

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS IN A POST-COLONIAL STATE: AN APPRAISAL OF NIGERIA'S EXPERIENCE UNDER OBASANJO REGIME (1999 – 2005)

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ABSTRACT

This article takes a critical look at the current reforms of the Civil Service being implemented by the Obasanjo administration. It examines the main components of the reform programme. The article notes that the current reforms just like the previous ones will fail because, they are based on the erroneous assumption that the main problems of the Civil Service are corruption, lack of professionalism, lethargy, low morale, weak institutional base, etcetera. It contends that these often identified problems are manifestations or symptoms of a more fundamental problem—the contradictions of the prevailing neo-colonial capitalist political economy. The article concludes that no reforms of the civil service will succeed unless there is a radical restructuring of the existing neo-colonial capitalist nature of the Nigerian state.

INTRODUCTION

The civil service of any nation remains its greatest asset in its quest for socio-economic and political transformation. Therefore, the efficiency of a state is predicated on the character of and methods of its civil service. This view was stressed by the Chairman of the Federal Civil Service Review Panel when he opined that, "there is a strong sense in which a country is a close reflection of the effectiveness and sensitivity of its civil service". The Nigerian civil service was a British creation and therefore a replica of the British civil service. It was established to provide a conducive socio-economic and political environment for the advancement of the British imperialist interest. Therefore the colonial civil service was more interested in resource exploitation than substantial and qualitative improvement in the welfare of the people.

Despite some modifications here and there, since Nigeria's independence in 1960, it still remains an uphill task trying to divorce the Nigerian bureaucracy from its colonial mentors vision. The Nigerian civil service continues to serve as an instrument of underdevelopment. Consequently, it has failed to act as an effective instrument for the socio-economic transformation of the country. Rather, it has been characterized by incompetence, pervasive and institutionalized corruption, lethargy, et cetera.

Consequently, many reforms have been carried out by successive governments in Nigeria with the aim of making the civil service result oriented and responsive to the needs of the generality of Nigerian population. Indeed, from 1960 when Nigeria became independent to 1994, seven Commissions or Panels have been set up to look into the problems of the public service and make recommendations on ways to improve its performance. However, these reforms were unsuccessful necessitating other reforms of the service.

Since 1999, the Federal Government, under the Leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, is under no illusion about the urgent need to affect the necessary reforms that will address the problems of the civil service and make it efficient and effective. "The government has embarked on measures to reorient senior public servants to new administration's expectation of them and to seek to reestablish old civil service values of loyalty, integrity, dedication and competence" (Musa, 2001:2). This article takes a critical look at the on-going reforms of the civil service embarked upon by the federal Government under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The main argument of the article is that the current reforms just like the previous ones are bound to fail because, they do not address the fundamental problem of the service which derives from the contradictions of the neocolonial capitalist political economy.

Administrative Reform – A Conceptual Analysis: Administrative reform has been variously defined. For instance, Caiden, (1969:65) defines it as "The artificial inducement of administrative transformation, against resistance". This as he puts it contains three interrelated properties: moral purpose (the need to improve on the status quo) artificial transformation (departure from existing arrangements and natural change process), and administrative resistance (opposition is assumed). Similarly, Quah (1976:58) defines it as:

A deliberate attempt to change both the structure and procedures of the public bureaucracy, i.e. reorganization of the institutional aspect and (b) the attitudes and behaviour of the public bureaucrats involved, i.e. the attitudinal aspect, in order to promote organization effectiveness and attain national development goals.

Thus, administrative reform has a 'moral content' in that it seeks to create a 'better' system by removing faults and imperfection. Similarly,

administrative reforms have a political content. As Caiden (1970:9) succinctly puts it:

Administrative reform is power politics in action; it contains ideological rationalization fights for control of areas, services, and people, political participants and institutions . . .

Administrative reform aims at making the administrative and political structures and procedures compatible with broader political goals. The crux of administrative reform, therefore, is innovation, that is, infection of new ideas and new people in a new combination of tasks and relationships into the policy and administrative process (Chikulo, 1981:57).

Administrative reform is a world-wide phenomenon.

Administrative delays and obsolescence and the consequent need for administrative "surgery" and "therapy" are world-wide problems. . . . An enormous amount of reform and improvement is necessary to develop the administrative structures and systems essential to the implementation of development plans and other measures to accelerate social and economic progress. (UNO, 1971:4)

Therefore, administrative reform is necessary irrespective of the stage of development of any country. Thus, Caiden, (1973:327) notes that "several countries, whose administrative capacity must be judged high by any criteria, have instigated comprehensive reviews of their machinery of government and administration". Similarly, many developing countries obsessed with the problems of survival, instability and societal poverty, have radically altered their administrative systems. The necessity of administrative reforms in developing countries is emphasized by the United Nations (1971:4) thus:

What is required in many developing countries is an "administrative revolution" in support of revolutionary changes in the economic and social fields in the Second United Nations Development Decade. . . . Public administration must be recreated, renewed and revitalized to produce the changes and achievements required in the transformation of societies. This necessitates a different kind and magnitude of administrative capability. . . . Dysfunctional and inapplicable administrative structures, systems and practices must be replaced. . . . A new concentration on achieving goals and the ability to solve complex operational problems becomes indispensable. . . .

Administrative reform is different from normal administrative improvement measures, basically in terms of their scope, modus operandi and implications. As a goal-orientated and comprehensive change exercise (Dror, 1976:127), administrative reform is different from mere reorganization.

According to Leaman (1976:8) administrative reform is reorganization of broad scope and of high intensity.

It is important to mention that administrative reform does not pretend to be evolving a perfect or problem free administrative system. As Chapman and Greenway (1980:231) point out, the aim of administrative reform is not 'how to ensure perfect efficiency but how much efficiency and of what kind.

Equally important is the fact that there is no universal formula for success in administrative reform. Therefore, "each country needs to shape its programs according to its unique circumstances, for among which are its stage of development, cultural pattern, political regime, access to administrative talent and functional requisites" (Caiden, 1973:336). However, every country shares the same objective in administrative reform and that is, to improve the administrative efficiency.

The Character of the Nigerian State and Administrative Reforms: This article adopts the Marxist theory of the state and by extension the post-colonial state to explain the problems of the Nigerian civil service and the utility of administrative reform as a solution to the problems. According to Ake (1985:105) "the state is a specific modality of class domination". This class domination is effected via a system of institutional mechanisms of the state and reducible to three major apparatuses each serviced by a bureaucracy, namely:

- 1) Governmental apparatus usually composed of three arms-legislature, Executive and Judiciary.
- 2) Coercive apparatus-Army, Police, Prisons, etc.
- 3) Ideological apparatus-the system of norms, values, mores and beliefs acceptable to the dominant class in a given epoch. These are usually spread through such agencies as the school, church, mass media and the family.

Therefore, contrary to the assertion of bourgeois or Western Liberal scholars, the state is not neutral but rather, serves to protect the interest of the dominant class. However, the manifestations of the state in the periphery remain unresolved. The questions that usually arise are: Does the peripheral capitalist state possess its own historical specificity distinguishing it from the advanced capitalist state? If so, how and why?

In an attempt to answer the above questions, Ekekwe (1986:12-13) states: "the state in the post-colonial periphery is a capitalist type of state, even though to some extent it is different from the state in advanced capitalist formations". It is a capitalist type state according to him, "since it is founded on social formations that are now largely incorporated into the global capitalist network of imperialism; in these social formations too the capitalist mode of production, though not in its pure form, dominates other modes". Ekekwe (1986:12) notes further that:

its fundamental problem is deeply rooted within the general contradiction of the prevailing political economy. As Obasi (1989:17) rightly points out with regard to the 1988 reform,

.... the reform failed to link these problems (corruption, bad management practices, etc.) to the structure and dynamics of the prevailing capitalist political economy. It failed to express the crucial fact why the civil service was used as an avenue for accumulating capital. Indeed, it failed to see the limitations of a civil service in a neo-colonial capitalist state as an instrument of development.

In summary, our main argument in this article is that civil service reforms in Nigeria have been superficial and cosmetic because, they were based on wrong interpretation of the root of the problem, which is structural.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA UNDER THE CURRENT OBASANJO ADMINISTRATION

Since assuming office for the first time in May 1999, as a democratically elected President and particularly, after his re-election for second term in 2003, President Olusegun Obasanjo has introduced a number of reforms which he believes will make the civil service more efficient and effective. It is important to mention that these reforms in the civil service are part of the wider reforms going on in the public sector, which are externally induced by the World Bank/ International Monetary Fund (IMF). Speaking at a retreat for Federal Permanent Secretaries and Directors, the Vice-President of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar said reforms in the nation's civil service was designed to meet the complex challenges of globalization (Nwezeh, 2005:1). According to him,

Government objective is clear: the people of this country require the delivery of high quality services so as to ensure sustained improvement in the quality of their lives. Civil service reforms are not just about slashing jobs but to reposition the service in order to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the complex challenges of globalization in a knowledge based environment (Nwezeh, 2005:1).

Like the previous reforms, the current civil service reforms are based on the wrong assumption that the main problems of the service are poor motivation, red tapes, poor record keeping, et cetera. The various reforms are aimed at solving these problems. No one has asked why these problems persist despite the previous civil service reforms introduced by successive regimes in Nigeria. The fact remains that the often identified problems of the civil service are symptoms of the more fundamental problem,

servants useful and effective in hitherto consultancy services offered at exorbitant rates by contractors.

In addition to the work being done under the Due Process and Procurement Reforms, the Ministry of Finance has launched a new process called Running Operational Reviews (RORs) designed to ensure that there is more transparent, efficient and effective use of resources in major government activities. According to the President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo (2003: 3):

RORS.... will allow for operational, logistical and financial reviews and assessments for major activities as they are being implemented so that lessons learned can be fed back "just in time" to improve the operations of that particular activity. Lessons learned can also be fed back to other similar activities thereby enhancing their effectiveness.

Apart from the above reforms aimed at ensuring transparency, accountability and efficiency in the conduct of government activities, the Federal Government has also introduced other reform in the Civil Service, which we shall discuss in the succeeding part of this article.

Monetization of Fringe Benefits: As part of its efforts to reduce the cost of governance and ensure efficiency in resource allocation, the Federal Government has decided to monetize the fringe benefits of Public Servants. The fringe benefits to be monetized include residential accommodation, furniture allowance, utility allowance, domestic servant allowance, motor vehicle loan, medical allowance, leave grant, meal subsidy, fuelling/maintenance and transport allowance and entertainment allowance.

The Committee on the Monetization of Fringe Benefits in the Public Service of Nigeria was set up by Mr. President on November 11, 2002 under the Chairmanship of the Secretary to the Federal Government, Chief J. Ekaette. It is expected that when fully implemented, monetization of fringe benefits will minimize waste, misuse and abuse of public fund and facilities, encourage public servants to own personal houses, enable public servants to plan for a more comfortable post-service life, reduce capital cost, maintenance and running costs and reduce rent as public servants who constitute 80 percent of the tenants, especially in Abuja, will have little money to offer to the landlords. Despite the advantages expected to accrue from monetization, its full implementation will result to retrenchment of workers, especially the drivers. The main components of the monetization programme are summarized as follows:

Residential accommodation: This has been monetized at 100 percent of Annual Basic Salary, which should be paid en bloc to enable an officer to pay for accommodation of his choice.

Furniture allowance: 300 percent of Annual Basic Salary has been recommended as furniture allowance. However, considering the large amount involved, this allowance would be paid annually at the rate of 75 %, which amounts to 300 % in four years.

Utility allowance: This has been monetized for public servants as shown on Table 1.

Table 1: Monetization of utility allowance for public servants in Nigeria

Grade levels	Allowance per annum
GL. 01 – 06	₦3, 600
GL. 07 – 10	₦6, 000
GL. 12 –14	₦7, 800
GL. 15 – 17	₦8, 400
Permanent Secretary	₦16, 800
Head of Service	₦16, 800

Domestic servant allowance: This allowance has already been monetized for Public Servants as shown on Table 2.

Table 2: Monetization of domestic servant allowance for public servants in Nigeria

Grade level	Number of domestic servants	Allowance per annum
GL. 15	1	₦119, 586
GL. 17	3	₦358, 704
Permanent Secretary	4	₦478, 344
Head of Service	4	₦478, 344

Motor vehicle loan and transportation: This has been monetized at 350 % of the annual basic salary in line with the provision of “Certain political, Public and Judicial Office Holders (Salaries and Allowances, etc), Act 2002”. The loan is to be recovered in 6 years. The existing interest rate of 4% on motor vehicle loan shall be paid by recipients.

Fuelling/maintenance and transport: The recommendation is that 30 % of annual basic salary shall be paid by Public Servants as Fuelling/Maintenance and Transport Allowance.

Medical allowance: Government proposed the payment of 10 % of an officer's annual basic salary as medical allowance.

Leave grant: This has already been monetized through the provision in the Public Service Rules, Chapter 13, section 13213 at 10% of annual basic salary.

Meal subsidy: This has already been monetized as on Table 3.

Table 3: Monetization of meal subsidy for public servants in Nigeria

Grade levels	Allowance per annum
GL. 01 - 06	₦6, 000
GL. 07 - 10	₦8, 400
GL. 12 - 14	₦9, 600
GL. 15 - 17	₦10, 800
Permanent Secretary	₦16, 200
Head of Service	₦16, 200

The Pension Reform Act 2004: The Pension Reform Act came into existence in 2004 as a result of an Executive Bill passed by the National Assembly. The objectives of the Act are as follows:

- a) Ensure that every pensioner who worked in either the Public Service of the federation, Federal Capital Territory and the Private Sector receives his retirement benefits as and when due;
- b) assists improvident individuals by ensuring that they save in order to cater for their livelihood during old age and;
- c) establish a uniform set of rules/regulations and standards to the administration and payments of retirement benefits for the public service of the federation, Federal Capital Territory and the Private Sector (See Section 2).

Some of the provisions of Pension Reform Act are as follows:

- a) Contributory Pension Scheme for Federal Public Service and Private Sector at the following rates:
 - i. Each employee of the Federal Public Service and the Private Organization who employs up to five person's, shall contribute 7.5 % of his total emolument as pension every month. His employer shall also contribute the same amount to the employees' retirement saving Account as the employee's pension.
 - ii. Military Personnel and their employer contribute 2.5% and 12.5 % respectively towards the personnel pension monthly (see section 9).
 - iii. The Judicial Officers (judges) and employees who have 3 years or less to his retirement under the previous Act(s) are expressly exempted in this Act (See Section 8).

Section 9(3) of the Act provides that employers shall maintain life assurance policy in favour of each employee to the tune of 3 times his total annual emolument. This is to be alternatively paid (in lieu of pension) to the next of kin of an employee who dies in service. Section 14 of the Act also

CRITIQUE OF OBASANJO'S CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS

Like previous reforms of the public service undertaken by successive regimes in Nigeria, Obasanjo's reforms operate from the erroneous assumption that the fundamental problem of the civil service had to do with lack of professionalization, absence of effective positive measures, weak institutional mechanism for public accountability and probity, et cetera. Thus, the reform glossed over certain fundamental questions: why did previous attempts by Babangida and previous regimes before him to curb corruption, professionalize the civil service, institute sound management practices and techniques, et cetera fail? Why is it that the Nigerian civil service in spite of previous reforms is still accused of being unresponsive to the developmental needs of the people? The current federal government, under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo is either ignorant or pretends to be ignorant of the fact that the often cited problems of the civil service and public service generally are symptoms of a more fundamental problem which is the neo-colonial capitalist nature of the Nigerian state. The Obasanjo regime "failed to see the limitations of a civil service in a neo-colonial capitalist state as an instrument of development" (Obasi, 1989:17). Instead of addressing the problems of the civil service through dismantling the existing neo-colonial capitalist structures, the Obasanjo regime choose the liberal approach by embarking on reforms which are superficial and aimed at meeting the conditionalities of the IMF and other international donor agencies.

There is no reason to believe that the current reforms will cure the fundamental ills of the civil service due to the following reasons. First, some of the recommendations of the Committee set up by the President to review the civil service include the professionalization of the service and the restructuring and strengthening of institutions. These recommendations are not new because, they were an integral part of the 1988 civil service reforms, embarked upon by General Ibrahim Babangida's regime. Yet, the civil service remained ineffective and inefficient, necessitating the current reforms. The recommendation on professionalization as Obasi (1989:19) rightly points out ignores the fact that "the tendency by civil servants to put aside professional knowledge and skills when dealing with issues and policies that are of great personal interest to them is most often deliberate". Professionalization of the civil service as part of the strategy of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the civil servants "divorces the behavioural orientation of civil servants from the dominant influence of the prevailing political economy" (Obasi, 1989:19).

Secondly, the emphasis of the reform on restructuring and strengthening institutions ignores the fact that the problem of the civil service is not the institutions but the substructure (the neo-colonial capitalist system) in which the institutions operate. A good structure may not work well under the current substructure.

Thirdly, the attempt in the current reform to curb corruption and enhance transparency and accountability through, "Due process" also begs the question. It emanates from the liberal view of corruption as being caused by greed and sheer selfishness rather than an inevitable product of the prevailing dependent capitalist system. Also it assumes that those who are to fight corruption in the civil service are above board uninfluenced by the dynamics of the capitalist system. The fact remains that the fight against corruption in the civil service will remain unsuccessful until there is a radical restructuring of the prevailing substructure which breeds corruption.

Finally, the proposed down-sizing of the Nigerian civil service is anti-labour and would be counter-productive in that it will lead to a feeling of insecurity and dampening of the morale of the civil servants. This was exactly what happened after the 1975 purge of the civil service by the Murtala/Obasanjo Military regime.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In this article, we have appraised the current reform of the Nigerian civil service by the Obasanjo administration. We noted that prior to the current Obasanjo regime, successive governments in Nigeria had implemented one form of reform or another in the civil service with the aim of making it efficient and effective. Yet, the civil service over the years has been criticized as ineffective and inefficient. Previous reforms failed because they were based on the erroneous assumptions that the problem of the civil service are nepotism, corruption, weak institutional base, lack of professionalism, apparent lack of executive capacity, et cetera. These problems are mere symptoms of the fundamental problem of the civil service, which is the neo-colonial capital nature of the polity. The article, therefore, contends that the current administrative reforms are superficial since they do not address the root cause of the problems. Only a radical restructuring of the existing neo-colonial capitalist political economy will provide a lasting solution to the current problems of the Nigerian civil service.

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