

## The Public Service and Problem of Morale: Nigeria in Perspective

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**Abstract.** The Public Service is viewed the world over as the Government on the spot or most demands and needs of a society. It is characterized as non-profit making but service oriented.

The civil service forms the major or focal point of the public service in any society, and the symbolization is stronger even with the civil service in terms of bureaucracy. Many schools of thought accuse the civil service, most especially in the developing countries of inertia. Yet it is the main force of stability in terms of crisis and a powerful force for growth and change in normal times in any country. This paper takes a general global look at the nature, role and organization of the public service and the civil service in particular. An attempt was also made of examining the civil service in Nigeria and the problem of morale, performance and job satisfaction. In so doing, the author employs secondary method of generating data. The Government is known to be the largest employer in most societies of the world and most especially in developing nations. The government is the fastest growing employer and it is known that public employment expands as existing activities grow and new activities are undertaken. Usually, the choice between alternative proposals rests with ministers or commissioners, and once these duos have their final decisions. It is the duty of civil servants to implement them in the possible manner as if the

decisions were their own. It is generally known that the morale of the civil service is therefore, a matter of the greatest importance to the government and all governments should as a matter of fact realize this.

As long as members of the civil service carry out their duties diligently and in loyalty, honesty, and to the utmost of their capacity, one expects they should be given the full measure of protection by Government.

**Keywords:** Public Service, Civil Service, Morale, Loyalty.

### 1. The Civil Service within the Machinery of Government

It is of most importance to define the civil service as the main component of the public service. The civil service the world over is fathomed to mean the executive arm of government. For the purpose of this paper, it would be necessary to establish a working definition of the term to avoid any misunderstanding of what is being discussed. Civil service as it exists today, is the executive organ of government through which governments' dreams, objectives and policies are translated into action and reality. It is the organization of government ministries which is the basic structure and machinery of government.

The civil service exercises control and supervision over all other arms of the public service, for example, the ministry of education supervises educational institutions and related bodies. Thus other arms of the public service reach the government only through the civil service and the ministers or commissioners in charge of such ministries and departments.

## 2. Definition and Role of the Public Service

It is perhaps necessary to begin this section by attempting to first give a definition of the public service. Public service, in precise, is the entire machinery of government in any country. It includes the police, the Armed Forces, all government Boards and parastatals including the Teaching Service, Local Government Service, Government health institutions and Judiciary. Public Servants are career officials whose job is to enforce standards and laws as well as provide welfare services in diverse and swiftly changing conditions.

According to Anifowose and Enemuno (2000), public service represents the employees of government. They are those responsible for the functioning of government through the implementation of government policies. Such policies include welfare services rendered to the citizens.

Anifowose and Enemuno posited further that public service is therefore made up of workers in government ministries, parastatals and agencies. Workers in the ministry of education, central banks of Nigeria, NITEL, Water Corporation, etc. are all members of the public service. Within the public service, the scholars said that, we have the civil service, which constitutes the inner core or the heart of public service.

In actual fact, the relevance or importance of public service in any setting cannot be over-emphasized. It is the public service that ensures the continuity of government, acts as custodian and protector of the public interest and public treasury against violation by the ruling class The Public Service, particularly the civil service

should serve any political master faithfully as they enjoy security of tenure of office.

Edigin (2003), asserted that civil service of a nation is perhaps the centerpiece of its administrative activities and performances. Its output mirrors the performance of the ruling government. As the arm of government charged with the formulation and implementation of public policies, the civil service is expected to play a vital role in the political, economic and the overall social development of a nation.

In Nigeria, the civil service has been subjected to various metamorphic changes from the colonial era through independence to the present time. Among others, it has been modified by successive governments-Civilian and Military. Structural changes notwithstanding, the traditional role of the civil service should remain the same. The civil service in this manner thereby acts as a driving force in the process of national development.

According to Longe (1985) a former secretary to the Federal Military Government and Head of the civil services emphasized on the importance of civil service thus:

*Successive governments in Nigeria since independence in 1960 have acknowledged that no matter how well meaning and how well articulated the programmes of any government may be, they cannot be successful implemented without an effective civil service on whose loyalty and commitment depends on the translation into action of ministerial decisions. The strength and efficiency of the civil service is vital to the success of the government as a whole.*

As the role of governments have considerably changed from its traditional regulatory function to one involved with the full scope of contemporary life, the Civil Service in a modern nation-state has had to advise on aspects of policies such as housing, public transportation ,health care, defense and internal affairs. Etc.

Writing on the functions of the civil service in developing society, Frank L.Blitz has this to say; In the contemporary world, no government can discharge its obligations without an efficient and

organized civil service. The function of the civil service in the modern state is not merely the improvement of government; without it indeed government itself would be impossible.

In the same vein, the Public Service Review Commission in its submission to the Federal Government of Nigeria in 1974 clearly states as follows:

- The new style public servant is conversant with the objectives and broad outlines of the Development plan and knows his role in the achievement of targets that come within the area of his responsibility whether large or small. He is result-oriented and such is not so much interested in minuting a file or writing a memo as is what actually happens on the ground; he wants to see results. He does not merely administer the established order by processing matters that come before him; he manages, that is, he makes things happen by organizing men and materials in order to achieve the particular objectives of his ministry or organization, within time targets. Such management is a vital factor in Nigeria's drive for development.
- Today, the Nigerian public services are recognized in the affairs that were beyond the imagination of our civil servants fifteen years ago. We are now selling insurance and minuting; we are banking and building. Tomorrow, we shall be forging still and educating every young Nigerian through his primary school years. All these are in addition to the regular work that itself has continued to expand along with all these new dimensions.

In precise, the above represents in a nutshell the task ahead of the developing civil service of Nigeria. The civil service as an organization is supposed to be organized and structured along certain prescribed norms if it is to achieve its aims. Being the principal organ of the nation's bureaucracy, the civil service represents all the activities of government.

### 3. The Civil Servant and Problem of Loyalty and Morale

The term civil servant should be understood to apply to any staff in a Government Ministry from the messenger to the permanent Secretary. It does not include the ministers or commissioners who are usually referred to as 'public functionaries'.

The civil servant is a servant of the state and his first loyalty therefore is to the state. Since the government is charged by popular choice with the control and administration of affairs of the state, the civil servants' loyalty is to the government of the day, and he should appropriately feel a positive and consistent responsibility to prosecute the interest of the Government as his employer. This explains why the civil servant swears an oath of allegiance, oath of loyalty or office and oath of secrecy. The allegiance or loyalty is to the state and government. The effectiveness of the government therefore, depends on the efficiency of the civil service and its ability to respond in practical terms to its policy decisions.

Agagu (2001) had his view that there have been many administrative reforms in Nigeria, but their impact have not been very significant. He came up with cogent reason that civil Service in Nigeria has really been confronted to the characteristic features of the third world countries, but in the nearest future it may improve.

Adebayo (2011) asserted that with the emergence of modern states, the civil service evolved as the bedrock of the executive arm of government and its task came to be the implementation and execution of the policies decided on by the legislature or those appointed by the legislature to carry on the executive work of government.

*It could be said therefore that civil service is the custodian of government's reputation because if it fails to carry out government's policies faithfully and efficiently, it may not only frustrate these policies but might seriously undermine government position and stability. This perhaps emphasizes the special relationship between the civil servants and the governments to the attitude of the civil servants*

*to their administration and their concern to ensure that attitude orientation in the services are in complete accord with the philosophy underlying the government's policies. This feeling is a common feature of every government.*

The above is in line with the idea of Garreft (1980) that the civil servant should not identify himself with any political party in order to be able to respond to the policies of the party in power.

The essential point, however, is not acquisition of a party card or lip service to the policies of the government in power; so much as a clear understanding of the policies of government and the significant role the civil service has to play as the executive arm of government in the development of the state.

The understanding is that policy decision is the responsibility of ministers or commissioners and the cabinet, and the civil servants' essential role is to implement to the best of his ability the decision handed down to him by his minister or commissioner and the cabinet or council.

It must however be understood that the higher civil service plays a vital role in the decision making process and the most important feature of the civil service could be said to be its non-partisan political character and as long as the relative role of the ministers/commissioners and civil servant are well understood, there is usually a smooth relationship between them. It is supposed to be a permanent service and its members should not normally expect to take up or to quit office on a change of government. But this feature was however eroded for years under the military government. The experience in Nigeria is that each time there is a change of government the civil service undergoes a trauma.

The civil servant is supposed to be in a position to serve all governments of whatever complexion with equal loyalty, and obtain the confidence of his minister or commissioner irrespective of his political affiliations.

This can only come about if civil servants particularly, those in the higher ranks, exercise special restraint in political matters, and are

sensitive to the political climate so that they do not embarrass their ministers or commissioners by their action. At the lower levels, the definition of the responsibility of the civil servant as one of carrying out the decision of his minister or commissioner fully describes his role.

The ordinary clerk, executive officer or artisan has to carry out instructions and though it is healthy for him to be able to appreciate the policy behind his instructions he ordinarily has no part in making that policy. It is his duty to carry out his responsibly diligently and to the best of his ability. He can make and often does make, suggestions for improvements in method and result which are welcome, but has no part in the formulation of political or administrative policies.

His immediate loyalty is to his superior officer in the service, and this loyalty ultimately leads by the normal chain of command to the minister or commissioner. The civil servant in the more senior posts of responsibility, however, has an important role in policy formulation. He is usually an officer with long personal experience and expert in knowledge, and is able to bring that experience and knowledge to bear on policy matters which should greatly assist his minister or commissioner. This is particularly the case with such officers as permanent secretaries, heads of Divisions and their immediate deputies and assistants. They have a normal responsibility of advising their ministers or commissioners over the whole range of their official duties. This advice is not only on the formulation of policy, but also on the execution and effect of any proposed policy. They also have the responsibility for interpreting to their staff the precise nature of their ministers' or commissioners' policies. All these form part of morale to these higher executives.

Adabayo (2011:71) emphasizes the vital and crucial role of the higher civil service in determining the effectiveness and efficiency of government since it participates fully in formulation of policy and at the same time is responsible for the execution of agreed policy and feels that this role is even greater under a military rule. The topmost civil servants may

therefore put forward policy proposals and could be loosely called “policy makers” the need for top ranking civil servants to be sensitive to the political wishes of their political masters has already been emphasized. At the level of permanent secretary, a realization of this need is the keynote to successful management and cordial relationship between the civil service, the cabinet or council and the governed.

Usually, the choice between alternative proposals rests with the ministers or commissioners, and once the ministers or commissioners have made their final decisions, it is the duty of civil servants to implement them in the best possible manner as if the decisions were their own. Most lectures on refresher courses for officers of the service lay great emphasis on these needs.

#### 4. Conclusion

The good civil servant is said to be one who studies his minister’s or commissioner’s ways and saves him from trouble. He has a special responsibility for preventing his minister or commissioner from making a fool of himself and this he must do in tactful, quite and unobtrusive way.

It is certainly clear that no minister or commissioner wants to be led by civil servants. The civil servant is, however, prevented from replying publicly to public criticisms since he has no voice but that of his minister or commissioner and so, the minister or commissioner ought to defend his civil servants from criticisms or attacks in respect of acts which they carry out in their official capacities.

The civil servants may see this as a source of frustration and demotivation. Today, if one should visit civil service, very often you hear them say “it is a thankless job”. It does appear that civil servants are gradually and very fastly to beginning to feel that their service is not worth the care. Such statement and feeling can only be taken as an expression of a lowering of morale.

This situation seems to be on the upward trend and it seems as if it becomes worse with each change and operation of government. The importance of mutual confidence and loyalty

between the civil servant and the Government cannot be over emphasized. The civil service, as it is believed holds the key to the effectiveness of the government and its ability to manage efficiently the affairs of the state .

The morale of the civil service is therefore a matter of the greatest importance to the government and all governments should realize this. As long as members of the civil service carry out their duties diligently, in loyalty, in honesty and to the utmost of their capacity, one expects they should be given the full measure of protection by government and get their morale boosted.

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