It is useful to note that compensation in the civil service had always been lower than in the private sector.



THE FUNCTION OF COORDINATION IS SO HUGE THAT WE RECOMMEND INSTITUTING A TEAM UNDER THE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY TO THE GOVERNMENT TO CONTINUOUSLY EVALUATE THE ACTIVITIES OF ALL MDAs AND ENSURE THAT DUPLICATION IS MINIMAL. IT SHOULD SERVE AS A CENTRAL UNIT THAT ALSO ANALYSES THE EFFECT OF VARIOUS POLICIES AND PROGRAMS ON EACH OTHER AND PROFFERS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRIORITIZING INITIATIVES

However, the disparity was not as stark as it is today.

Overstaffing and duplication: There are too many people doing too little in our civil service. This problem cuts across both the federal and the state civil services. In a bid to tackle unemployment, the government has absorbed a plethora of people who have no business being in the service and this has given rise to an over-bloated and bureaucratic workforce. In addition to overstaffing, functions appear duplicated within and across ministries, departments and agencies resulting in a waste of funding. More serious is the fact that processes which have been automated in many other countries are still bogged down ancient paths.

Inclusion at the expense of merit: In a bid to ensure that all states in Nigeria are included in the process of governance, Federal Character has been pursued at the expense

of meritocracy. In addition, people transfer from the state civil service to the federal civil service without the exposure and training required in the federal civil service. This dilution has reduced the efficacy of the federal civil service and exposes the weakness in many state civil services. It also discourages those in the federal civil service who may be more experienced and competent than those transferred.

Long service over quality: The length of service is the primary consideration for promotion in the civil service. People wear these years like stripes from war. Unfortunately, this is often at the expense of quality of contribution and delivery. A focus on long-service alone, limits competitiveness and innovation and where these are not encouraged, bright minds will shun civil service. In recent years, promotion examinations were introduced to assess quality however these are typically not used in determining promotion or continued service.

Limited Accountability: Sources of government revenue appear delinked from the people so the burden of accountability is not shared. Over 70 per cent of our revenue is from natural resources which promotes the rent-seeking behavior in our society. The United States of America generates an estimated 40 per cent of its revenue from income tax, which makes the use of public funds everybody's business and the creation of more jobs, in order to get more taxes, the business of government. Civil servants must therefore treat government work, property and money like their own and become more accountable.

Red-tape and Corruption: Red-tape is used as a weapon for corruption. The use of the word corruption is usually associated with public servants who abuse their position and power and use it for private gain. It is a phenomenon that has become deeply rooted in the Nigerian civil service and cuts across all strata. From the clerk who will not move a file until he is bribed to the director who will not treat it until he is settled. The system is repeatedly abused. Corruption is motivated by both need and greed and the failure of the government of the day to deal decisively with corrupt officials helps to increase the rot in civil service. Many civil servants have children and wards in foreign educational institutions at costs several times their annual pay and one can only wonder where the additional funds come from.

How do we move forward?

1. Implement civil service reform
I am aware that many attempts have been made at civil service reform in the past. Post-independence, there were commissions and review panels including Morgan, Eldwood, Adebo, Udoji, Phillips, Decree No. 43, Ayida, Obasanjo and the Oransanye Panel, which were tasked with repositioning the civil service towards efficiency. Many of these reforms yielded very little results. However, there remains a need for a comprehensive

review of prior panel reports in light of the current structure, composition, compensation, rules and outputs of the civil service. Our government must have the political will to take decisive action and implement recommendations that will improve the process of governance. There is no use in constituting panels and commissions if their findings and recommendations will remain unimplemented.

2. Fully implement IPPIS

Under the 1999-2007 administration of President Obasanjo, the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System was approved for implementation. The system authenticates all public servants by checking and uploading their credentials – birth certificates, school certificates, employment and promotion letters amongst others, and then inputs their bank account details into a database. This is used to validate their existence (and weed out ghosts), authenticate records to ensure that staff indeed qualify to be civil servants and then make direct payments to each staff. While the implementation of IPPIS has been hampered by some public servants who resist accountability, the estimated 30 per cent implementation has thus far resulted in huge cost savings for the government and a significant reduction in staff numbers. It is therefore recommended that the government commits to the full implementation of this system in order to allow us derive credible figures on the number of federal civil servants and the actual recurrent expenditure of government. This will also improve public sector personnel management and reduce waste.

3. Modernise processes and institute coordination

It is imperative that many of the processes in government become automated and modernised to eliminate corruption and inefficiency. Physical file movement, raising hard-copy vouchers, issuance of cheques and utilisation of cash should be discontinued and replaced with more modern alternatives. Coordination is vital to the streamlining of functions and success of MDAs in achieving their objectives. The function of coordination is so huge that we recommend instituting a team under the office of the Secretary to the Government to continuously evaluate the activities of all MDAs and ensure that duplication is minimal. It should serve as a central unit that also analyses the effect of various policies and programs on each other and proffers recommendations for prioritising initiatives.

In the words of Governor Chris Christie of New Jersey USA, 'There has to be parity between what is happening in the real world and what is happening in the public sector.'

By Angela Adebayo
For: Alegna Global Partnerships
www.agpartnerships.com