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Public service reform in Ethiopia: Challenges and gaps post-implementation

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Background: The Federal Government of Ethiopia has introduced successive public-sector improvement initiatives in the past few decades. However, preliminary studies and observations revealed that such efforts were far from meeting their targets of improving the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the public sector to the desired level.

Aim: This study has focused on identifying the challenges and gaps observed in the post-implementation phase of such initiatives.

Setting: Fourteen respondents were purposely selected, taking in account their extensive participation in both the implementation and post-implementation of the reform efforts with the justification that participation to such a degree provides them with a particularly higher level of access to the information related to the matter.

Methods: Basically, the study is characterised as exploratory in nature and used qualitative data with the pertinent analyses.

Results: It has been found that the reform programmes were top down, lacking the required ownership from the side of lower-level leadership and employees. As a result, the reform programmes were not popular and did not enjoy a reasonable level of commitment at the bottom of the hierarchy where the reform efforts were to be brought down on the ground for implementation and institutionalisation. The other finding demonstrated in this study was related to the fact that the reform agents as well as the process owners in the implementation endeavours were assigned not based on merit but political commitment. Obviously, such a lack of commitment to merit discouraged those experts with the required capabilities to make ends meet, casting a shadow on the successful implementation of the reform efforts. In addition, it has been found that the essence and strategies of the reform efforts were modelled on those of other countries and put into implementation in Ethiopia for all the sectors without doing the required adjustment and customisation on the ground. Also, the reform efforts were not able to offer incentives related to both the implementation and post-implementation phases.

Conclusion: It has been concluded, therefore, that because of the pitfalls in the reform efforts just mentioned, the desired targets of the reform efforts were not met. The study calls for further longitudinal study for informed decision regarding the reform initiatives in Ethiopia.

Keywords: Ethiopia; challenges; gaps; public service; reform.

Introduction

Public service reforms in the field of human resource management target reshaping the role of public administration to the changing demands of the society (Tjiptoherijanto 2015).The basic reason for engagement with public service reforms came from the perception that the system of public administration was incapable of providing good services to the public. Wescott (1999) stated that the ultimate goal of public service reform is to raise the quality of public services delivered to the population and to enhance the capacity to carry out core government functions. Most reforms in the area of public service were initiated because of slow delivery of services and lack of transparency and accountability in public service organisations. For example, as depicted by Moon and Kim (2006) in Indonesia, as in many other Asian countries, citizens have demanded cheaper, faster and better public services and more effective and efficient government.

As cited by many authors like Werlin (1992) and Esman (1988), public service reforms can take place in the form of a top–down approach or a bottom–up approach. Favouring the top–down approach, Werlin (1992:204), citing the example of countries such as Korea, argues that reforming central bureaucracies is primarily a problem of political will and government capacity to effectively use persuasive and manipulative (rather than coercive and corrupting) forms of power.

Esman (1988), on the other hand, advocated for a bottom–up approach. He claimed that system-wide reforms disrupt familiar routines and reforms if they concentrate on a few critical functions, shifting politically important patronage opportunities to less vital agencies. In Ethiopia, the public service reforms seem to take more of a top–down approach than bottom–up. The federal government has introduced national reform programmes as an instrument of public sector transformation towards delivering required services for citizens in an effective and efficient manner. In a bid to address these issues, different change initiatives such as management by objectives, Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), kaizen, balanced scorecard (BSC) and recently deliverology were introduced by the governing body. However, most of the observations have shown that the change outcomes were not up to the expected level. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges of and gaps in the reform agenda in the Ethiopian context, based on the qualitative data obtained from participants who are currently leading or working as reform officers in public service institutions in Ethiopia.

Problem description

Many authors have expressed their views on Ethiopian public reform initiatives. Paulos (2001) evaluated the first phase of public service reform and showed that duplicative positions were reduced by 10% to achieve efficiency in public administration. Tilaye (2007) described that various management tools such as BPR, strategic planning and a management and performance-based management system were introduced. He stated that the programmes were short-lived, and new ones would be introduced before observing the outcomes of the previous ones. It is with this fraught practice that the government commenced the third phase of its reform agenda in the form of the Five-Year Public Service Delivery Capacity Building Program following the launch of the Public Sector Capacity Building Program without adequately evaluating the level of effectiveness of the preceding one (Mohammed 2008). Getachew and Common (2006) expressed that some of the objectives of the reform programmes included building the capacity of the public service to enable the successful execution of the government policies and programmes, enhancing the transparency and accountability of the public service, building a public service that is ethical and free of corruption, and facilitating the public service's provision of efficient and fair services to the public. Unfortunately, whatever achievement the reform programmes have gained, the authors in the area agreed that they could not address the problems of good governance. In all cases, the authors based their insights on information obtained mostly within the bound of time when the results of the implementation stages were not yet adequately evident. In other words the opinions of such authors were generally formed at the infant stage of the implementation and this makes their opinions suspect. In addition most of the opinions of the authors were directed towards each intervention separately, failing to provide a holistic view of the challenges and gaps in implementing and institutionalising public sector reforms in general, regardless of the form a particular change initiative takes. As part of doing so, this study has made a point of focusing on the initiatives in their post-implementation phase by referring to data about the whole phase of initiation, implementation and post-implementation. It has been the case that the participants as the source of data were mainly those people selected on purpose based on their participation in the whole phase so they would provide data for the whole phase with better knowledge and memory. In addition, various related documents were used as both standalone sources of data or as instruments against which first-hand information from respondents was corroborated, targeted to evaluate the post-implementation period of the reform programmes based on empirical evidence from the respondents who participated and led the Ethiopian public service reform efforts. A preliminary survey of various documents within the target organisations themselves revealed that the public service reform initiatives were far from meeting their goals, prompting a detailed investigation into the real challenges and gaps in the process of putting these initiatives in place. It is to be noted that these documents were not able to identify the reasons for failure, apart from boldly pointing out that failure was rampant. So, it has become imperative to identify the challenges and assign causations for the next round of reforms to be effective by way of devising mechanisms to cope with these challenges. The following research questions were extracted from the research problem (gap) just stated:

- How effective were the public service reform programmes in meeting their envisaged objectives?
- What were the major challenges that were commonly encountered in the process of realising the public service reform programmes?
- What is the extent to which the reform programmes and the needs of the citizens were aligned?
- What is the level of commitment of the various participants in the public sector reform process?

Organisation of the article

This article consists of four parts. The first part constitutes the introduction, where the basic concept of the public-sector reform in theoretical and practical terms is presented against the background of the study section. The other section in the introduction part is the statement of the problem section, where the knowledge gap in the issue is identified and put forth, with particular reference to the public service reform programme endeavours in Ethiopia. The second part of this article represents the literature review, where both the conceptual and empirical developments in the issue were synthesised. The third part deals with the research methodology. The fourth part of the article presents the data analysis and discussion; the final part presents conclusions and future directions for study.

Review of related literature
Definitions

As defined by Schultz (2002:634), public service reform is a deliberate action to improve the efficiency, effectiveness,

professionalism, representativeness and a democratic character to public service, with a view to promoting better delivery of public goods and services, with increased accountability. Reform is fine tuning or redressing wrongs by altering the system. Some reforms require fundamental rethinking or assumption, and other reforms require improvements of the system. Reform can generally be distinguished from revolution, which means basic or radical change. Such actions can include data gathering and analysis, organisational restructuring and improving human resource management systems.

According to Verheijen (1998) cited in Bersisa, Zeleke and Gebremedhin (2016:27), there are different models used for the reform of public management or public administration. The author identified three models: radical reform, incremental reform and moderate managerialism. Public reforms relate to the general structure of a public sector or policy, or a business function of all the public organisations (as in performance measurement, human resources management, etc.).

Longo and Cristofoli (2007:28) argued that various assumptions can be identified to classify public reforms. Looking at the purpose of reform, various kinds of innovation in the public sector can be seen. Some of them relate to:

- the role of public administrations and the boundaries between state, market and public society
- the reshaping of public administration and the allocation of public functions (e.g. decentralisation and centralisation)
- the introduction of administrative rules and proceedings
- the identification of failings in public policies defining which actions have to be taken to contribute to the public interest, having a cultural and value background
- the introduction of managerial tools, such as organisational structures, stakeholders' control or evaluation systems, new marketing or finance solutions and so on.

As depicted by Tjiptoherijanto (2015), the new role of public service reform has been shaped by three main models: (1) public administration, (2) public management and (3) governance. While public administration can be defined as all the processes, organisations and individuals involved in carrying out laws and other rules adopted or issued by the legislature, public management redefines the relationship between the government and society. The author further identified that good governance entails sound public sector management (efficiency, effectiveness and economy), accountability, and exchange and free flow of information (transparency) along with a legal framework for development (justice and respect for human rights and liberties).

Features of public service reforms

There are various environments that affect public service organisations. These environments include global, political, legal, economic, technological, human, social and cultural factors, among others. Longo and Cristofoli (2007) suggested that the domestic environment, political agenda

and landscape, administrative paradigm and tradition, and national culture all have important roles in change and innovation. They added that the contingent history and structure of each single organisation element act as a key dimension for framing change. Public organisations differ from each other: They differ in their history, accountability, internal, managerial and operational development rates. Change leaders must consider outside influencers, as well as internal drivers as a key element when they consider designing, managing and evaluating change. Patrickson and Bamber (1995) stated that a multidimensional model of organisational change including managerial, technical and cultural aspects needs to be considered to understand the different organisational dimensions in which change occurs. In another perspective, as identified by Moon and Kim (2006), evaluating the intention (design) or result (effectiveness) of any public service reform is difficult for a host of reasons, including the political complexity of the reform, the vagueness of measurable outcomes, the different maturation periods required for policies to produce desirable results and variations in the durability (sustainability) of the reform. It is not easy to identify universal factors that contribute to the success of public administrative reform. For example, a strong top–down approach may be suitable for one country, whereas another may succeed with a bottom–up approach. As Peters (1998) notes, there are several 'antiphons' in administrative reform and contradictory reform ideas that always compete in an uncertain fashion.

Public service reform initiatives in Ethiopia

Based on the analysis of related documents, the Ethiopian public service reform initiatives made so far can be summarised as follows.

Business process reengineering

Ethiopia has been one of the most prominent adopters of BPR as a key approach for public service reforms. The federal government had made a decision to initiate BPR across all government institutions to achieve a significant change in public service delivery, which was followed by a sweeping campaign to implement it across the board in the public sector. Business process reengineering is seen as being at the more 'radical' end of reform initiatives, pursued by countries especially interested in importing private sector practices into the public service and in reducing the distinctions between the two. Despite the diversity of applications globally, there is no comprehensive assessment of how successful BPR reforms were in public sectors in Ethiopia.

Balanced scorecard

After BPR, greater emphasis was placed on the measurement of public service performance using the BSC tool, which aims to align individual and organisational performance. The federal government introduced the BSC in 2008. The BSC is being used as a planning, change management and communication tool and is also considered as an opportunity to embed strategic management principles into the strategic plan.

Performance accountability and transparency are also being sought through the introduction of the change army, under which the government seeks to unite the party, state and society to execute the gross transformation plan (GTP). In relation to this a Citizens Charter, a document that represents a systematic effort to focus on the commitment of public service providers to their users with respect to standards of service, information and grievance redressal mechanisms, has been developed and its implementation sought (Adebaye 2008).Though many organisations in Ethiopia adopted and implemented BSC as a tool to align strategic planning to specific performances, no comprehensive assessment was made of the effectiveness of BSC post-implementation.

Change army

Following its pilot application in the rural areas, since 2012 the change army has been streamlined into the public service to bring about national consensus by involving the party, state and citizens in its three wings, namely the party wing, state wing and public wing (Adebabay 2011).

The state wing (public service) consists of five levels: individual public servants, 'model' public servants, lower-level leadership, middle-level leadership and top leadership. At the lowest level, the '1 to 5' members are grouped together based on their work processes and led by a 'model' public servant (i.e. someone identified as an effective performer). These model public servants conduct daily or weekly peer reviews and evaluate the group's performance. This is expected to create a mechanism to coach junior staff and improve attitudes by putting peer pressure on public servants. The outcomes of these weekly discussions are presented to the lower-level leadership, which constitutes the lead public servants from the '1 to 5' groups and/or the middle-level group, which constitutes directors. The highest level, the council, constitutes top managers and directors and meets at least monthly. The council also meets monthly with all staff members to discuss performance reports and resolve internal issues, and it meets with the public wing on a quarterly basis (Adebabay 2011).

The public wing is a platform that consists of clients; associations for youth, women, professionals; cooperatives; private sector representatives; and others identified as relevant by government ministries, agencies and bureaus. On a quarterly basis, public wing members meet with the state wing (typically represented by a minister or state minister at the federal level) to discuss strategic plans and their implementation, the objectives set, the service standards agreed upon by the Citizens Charter, as well as new policy recommendations and issues related to rent seeking. The party wing is concerned with building a national consensus on the country's development strategy, and public service is one of the key players in this discourse. The party wing is responsible for providing orientation programmes to enable public service members to fully grasp and effectively execute government policies and strategies.

Kaizen: Service improvement

According to Imai (1986), *kaizen* is a concept meaning an ongoing improvement involving top management, managers and workers. The kaizen philosophy assumes that our way of life, be it working, social or home life, needs to focus on constant improvement. Kaizen was introduced in Ethiopia with assistance provided by the government of Japan under the former Ministry of Trade and Industry. Kaizen is one of the management tools selected to improve and enhance the managerial capability to implement the growth and transformation plan (Federal Republic of Ethiopia 2011). In the Ethiopian context so far there have been limited and inconclusive studies conducted on the implementation of kaizen. Findings by Seid (2012) showed that the implementation of kaizen increased labour productivity on average by 50%, time-wasted for searching tool; improved defect ratio that ranged from 50% to 70% and improved lead time in the range of 16%–90%. On the other hand, Desta et al. (2014) identified that employees didn't have the full capacity to accept the kaizen management system, and the executive managers themselves were not committed to kaizen teamwork because they did not usually allow shop floor workers to participate in teamwork. Hence, further studies are required on the implementation of kaizen as a reform tool.

The Citizens Charter

The Citizens Charter enables government institutions to enter into agreements with the general public on the provision of services and the modalities through which complaints will be resolved. The idea of accountability to citizens is a relatively new concept in the Ethiopian public service. The basic principles of the Citizens Charter were first initiated by organisations as part of the BPR process. All public service institutions were encouraged to establish service standards in consultation with users. Many organisations started to publicise these standards through notice boards at the entrances of public offices. However, there was no systematic monitoring of the organisation's actual performance against these standards. This led to significant variance downward from the standards set under BPR in 2007–2008. The government is now trying to reinstitute the service delivery standards under BPR through a formalised Citizens Charter. The Citizens Charter, where it is implemented, is published and disseminated to users using different mechanisms, including notice boards posted where services are provided. However, no systematic study was conducted to evaluate the outcome of this effort.

Deliverology

Because the individual public agencies, as well as all local governments set ambitious reform plans, the government of Ethiopia introduced deliverology to deliver results in public sector. The initiatives were made because frequently plans fall by the wayside and reform goals remain unmet, for a variety of reasons: Political pressure can cause priorities and resources to shift, success can be difficult to measure, consequences for failed delivery are less obvious than in the

private sector, and stakeholder motivations are not always transparent. Hence, the idea of deliverology is based on the premise that the challenge for public-sector organisations is to find ways to define and execute their highest-priority objectives so that they have the greatest possible impact. The Ethiopian government introduced an approach to managing and monitoring the implementation of activities that have significant impact on outcomes. The approach, called 'deliverology', leverages and extends the key principles of best-in-class performance management. The impact of deliverology was not assessed in its comprehensive form.

Gaps observed

Following the structural adjustment that was initiated in the beginning of the 1990s, the Ethiopian government deployed reform tools to ameliorate civil service delivery by government institutions in the country. As has been identified in the preceding paragraphs, the reform tools included BPR, BSC, the introduction of change army, Citizens Charter and deliverology. These change tools were implemented across all civil service institutions in the country. However, the preliminary studies and observations have shown that the efforts did not meet their targets at the expected level (Adebabay 2011; Paulos 2001; Solomon 2013; Tesfaye 2009). On the other hand, no systematic study has been conducted particularly in the post-implementation period showing why the tools did not meet the envisaged target. Therefore, the present study aimed to evaluate the implementation of the change efforts for informed decisions by purposively sampling informants who play key roles in government institutions in Ethiopia.

In summary, we can observe that the Ethiopian government has been rather open to adopting and testing new reform tools on a sweeping scale. However, the interval between successive change interventions has mostly been too narrow to make sensible post-implementation analysis possible. In fact, research studies on such post-implementation effectiveness analyses have always been very scant. In addition, existing studies were not able to portray the overall process, generally the case in all the reform interventions in general terms. Instead the studies separately shown the outcome of change interventions. One can, therefore, consider the fact that there has been no reasonable level of post-implementation analysis and no study that has managed to evaluate the reform implementation and management capability of Ethiopian public services in aggregate terms as gaps to be filled.

Research methodology

The purpose of this research is to assess the challenges and gaps in implanting public service reform initiatives of public institutions in Ethiopia. A qualitative research approach and exploratory design were selected to achieve this objective. Qualitative research captures the *how* and *what* of the collective experience (Creswell 2009). Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were used from published books, journal articles and documents

for reviewing the existing literature. The main data collection technique was group discussion conducted with employees currently working as reform officers in Ethiopian public institutions. A total of 14 change officers from various public organisations who demonstrated willingness to participate were invited for group discussion. The respondents were chosen using a purposive sampling method. Specifically speaking, they were chosen for their exposure of how the reform efforts have been executed and also of how the reform endeavours have unfolded in terms of meeting the envisaged objectives. Their knowledge of these issues was established as they had been taking part in the implementation of the change tools, as well as playing a change officer role by the time they were asked to take part in the focus group discussion. The participants were drawn from various government organisations, namely the Ethiopian Electric Corporation, House of Peoples' Representatives, Ministry of Social Affairs, Spa Service Enterprise, Ethiopian Management Institute, Ministry of Natural Resources and Agriculture, Educational Strategy Center, Central Statistics Agency, Ministry of Public Service, Sugar Corporation, Ministry of Public Media and Information Technology, Ministry of Social Security, Ethiopian Leather Institute and Ministry of Defense. Sample question items drawn from the focus group discussion guide are represented below:

- What are the triggering factors for public service reform initiatives?
- Do the public service initiatives meet their envisaged agenda? If not, what are the factors that impede the reform initiatives from meeting their objectives?
- What are the external and internal factors that affect the reform programmes?
- What is the level of commitment of management, as well as employees, to change initiatives?
- Did the political leaders commit to reform initiatives?

Data collection was terminated at the point of saturation, where the researcher was not able to get additional information by adding more respondents. The responses were organised into five thematic areas and analysed qualitatively (please see the 'Results and Discussion' section).

Results and discussion

The Ethiopian government has been engaged in several reform programmes to improve the delivery of services within the public sector. It has been found that these public service reform programmes are mainly national in terms of agenda – they were not imposed by the International Monetary Fund or other international organisations. The reform programmes were initiated in line with the introduction of a market-led economic system and as a part of a structural adjustment programme in 1991. The reforms were initiated and implemented in three phases. The first phase took place in 1993–1996, the second phase in 1996–2003 and the third phase from 2003 to the present (Solomon 2013). The process and outcome of the initiatives has been evaluated in this article based on the data obtained by engaging respondents with expertise in the subject matter in a focus group discussion.

Their expertise has mainly been justified by their participation in the implementation of the reform initiatives and the role they are playing currently as change officers.

Profiles of the respondents

Fourteen discussants were invited for group discussion purposely considering their knowledge of each phase of the change initiatives and its implementation. The participants currently hold positions as change officers in their respective organisations. They have been participating in reform programmes for more than 10 years. Their educational qualifications show that they hold a minimum of a Bachelor degree. Their views regarding the reform initiatives and their implementation are presented in the following five thematic areas.

Findings on the attitude of public servants towards public service reform

Caiden (1988) stated that administrative reforms are more likely to be successfully implemented if they have a relatively higher level of political support, are implemented in a system with relatively higher administrative capacity, enjoy internal bureaucratic support and can mobilise popular participation in their implementation. Public service reform might be challenging, as it involves dealing with people by way of such activities as recruitment, selection, promotion and rewarding of employees who affect the lives of human beings. As a result, employees might resist or accept the envisaged organisational changes. On the other hand, as stated by Kassa (2011), bureaucratic continuity is a necessity, even though it may become a mechanism for creating a privileged, self-oriented group within the state. The participants identified the following points regarding the attitudes of employees to public service reform attempts in their respective organisations:

> 'Employees consider public service reforms as politically motivated rather than as a means of improving organisational service delivery systems. (Respondent no. 3, Male senior expert). 'Employees demonstrate suspicion that the objective of reform programmes is basically politically motivated with the undesirable outcome of misallocating employees or downsizing employment.' (Respondent no. 9, male, senior expert).

The respondent's view shows that employees were suspicious of organisational reform efforts. This is in direct conflict with the tenet that the shared commitment and acceptance (ownership) of lower-level public servants is critical to the durability and success of administrative reforms. As stated by Moon and Kim (2006), while initiatives for improving and reforming human resource management and development are necessary for internal conditions, the public service reform process requires a committed workforce to meet its objectives. A paradigm shift in the attitudes of public servants is required to cope with the emerging demands and changes in society and the economy. Regarding the level of awareness of employees about the envisaged reform agenda, the participants stated the following points:

> 'Employees are not equipped with systematic knowledge of reform programmes. The reform process normally took the form

of a top–down approach, and the employees, as well as organisational leaders have less knowledge about the reform agenda. No communication strategy had been established. The change army teams are more concentrated on procedures and processes than on the main agenda of reform.' (Respondent no. 5, male, change officer).

> 'Employees do not differentiate between change in leadership and reform programmes. Employees are unable to figure out problems and provide solutions based on best practices because they are not equipped with adequate knowledge regarding public service operations and reform programmes.' (Respondent no. 13, male, change officer)

As the participants indicated, because good governance and reform are new concepts in Ethiopia, the employees might fail to reach the required level of common understanding because of lack of professionalism, poor government structure and the politicisation of the public service, among others. Bersisa et al. (2016) stated that there are some weaknesses in the implementation of the reform programme in Ethiopia. These include attitudinal problems on the side of the public servants, shortage of competent public servants, lack of clear direction and commitment among organisational leaders, a limited level of public participation, problems of accountability and partisanship on the part of the public servants. On top of that successful implementation reforms require expertise in the area of reform and a clear roadmap. The discussants stated the following points regarding the employees' level of commitment towards their tasks:

> 'Willingness and a culture of willingly serving society are not prevalent among employees. Employees are unwilling to provide requested information; rather they tend to hide information. Experts feel hopeless. The employees do not see the outcome of the reform programmes from a long-term perspectives. Rather, they emphasise more short-term achievements, which ultimately results in no commonality of vision among the change army'. (Respondent no. 8, male, senior expert).

> 'Most of the employees concentrate on minor issues, giving less attention to the big picture of the reform agenda'. (Respondent no. 11, female, senior expert).

> 'No attention is given to the change implementers. The employees feel inequity, which ultimately ends up as high employee turnover. Rent-seeking behaviour dominates the outlook of the public servants. There is no unity among change-seeking employees.' (Respondent no. 14, male, senior expert,)

The preceding statement reveals that employees are uncomfortable with the change initiatives and have less commitment to organisational change efforts than required. Tesfay (2009:12) stated that 'organizations need professional public servants that work independently and that are at the front line to solve the problems of citizens'. Moreover, Agere and Mendoza (1999) commented on declining social values, pointing out that the values that were generally considered as desirable (honesty, integrity, dependability, impartiality, courteousness and fairness) are gradually disappearing from the public service. Successful reform requires professional and politically neutral public servants. As stated by Philip (2002), the secret behind public service neutrality is a

workforce that is able to demonstrate autonomy, competency, professionalism, ethics, harmony, equality, impartiality, responsibility, efficiency and effectiveness, accountability and other desirable traits. Therefore, to enhance the efficiency and fairness of the public service, there is a need to protect the institution from direct forms of partisanship. In the case of Ethiopia, any reform measure creates, more often than not, fear of job losses, more paperwork and workload. This has caused public service organisations to waste their limited human resources and financial resources, as well as their organisational memory. The respondents' views with regard to organisational leaderships are summarised in the following.

Assignment of organisational leaders

Most of the authors agree that effective leadership is one of the most important contributors to the overall organisational performance and change management. The success of public service reform involves aligning senior leadership teams around a common plan and set of deliverables. In relation to the assignment of organisational leaders in their respective organisations, the participants stated the following points:

> 'Leaders were not recruited on a merit basis. More emphasis was given to the political background of the leaders than their achievements in leading organisations. Organisations were led by political assignees. No effort was made to balance the technical skill requirements and the leadership skill requirements of managing the reform initiatives. It was rather the case that the assignment of change leaders was substantially based on political loyalty'. (Respondent no. 2, male, senior expert).

> 'Another problem observed was related to the ethnic tension in the Ethiopian public service, where the change leaders were not accepted as standing for improving public service in Ethiopia but were seen as trying to assure dominance of the public service by their respective ethnic relatives. (Respondent no. 7, male, senior expert).

> 'Another problem identified is related to the tendency of changing leaders more frequently, so much that the change endeavour suffers from a flatter experience curve and, at times, even worse.'(Respondent no. 10, male, change leader).

In relation to the view of the participants, Adebabay (2011) stated that, despite some progress in the implementation of the second phase of the Ethiopian Civil Service Reform (CSR) in the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) Era, among the fundamental shortcomings in the public service were that top leaders in the public service were not supportive and competent, public servants' performance and morale were at low levels, service delivery was inefficient, public resources were inappropriately utilised and there were unethical practices in service delivery (Adebabay 2011). Tesfay (2009:11) also further stated that 'the attempt of politicians to use their ideologies to control government organizations may cause divergence of goals between the politicians and the managers of the organizations'. Therefore, as revealed by the participants, politicisation and ethnic thinking might undermine merit-based employment and jeopardise bureaucratic integrity, and they harmfully affect the decision-making processes of public servants.

Leadership competency with respect to public service reforms

Leaders can play a key role because they can create suitable environments to adopt change. The role of leaders and leadership is also very important for developing and managing change in any organisation by creating a suitable atmosphere to adopt change within the organisation. Top management can develop strategies to interconnect people working in an organisation and its processes. Bennis and Nanus (1995) stated that leadership styles have a strong relationship with the development of change. Hence, the public service requires highly qualified professionals who can plan, organise, lead and control the strategies of the government and provide citizens with fair and equitable services. The participants were asked to forward their views regarding the level of competency of the organisational leaders who were participating in implementing public service reforms. They expressed their views as follows:

> 'The leaders have no better knowledge and understanding about the reform agenda than ordinary employees. They do not demonstrate better competency on how to lead the organisation's reform. The reform leaders do not properly understand the instrument used for public service reform initiatives'. (Respondent no. 3, male, senior expert).

> 'Professionals are not given the chance to forward their views based on professional requirements; rather they will be cornered and will not be given opportunities to take part in the reform agenda. Reform coordinating officers are given lower positions in the organisational hierarchy. Leaders were not motivating employees to create and sustain commitment. In most cases, the human resource management aspects were neglected. Rent-seeking behaviours among organisational leaders were prevalent'. (Respondent no. 5, male, change officer).

> 'The leaders would not plan for their operations. The leaders are more luxury oriented. They exaggerated minor achievements and placed more emphasis on minor achievements. The leaders concentrate on false reports that do not reflect the outcome of reform. Leaders like to be safe and tend to develop comfort zones.' (Respondent no. 11, male, change officer).

As revealed in the preceding, the participants are in doubt of the competency and commitment of the organisational leaders. The central theme of the merit system is that the process of hiring and promoting government organisational leaders should be based on their ability rather than on their political connections. As Kanter (1999) points out, 'the most important things a leader can bring to a changing organisation are passion, conviction, and confidence in others'. Successful change leaders focus on the change and solely on the change. It must be the centre of all thoughts and actions and the driving force behind every business decision.

Reform tools and their implementation

As part of its effort to improve the performance of the public service, the Ethiopian government has introduced several public service reform tools such as strategic planning and management, quick wins, management by objective, BPR, BSC, public service change army, Citizens Charter and

recently deliverology (FDRE-MoCs 2013; Tesfaye 2009;Tilaye 2007).These initiatives aimed to radically transform the public service system into a modern, objective and efficient system that allows government to attain its vision and policy strategies. The participants stated their opinion regarding the reform tools and their implementation as follows:

'Public reform practices were usually benchmarked from different countries, and change management tools were taken as a whole package. Related documents were also copied based on the knowledge area of change management sciences. Change management tools were not customised and contextualised as per the nature and reality of the organisation; rather, they were used as is. Hence the society is never satisfied with the reform outcomes. There is a mismatch between the theoretical requirements of the reform tools and their implementation. The reform initiatives were not based on justified theoretical foundations'. (Respondent no. 1, male, senior expert).

'Organisations failed to create a sequential link among the change implementation tools. There is lack of awareness of which reform programmes should come first and which would follow. The reform agenda sounds like a management fad with little hope of being able to improve public service on a sustainable basis. BSC followed BPR with no adequate evaluation of the successes and failures as well as gaps of the former. It has become the modus operandi that the latter comes negating the former, failing to take advantage of the possibility of supplementing one with the other. Those organisations that reformed their activities through the process of business process reengineering as well as those that have never exercised BPR are equally executing their tasks in the same manner. Even BPR created an obstacle in the activity of institutions. It is a group-based activity. No documents referring to BPR were kept for further reference purposes.' (Respondent no. 5, male, change officer).

Even though the government has tried to implement different management tools to improve the service provision practices of the public sectors, the respondents indicated that the result was not as expected. The Ministry of Civil Service (Federal Government of Ethiopia 2011) report also revealed that it seems that the tools primarily concern the transfer into the practice of public administration of established business management technologies, such as personnel management, the management of business processes and planning, and the introduction of outsourcing mechanisms and performance contracts (for subordinate institutions and organisations). The technologies themselves are borrowed from the 'fashionable collection' of contemporary management. Hence, no proper customisation was effected to realise the public reform efforts.

Supportive technology, incentives and facilities in reform implementation

Although using modern technology requires a country to have huge funds, resources and satellite capabilities, the government made an effort to modernise the public service operation through the use of modern technology like computers and various means of information technology. The participants' views regarding the application of modern technology to public service reform are shown as follows:

'Reform programmes were not supported with appropriate technology. Organisations are always in a hurry to implement the reform programmes with no software that supports the change programmes. Usually a technological setting to support reform programmes would not be considered. It was underscored that insufficient budget was allocated to implement the reform programmes'. (Respondent no. 1, male, senior expert).

'The reform is not supplemented with the required incentives that go along with the reform agenda. The change army is not properly structured. They tried to implement changes without change implementers, i.e. a change army. More emphasis would be given to minor achievements, while tending to miss the whole picture of the organisational change agenda.' (Respondent no. 4, male, senior expert).

'Higher educational institutions as well as training institutions in the country would not make an effort to come up with tools that support reform agenda. Also, there was no appropriate link made between training institutions and public service institutions. There were also inequitable incentive practices where some ministries such as Inland Revenue made salary adjustments where others did not, creating a sense of inequity among civil servants working in different ministries. All units were considered as a single entity and an incentive that goes along with performance reports would not be considered. In some cases, after employees were provided with incentives, they were requested to return them. Required facilities, materials and human power for implementing reforms were not provided at lower organisational hierarchical levels. Employees would be assigned to different positions without the benefits that go along with the said position.' (Respondent no. 10, male, change leader).

Salaries and other emoluments of the public service should be improved to a level deemed conducive to increasing morale and productivity. Poorly paid and poorly motivated workers tend to pursue their own needs, including opportunities for rent seeking, completely neglecting the goals of the government. To make ends meet, public servants are forced to engage in other income-generating activities, often using government offices as their base. Corruption in the procurement and delivery of goods and services has become a serious problem. All these factors imply that the effort dedicated to government work diminishes remarkably. Without sufficient resources to work with, public servants feel that they are challenged to complete tasks effectively.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that Ethiopian civil service reform programmes were not framed in line with the country's development strategy. Instead there has been a tendency to take a benchmark from other countries and adopt it regardless of whether it is aligned to the objective situation on the ground in Ethiopia. Again a rather top–down approach has been widely put in place without making sure that there is unity of purpose down the line, mainly because the change initiatives were highly politically motivated. It actually turned out that in effect much of the reform efforts happened to be little more than rhetorical, with the actual implementation being far from that stated as its objectives. Therefore, society and public servants lack confidence in the reform directions because there is a

mismatch between what has been said and put on paper and what has been implemented in reality. It has also been found in this study that no impact assessment had been conducted on the fruits of the civil service reform initiatives. Another problem uncovered in this study relates to the phenomenon of a higher rate of turnover in reaction to the change endeavours, causing a chronic problem of discontinuity, as the organisational memory tends to be disrupted because of the turnover of such highly experienced employees. Accordingly, organisations begin reform programmes from scratch because of employee turnover. The reform efforts have also been found to have failed to bring about unity of purpose as a country. Rather, much of the effort appears to have been ethnically driven with the apparent intention to gain dominance in the civil service sector. Therefore, it can be concluded that civil service reform programmes in Ethiopia were politically biased, and no due consideration was given to the basic features of the organisations under reform. In addition, it has been observed that the requisite technical capabilities were not taken into account as per the science of reform tools. It can also be inferred from this study that the reform implementers, as well as the organisational leaders were not able to exhibit the required level of commitment to implement the reform programmes to the expected level. In summary, it can be concluded that no visible improvement in civil service delivery has been registered in most organisations as a result of the reform initiatives. It has been recommended that, for such reform efforts to meet their objectives, reform plans be made for each sector and organisation on a case-by-case basis, instead of deploying a one-size-fits-all style campaign, and that benchmarking efforts be adjusted for context. It has further been suggested that reform efforts be incentivised in a bid to minimise resistance and enhance motivation to get used to the new endeavour. The study calls for further longitudinal studies for informed decisions regarding the reform initiatives in Ethiopia.

Acknowledgements

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