

PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

The inability of the public service to deliver effectively public goods and services and high incidence of ghost workers have justified the need to reform the public service to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in Nigeria. To this end, this paper examines the public service reforms and the Millennium Development Goals. The Weberian legal rationale bureaucratic theory was used to buttress the arguments in this paper which uncovered among others that the internal reforms and programs put in place to achieve the Millennium Development Goals are laudable. However, as a result of poor implementation, the achievements so far are nothing to write home about. For instance, despite poverty alleviation and eradication programs implemented at all levels of government to achieve goal 1 by 2015, the percentage of Nigerians living in extreme poverty remain 35% in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The paper recommends among others, the need for social and cultural re-orientation to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

The problem of development has attracted the attention of many development scholars for many years with an increase tempo in the new millennium. Although there are different perspectives to development but there exist a common consensus among academics that development leads to equitable distribution of basic necessities of life, employment opportunities, gender equality, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, improved literacy rate, maternal health, and eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The reality in Nigeria is that majority of the people are wallowing in abject poverty; wealth is concentrated in the hands of the few Kleptomaniacs who in one time or the other, occupied public offices. This placed Nigeria as observed by Igbuzor (2006) among the 20 countries in the world with the widest gap between the rich and the poor. He further observed that Nigeria is one of the largest exporters of crude oil and at the same time, occupies the third position as a nation with largest number of poor people after China and India (Igbuzor, 2006).

The inability of the public servants to deliver effectively public goods and services, poor costing of government programs and projects, poor implementation of government policies and programs, high incidences of ghost workers have justified the need to reform the public service over the years. This is because public service is the machinery through which the will of the state is formulated, expressed and implemented for the betterment of the entire citizens and by extension, for economic growth and development.

Nigeria was a party to the United Nations Millennium declaration which was adopted in September, 2000 at one of the largest gathering of Head of States committing both the rich and the poor countries to eradicate extreme poverty, achieve Universal Basic Education and promote gender equality among others. To achieve this, Nigeria embarked on multi-sectoral reform programs which include right-sizing of public services, implementation of accountability, transparency, anti-corruption measures and curtailing waste in the public services through monetization of fringe benefits, national health insurance scheme, pension reform and budgetary discipline (National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, 2003). This paper posits that with good implementation of the public service reforms programs, Nigeria will achieve MDGs by 2015. The paper believes that the reverse will be the case if the reforms are poorly implemented.

Public Service

The importance of public service in policy formulation and implementation cannot be over emphasized. In Nigeria, especially in the post independence era, the public servants assumed significant roles and served as the engine room of government. Public service in the developing countries as reported by Ayodele and Bolaji (2007) is everything and contains a network of human relationship and association extending from the highly influential government officials to the lowest paid and powerless individuals, charged with all human and material resources and all other aspects of the life of the society with which the government is concerned. In the same vein, Nwankwo (2006) observed that Public service comprises the civil service, the judiciary, the universities, the armed forces, the police and the parastatal organizations. It is a continuous active business part of government concerned with the implementation of government policies and programs to provide public goods and services. In essence, public service is the totality of how progress and development are made in the society. Obikeze and Anthony (2004) defined public service as the totality of services that are provided under public authority and all those who work for government are members of the public service.

On the strength of the above argument, this paper posits that public service comprises of all government employees: career, elected and political appointees; ministries, departments, agencies, police, Arm forces, custom, immigration and extra ministerial department like Economic and Financial Crime Commission etc. who are involved in formulation and execution of government developmental policies and programs to achieve Millennium Development Goals and improve the quality of life of its citizens.

Historical Development of Nigerian Public Service

Nigerian public service is a product of colonialism. It evolved from the colonial service that was established by the British as the administrative machinery for governing Nigeria. The primary responsibilities of the public servants were the maintenance of law and order rising of revenue to sustain the colonial authorities. The amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorate by Lord Lugard in 1914 as reported by Obikeze and Anthony (2004) led to the creation of a unified public service in Nigeria without due consideration to the diverse cultures, norms and conflicting values of the people. The creation of three regions North, East and West in 1954 led to the establishment of regional public services and public service commission at the centre and in each of the regions within the same period. The central and regional services thereafter, nurtured a career civil service within their respective domains (Adegrooye, 2006).

The introduction of the indigenization policy with all its defects was a significant development in the nation's public service. The policy was not interested in standard but in Nigerianizing the service. The relegation of merits and standard to the background as observed by Obikeze and Anthony (2004) did not make public service an effective and result oriented one and this may have contributed to the poor performance of the Nigerian civil service from independence to date. At independence, the role of the civil servants changed from the maintenance of law and order, collection of tax during the colonial era to that of facilitating the realization of nation's development aspirations. Consequently, the public servants became more involved in policy formulation and implementation to realize the developmental objectives of government (Adegrooye, 2006). Even with the military involvement in politics in 1966, the role of civil servants did not change significantly. In fact, it is on the record that the military government of General Ironsi and Yakubu Gowon relied heavily on the bureaucrats and almost all important decisions were taken by a small group of military elites together with a handful of civil servants advisor. It was believed by the succeeding Murtala/Obasanjo regime as reported by Ayodele and Bolaji (2007) that the public service carried its romance with the military to an extreme by engaging in graft, inefficiency, indolence and redundancy as to have warranted the sacking of over 10,000 of its personnel. Consequently, the great purge left

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the public service demoralized, ridiculed and battered. They further observed that the democratic government of the second republic complemented the destruction with the politicization, polarization and factionalization of the service. Even though several reforms were put in place to re-invent the public service by successive military government between 1983 and 1999, the impact of the reforms in improving the quality of lives is nothing to write home about (Ayodele and Bolaji, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Many theories have been propounded by different authors to explain the reasons for the dismal performance of Nigerian public service. To this end, the Weberian legal rationale bureaucracy is chosen as a tool of analysis of this paper. This is because the gap between the expected and the actual performance of public service bureaucracy in Nigeria has been a major subject of post – colonial interest in comparative Public Administration. The modern bureaucracy practiced in Nigeria is a product of European industrial revolution. It was designed by Weber as a replica of an efficient production machine. It is purposive arrangement of social role and status into hierarchical sets of productive relationship with a centralized command, such that it can perform superior functions at such a magnitude, speed and level of efficiency than no individual or groups of unorganized, unspecialized, persons can be attained.

Given its actual concept, should the institutions of public service of post – colonial Nigeria be seen as instrument of political administration or agencies for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals? Can the performance of the Nigerian public service bureaucracy before and during the era of the Millennium Development Goals could be said to have been consistent with the philosophy and expectation of Millennium Development Goals? A review of Nigerian public service to answer the above questions will reveal three major issues among others: Firstly, the public service was a purposely rationale machine created to facilitate the exploitation of the Nigeria Colonized economy. Secondly, its structures and leadership style were patterned on Western social class consideration in which the aristocratic class at the top, think and command the activities of the specialist or technical personnel in the middle and lower classes irrespective of the specializations and competence of the latter. Thirdly, its temperament, morale or outcome also predicate on the western civil culture in which the career public servant is completely subject to the overall direction of and indeed an operation adjunct to the political leadership at the top (Takaya, 1992).

Public Service Reforms

The search for more effective and productive public service for Nigeria has led to the establishment of many commissions at different times, under different regimes and governments. In fact, beside 1945 and 1946 Tudor Danis and Harragin Commissions which reviewed wages and general conditions of services and divided the civil service into junior and senior services, there are many reforms which focus on creating more appropriate structures and improving the efficiency of service delivery to the public. One of these reforms that need to be looked into is the Dotun Philips Civil Service Reforms of 1986. Some of the most important provisions of the reforms were;

- i. The post of permanent secretary was abolished. In its place, a new political post of Director General was created. The Director General lives office with the government that appointed him or her.
- ii. The civil service was professionalized in order to stimulate specialization and expertise. Consequently, an employee was expected to make a career in a particular ministry or department.
- iii. The office of the head of civil service was abolished, the minister aside being the chief executive, became the accounting officer in place of the permanent secretary.
- iv. Each ministry was empowered to undertake the appointment, promotion, and discipline of its personnel under the general and uniform guidelines provided by the Federal Civil Service Commission.

- v. Each ministry or extra ministerial department was allowed to have three common service departments namely; Department of Personnel Management, Department of Finance and Suppliers and Department of Planning, Research Statistics and not more than 5 other departments (Adegoroye, 2006).

Few years later, it became clear that the Dotun Philip's reform had some limitations, prominent among which were:

- a. There was inadequate knowledge about the provision of the reforms on the part of some civil servants and top government functionaries.
- b. There was the problem of human resistance to change and fear of the unknown on the part of many civil servants.
- c. There was wrong deployment of officers to the duties not relevant to their academic/professional background and training.
- d. There was lack of formal programs of reform implementation and sanctions for infringing the provisions of the reforms (Adegoroye, 2006).

As the result of the above limitations among others, the Federal Government in 1995 set up a civil service review panel under the chairmanship of Alison Ayida. The panel recommended the abolishment of the reforms and return to the status-quo. Despite all these reforms as observed by Adegoroye (2006) the Nigerian civil service was far from being ideal. It was characterized by corruption, little emphasis on result and concrete performance, low staff morale and productivity, poor staff training and development schemes and open demonstration of its inability to cope with the millennium challenges to achieve the millennium development goals. In the same vein, the then secretary to the government of the Federation, Ambassador Baba Gana Kingibe observed that:

“our public service has continued to show various degrees of deficiencies. Needed skills and competences are grossly inadequate and certain unhealthy practices in our promotion, discipline and developments have, over the years, cumulatively tended to institutionalized mediocrity and the dysfunctionalities in the system... the public service as you all know is the engine of government. Accordingly, a nation's economic growth and development are determined by the capacity and efficiency of its public service. Continuous renewal and transformation of the public service are imperative for it to respond to the development challenges of the 21st century” (Leadership, 2007).

The Federal Government responded to these challenges by developing comprehensive reforms packages under the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS) in 2003. NEEDS was aimed at reforming the public service among others by changing the way government operates, by identifying the core business of government and sticking to them while allowing other stakeholders to run businesses and provide other services for which they have comparative advantage over government. Others include implementing accountability, transparency and anti-corruption measures and curtailing waste in the public service through pension reforms, monetization of fringe benefits, national health insurance, professionalization of the service and budgetary discipline (NEEDS, 2003). In fact, NEEDS document on page 21 further states that “critical to successful implementation of NEEDS is an effective institutional framework, particularly a public service dedicated to excellence and support of reforms”. Several approaches have been taken among which are:

1. **Right-sizing the service:** This is a scheme to get rid of those who are incompetent professionally, technically and ethically.

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2. **Review of performance management system:** This is to transform the service from one of input-output-process system to a result oriented performance system.
3. **Restructuring of Ministries, Departments and Agencies:** This is to ensure that academic and professional qualifications matched tasks, positioning and that the application of Information Technology is being encouraged.
4. **Service-wide capacity-building:** This is meant to sharpen skills of officers, a process being carried out through repositioning of existing training institutions such as the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Centre for management Development (CMD), establishment of Civil Service College in Abuja for executive and middle level management training etc.
5. Review of public service rules, regulations and promotion of ethical conduct (Oladipo, 2007).

In promoting ethical conducts, a number of steps have been taken, prominent among them is the creation and strengthening of anti-corruption agencies such as: EFCC, ICPC, Dues process Office, etc. Other complimentary reforms to combat corruption and promote accountability are the policy of monetization which became imperative because of the large scale and unjustifiable cost of governance as issues of official transformation, housing, health and others continued to be sources of financial wastes and leakages. Oladipo (2007) observed that monetization confers the dual advantages of rightsizing the service as well as providing the platform for riding the system of corruption in high places. Similarly, the current public service reforms have produced a number of programs to meet the millennium development challenges.

Public Service Reforms and the MDGs

Since the millennium declaration of 2000, the millennium development goals have become important tools for monitoring progress on human development across national boundaries. As rightly observed in the introductory part of this paper, MDG's are eight (8) goals which the United nations have committed its members to achieve by 2015 as a response to the millennium development challenges. The eight main targets of MDG's are:

Goal 1: Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger

To reduce the number of people living on less than one US dollar a day and those suffering from hunger by 2015.

Goal 2: Achieve Universal Basic Education

Ensure that all children have access to primary education by 2015.

Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality

Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education enrolment and achieve equity at all levels by 2015

Goals 4: Reduce Child Mortality

To reduce by two-third the child mortality rate by 2015

Goal 5: Improve Maternal Health

To reduce by three-quarter the proportion of women dying in child birth by 2015.

Goal 6: Combat AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases

To halt and begin to reverse the incidences of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases by 2015

Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

To integrate the principles of sustainable development into countries policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources i.e. to reduce by half the number of people without access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015

Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

This goal commits both developed and developing nations to work together to achieve an open rule-based trading and financial system to increase aid to countries committed to poverty reduction and relieve for the debt problems of the developing countries (Nigeria MDGs Report, 2006).

Analysis and Conclusion

The internal reforms and programs put in place to achieve these goals by 2015 are laudable but because of poor implementation, the achievements so far are nothing to write home about. First and foremost, despite poverty alleviation and eradication programs initiated by government to achieve goal 1 by 2015, the percentage of Nigerians living in extreme poverty remain 35% in 2004, 2005 and 2006 (Nigeria MDGs Report, 2006). The adoption of Universal Basic Education (UBE), introduction of Education Trust Fund (ETF), Girls Education Program which guarantee places in schools for girls and encourage their attendance have improved literacy rate among the young people ages between 15-24 from 76.2% to 80.20% in 2005 (Igbuzor,2006; Nigeria MDGs Report, 2006). But significant numbers of Nigeria's children are walking on the streets without formal education. The efforts of government and non-governmental organizations over the years in promoting gender equality and women empowerment is encouraging but much needs to be done because a very huge gap exists between the ratio of male-female enrolment in schools, participation in politics and other economic activities. The above data shows a very slow progress towards the achievement of goal 2 and 3 respectively.

According to the Nigeria MDGs Report (2006) the infant mortality rate per 1000 live was 100 in 2004 but rose to 110 in 2005. While the maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births was 704 in 2004 but rose to 800 in 2005. With respect to goal 6, 7 and 8, one could argue that Nigeria's health status in general is poor. HIV/AIDS and Malaria are the major public health problems in the country. However, as a result of government commitment to roll back malaria initiatives, malaria mortality rate has reduced from 0.21% in 1999 to 0.16% in 2004. The activities of National Action Committee on AIDS (NACA), State Action Committee on AIDS (SACA) and other anti-HIV related programs have declined the spread of HIV/AIDS from 5.8% in 2001 to 5.0% in 2003 and 4.4% in 2005 but not halt the spread of HIV/AIDS (Igbuzor,2006; Nigeria MDGs Report, 2006).

In fact, if one should evaluate Nigeria's progress toward the achievement MDGs even from the government point of view, one would be left with no option than to conclude that Nigeria is likely not to achieve millennium development goals by 2015. According to Igbuzor (2006) the Nigeria MDGs report 2004, states that based on available information, it is unlikely that the country will be able to meet most of the goals in 2015 especially the goals related to eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, reducing child and maternal mortality and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. For the other goals, data exist which shows that if the current slow trend continue, it will be difficult for Nigeria to achieve MDGs target by 2015.

Recommendations

The following are recommended:

- i. There is need for social and cultural re-orientation to achieve goal 3 because significant gap still exist in the ratio of male-female enrolment in schools and participation in politics.

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- ii. Employment opportunities should be created to empower the poor individuals and families as this will go a long way in alleviating extreme poverty and hunger in the country.
- iii. Good implementations of poverty, Health, Education related programs to achieve goal 1,2,4,5 and 6 in Nigeria by 2015.
- iv. Finally, good implementation of the current Reforms in the public service.

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