



Public sector reforms and national development: A situational analysis of post-independent Nigeria

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Background: The article examined the need to keep up with the growing demands of governance and the best way to improve efficiency and productivity in the Nigerian public service. In response to the demands of environmental dynamics, organisations strive to cope with or manage change.

Aim: The aim of this article was to devise a mechanism that would enable civil servants to work better or achieve better results, as well as organisations embark on reorganisation, amongst others, to improve their mode of operations to fulfil their statutory public mandates.

Setting: The article focussed on all the parastatals, ministries, departments and agencies that make up the Nigerian public service.

Methods: The methodology of this study entailed a conceptual and contextual analysis of literature and official documents to analyse the area of investigation. The article deployed the qualitative research method to analyse data and information to reach a conclusion.

Results: The findings revealed that public sector reforms in Nigeria have largely failed to bring about the desired reinvention of the public service. This lack of desired impact has occurred because the reforms were not radical and comprehensive enough in terms of the envisaged changes.

Conclusion: To transform society from its relatively underdeveloped polity, transformation must be planned by the government, through its administrative agencies, to be the facilitator of development. To be an effective agent of socioeconomic development, the public service must also adapt itself (through administrative reforms) to cope quickly with dynamic changes and new demands that emanate from its environment.

Keywords: public sector reforms; civil service; developmental goals; Nigeria; public administration.

Introduction

The public sector is the machinery used by the state to execute plans, policies and programmes. It is therefore utilised as the indispensable instrument of change and development in developing countries such as Nigeria, with the urgent and pressing need to bring about rapid fundamental socioeconomic transformation. Since Nigeria attained independence in 1960, various administrative reforms have been carried out by previous national governments with the aim of increasing the administrative capacity of the public sector to implement development programmes and achieve national development goals. The success of these reforms in repositioning and strengthening the public sector as a veritable instrument for national development is, however, doubtful. Adopting the qualitative research method and descriptive analysis, this article examines public sector reforms in Nigeria and their impact, if any, in terms of making the country's public administration more developmental.

Every organisation is established or exists to realise certain objectives and essentially undertakes some core activities toward the discharge of its mandate. In response to the demands of environmental dynamics, organisations strive to cope with or manage change. To work better or achieve better results, organisations embark on reorganisation to improve their mode of operations. In developing countries such as Nigeria with an urgent and pressing need to bring about accelerated or rapid socioeconomic development, public sector reforms have become imperative as public administration is only effective to the extent that it can respond swiftly and efficiently to the ever-changing demands from its environment. Public sector reforms have primarily been driven by the quest to strengthen or enhance the capacity of public administration to achieve national development goals.

Successive attempts have been made to revitalise Nigerian public service since independence. For any reform programme, the most fundamental issue is the extent of its successful implementation. It is thus pertinent to ask: what has been the impact of these administrative reforms on the public service? In other words, have these reforms made the Nigerian public service more efficient and productive? The main task of this article is to examine administrative reform efforts in Nigeria. This will be performed with the intent of assessing their impact on national development (Aladegbola & Jaiyeola 2016:21).

Conceptual framework

This section provides a definition and meaning of public sector. It also explains what public sector reforms entail. The section also gives clarity on the meaning and features of administrative reforms in Nigeria. Finally, it provides a brief background on the meaning and essence of development as it relates to sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria in particular. These concepts are used to help bring clarity and context to the themes being discussed in the article.

The term 'public sector' is generally identified with the government or state. The public sector is generally owned and controlled by the state or government. Public sector organisations manage the public's business and are responsible for getting the work of government accomplished. In a sense, the public sector can be used as a synonym of public service as both terms relate to government or public administration.

Public sector reform simply refers to the administrative transformation of the public sector. It is concerned with taking action on administrative problems in the public sector through institutional or administrative reforms. Public sector reforms are aimed at improving the efficiency and productivity of the public service (Shafritz, Russell & Borick 2009:25). Some scholars (Caiden 1970:65; Ovwasa 2004:18) defined administrative reform as 'the artificial inducement of administrative transformation against resistance'. They further elaborated 'that it is artificial because it is man-made and deliberately planned'. This means that 'it is not natural, accidental, or automatic'. This is so because 'it is induced and it involves persuasion, argument'. Although it is not always universally accepted as the obvious or true course, it is an irreversible process and is undertaken in the belief that the end result will be better than the status quo and therefore will be worth the effort to overcome resistance (Caiden 1970:65; Ovwasa 2004:18).

Drawing on some scholars (Caiden 1970:65; Ovwasa 2004), it therefore implies that public sector reforms involve not only administrative change, but also invariably organisational resistance. Quah (1981:21) postulated that administrative reform is 'a deliberate attempt to change both the structure and procedure of public bureaucracy' (i.e. the reorganisation of the institutional aspects). It also encompasses 'the attitude and behaviour of the public administrators involved (i.e. the attitudinal aspects) in order to promote organisational effectiveness for national development' (Shafritz et al. 2009:32).

Mosher (1965) opined that administrative reform has four major objectives, namely 'the need to: (1) change operating policies and programmes, (2) improve administrative effectiveness. It also includes (3) 'improve personnel, particularly their performance, qualification, job satisfaction, and welfare', and (4) 'respond to or anticipate criticism or threats from the environment' (Mosher 1965:15).

Adamolekun and Kiragu (2005) conceptualised 'three main features of public sector reforms, namely recalibration of the role of the state, modernisation of public management to improve performance, and improving service delivery'. Caiden (1970:24) argued 'that the intrinsic aim of administrative revitalisation is the improvement of administration'. He therefore proposed a process model of administrative reform with four distinct phases, namely (Caiden (1970:24):

- (1) awareness of the need for administrative change,
- (2) formulation of goals and objectives, and strategy and tactics,
- (3) implementation of reform, and (4) evaluation of reform in terms of the reformer's objectives.

Scholars like Appleby (1949:19) and Shafritz et al. (2009) proposed that 'there are two basic types of administrative change, namely constant and episodic'. The first type is incremental change that occurs in the course of spontaneous adjustments to changing situations. Episodic change (which Appleby called reorganisation) is 'much more wide-ranging in scope and content and involves a major shakeup' (Appleby 1949:19; Shafritz et al. 2009:31). Administrative reforms are usually embarked upon in developing countries 'in order to enhance the capacity of public agencies to achieve development goals' (Appleby 1949:19; Shafritz et al. 2009:31).

A brief encapsulation of the meaning of development is relevant in this section. Development can be envisaged as a multi-faceted idea that encapsulates significant metamorphosis in social structure, population, attitudes and institutions (Okoye 1997:21; Sahni & Vayunandan 2010:17). There is a deluge of expositions on the notion of development. It is imperative to elucidate on what development entails to communities living in developing parts of the world like sub-Saharan (Ukwandu 2014:41). For people living in the leafy suburbs of Sydney, Australia, development could entail protecting animal rights and climate change (Ukwandu 2018:30). Conversely, for those living in poor informal settlement such as Alexandra, South Africa, development should and could connote the improvement in living standard. It could mean a struggle for provision of the basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter, a job and water (Ukwandu 2014:45).

Seers (1969:31) offered a roadmap on what development should entail. He argued that for development to be meaningful, it must attend to the material needs and aspirations of people. In essence, for development to be relevant in a region like sub-Saharan Africa, it must address the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality that continue to characterise the life of the majority. According to Seers (1969:31), in a scenario where these triple challenges are reduced significantly, then it can comfortably be asserted

that development is taking place. We cannot refer to the process as development if one of the three issues has deteriorated in a region or country. It should not be referred to as development even if per capita income has increased because economic growth alone is not a real measure of development (Ukwandu 2009:42). The real essence of development is to improve the sustainable livelihood and the material conditions of people (Ukwandu 2014:21).

Overview of public sector reforms in post-independent Nigeria

The Morgan Commission of 1963 was the very first public sector reform effort in post-independent Nigeria. It was instituted to review the wages, salaries and conditions of service of junior employees in the public and private sectors. The commission did not make recommendations for structural and behavioural changes in the public service, but it concerned itself mainly with the review of salaries and wages. The commission recommended a minimum wage in the country on a geographical basis (Nigeria 1963:140). The Elwood Grading Team of 1966 was the next review commission to be inaugurated. It was tasked with determining appropriate grading and how to achieve universality in the salaries of employees who perform similar functions. The major achievement of the team was its suggestion that job evaluation and other scientific methods be used to grade all positions in the public service. This should be performed before remunerations are apportioned to positions and functions (Nigeria 1966:180).

The Adebo Salaries and Wages Review Commission was instituted in 1970. Its mandate was to review existing wages and salaries at all levels in the public service. Its job also included statutory corporations and state-owned companies. The commission recommended the abolition of the daily paid worker system. It also recommended the use of scientific methods to analyse jobs and fix salaries. Although the Adebo Commission was not mandated to review the organisational structure of the service, it recommended a structural change for the public service (Nigeria 1970:150).

The Adebo Public Service Commission suggested to constitute the Udoji Commission. This was implemented in 1972. Unlike the previous commissions, the Udoji Commission went beyond the review of wages and salaries. The commission's terms of reference included 'examining the organisation, structure and management of the public services'. Its terms of reference also involved 'investigating and evaluating the method of recruitment and conditions of employment and the staff development programmes of the public services' (Nigeria 1974:200).

The Udoji Commission was instituted because the government was conscious of the need to secure adequate development and optimum utilisation of the manpower available in the public service. The commission was also necessitated by the need to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the public services in meeting the challenges

of development in the country. The main report of the Udoji Commission (1974:170) offered many recommendations on how to restructure the public service to make it more efficient and effective. These recommendations included the following:

- 'Salary increases to all categories of workers backdated and paid in arrears.
- A positive conception of the Nigerian civil service such that civil servants should be positively oriented in their work and attitude towards the service.
- The adoption and use of modern management techniques such as Management by Objectives; Programme, Performance, Budgeting System; and Project Management.
- Introduction of a Unified Grading Salary Structure from levels 01 to 17.
- The abolition of dual hierarchies in ministries and replacing them with a unified and integrated structure.
- Emphasise merit as a yardstick for the promotion of officers in the public service.
- Open reporting system for the performance appraisal of employees.
- Incorporation of a code of ethics in the oath for the public officers for discipline and guidance'. (Udoji Commission 1974:170).

The commission also interrogated the duties of the Head of Civil Service and Public Service Commission. The interrogations included staff training, and manpower planning and development were also addressed by the commission. The unified grading system introduced by the commission was vehemently opposed by the management of public enterprises (Nigeria 1974:170).

The 1988 civil service reforms were an offshoot of the Dotun Philips Study Team report of 1985. *The Civil Service (Reorganisation) Decree No. 43 of 1988* gave legal teeth to the 1988 reforms. The aim of the 1988 civil service reforms was to make the service result orientated and efficient. To achieve this aim, the reforms provided, among others, for the following:

- 'Coupling of administrative and political leadership by making the minister both the chief executive and accounting officer of the ministry
- Abrogation of the post of permanent secretary and replacing it with the political post of director-general; that is to be a deputy to the minister and whose tenure would end with the government that appointed him/her
- Independence from centralised control and checks by making each ministry responsible for the appointment, discipline, and promotion of its staff under general and uniform guidelines to be provided by the Federal Civil Service Commission
- Professionalisation of the service as every officer, whether specialist or generalist, was to make his/her career entirely in one ministry or department of his/her choice
- Staff training was emphasised and successful participation in prescribed training courses were made a prerequisite for promotion from certain grade levels to another

- Promotion to be based on merit as defined by performance. The federal character and seniority were therefore de-emphasised as criteria for promotion'. The criteria for promotion were changed as follows: Annual performance: 50%; interview: 30%; additional qualification/examination: 15%; and seniority: 5% (Nigeria 1988:200).

In occasions where interviews or examinations are not necessary for a particular promotion, the weight allotted to performance was to be increased accordingly. The strident criticisms that followed the 1988 civil service reforms led to the creation of the Ayida Review Panel in 1994. The panel in its recommendations reversed most of the changes introduced by the 1988 panel. The major highlights of the 1994 civil service reforms were as follows:

- *'The Civil Service (Reorganisation) Decree No. 43 of 1988 and its amendment decree, No. 80 of 1993, should be abrogated and the civil service should revert to the system in which it is guided by the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the civil service rules, and financial regulations and circulars.*
- Personnel management functions of the civil service should be left to the Federal Civil Service Commission with delegated powers to the ministries.
- The retirement age in the civil service should be 60 years, irrespective of the length of service.
- The government should harmonise the pension rates of those who retired before 1991 and those who retired since 1991.
- The salaries and allowance and welfare packages of civil servants should be adjusted annually to ameliorate the effect of inflation and discourage corruption.
- The title of permanent secretary should be restored, which would be a career post.
- The role of the accounting officer of ministry should be reverted from the minister to the permanent secretary.
- The post of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation should be re-established as a career position and should be separated from the post of secretary to the government.
- Ministries and extra-ministerial departments should be structured according to their objectives, functions, and sizes and not according to a uniform pattern as prescribed by the 1988 reforms.
- The pool system was restored for personnel in professional and sub-professional cadres that commonly exist in the ministries/extra-ministerial departments.
- Recruitment into the Federal Civil Service, at the entry grades, should be based on a combination of merit and federal character, but further progression should be based normally on merit'. (Nigeria 1993:180).

At the dawn of the Third Republic in 1999, the Obasanjo administration inherited a public service that had many anti-development characteristics, including being lethargically slow in official decision and action; insensitive to the value of time; irregular attendance at work; nepotism; wastage of government resources; corruption; slow change; and irresponsive and discourteous to the public (The Daily Independent 2009:68).

The Obasanjo administration implemented a range of administrative reforms to redress the situation. The reform exercise was part of the implementation of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy. The main objective of the public service reform efforts was to change the way the government performed its work by creating a more efficient and responsive public sector. The programme therefore sought to ensure that the public service was revitalised, and its role redefined and refocused for effective service delivery. The major thrusts of the reform included: (1) re-professionalisation of the public service through massive retraining of employees, (2) effective expenditure management, including monetisation of fringe benefits, as well as due process mechanisms to promote transparency and accountability in government business, (3) appropriate sizing of the public sector and eliminating ghost workers, (4) rationalising, restructuring and strengthening institutions, (5) redefining and redesigning processes to reduce delays and (6) increasing the efficiency of service delivery (Nigeria 2004:170).

The Yar'Adua administration adopted a national strategy for public service reforms to improve the performance of the public service. It was also performed to promote good governance through its seven-point agenda and attainment of the desired objectives of Vision 20:2020.

The Nigerian public service underwent further administrative reforms as part of the transformation agenda of former president Goodluck Jonathan. His public sector reforms' drive was anchored on Vision 20:2020, and the attainment of the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals and Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme, among others. The incumbent administration of Muhammad Buhari is yet to embark on any significant reforms of the public sector in Nigeria.

The roles of public administration in national development

Public administration plays an indispensable role in national development. As a developing country, Nigeria's public service is expected to function as an instrument of social change and development in terms of advancing human welfare and bringing about accelerated socioeconomic progress. According to Naidu (2005:26), 'in the developing countries the people, especially the poor, look to public administration to improve their lot and alleviate their misery'. Naidu (2005:26) further stated that public administration must act as the locomotive of development as various development activities are undertaken by the government to reduce, if not eliminate, poverty and unemployment and bring about improvement in the lives of the people.

The traditional role of public administration is to execute the development programmes and policies of governments. Once those who are constitutionally empowered to formulate the state policy decide on and commit to a specific policy or

programme. It is incumbent on the public service to ensure the faithful implementation and the attainment of the policy objectives. As Self (1977) stated:

Public administration is all about the identification of goals, the analysis of policies and the efficient implementation of those policies. Public administration serves as the pivot of government as it is expected to help realise the goals of the state. (p. 24)

Public administration activities broadly fall into four main categories, namely protectional, promotional, proprietary and regulatory (Rodee et al. 2000:14).

Public administration also has the vital duty of maintaining law and order. Peace is an important precondition for the development and progress of society because there can be no development without peace. Moreover, public administration is saddled with the onerous task of protecting the life and property of citizens and other residents. Citizens must be alive and well before they can make meaningful contributions to the development of society. In a sense, public administration not only serves but also protects. In essence, this means that the overriding mandate of public administration is the maintenance of order and stability. Peace and stability are the first goal before public servants delve into other aspects of public administration like provision of basic amenities, such as water, electricity and housing.

Specific development activities that public administration engages in relate to:

1. 'helping to set developmental goals and priorities
2. the implementation of developmental plans, policies, programmes, and projects
3. the mobilisation of material and human resources and their proper utilisation for developmental activities
4. the development of human resources to secure the necessary managerial skills and technical competence
5. utilisation of advances in science and technology in order to increase productivity, and promote industry and agriculture
6. the creation of new administrative organisations and improving the capacity of the existing ones for developmental purposes
7. securing the support of the people for developmental activities by involving them in the process of development and by creating in them appropriate attitudes towards the socioeconomic changes that are taking place'. (Naidu 2005:25).

Public administration and national development: An assessment of public sector reforms in Nigeria

Public sector reforms in Nigeria have largely failed to bring about the desired reinvention of the public service because they were not radical and comprehensive enough in the changes engendered (with the possible exception of the 1974,

1988 and 2003 reforms). These reforms have been mostly cosmetic and overly concerned with monetary awards and structural changes, to the exclusion of behavioural and attitudinal changes.

In 2006 (18 years after the implementation of the 1988 civil service reforms), the then president Olusegun Obasanjo was reported to have said that (The Guardian 2006):

[T]he public service is deficient of the critical corps of expertise and skills mix required to induce rapid transformation and the capacity to face the challenges of competitiveness posed by globalization. (p. 33)

Likewise, the then chairman of the Bureau of Public Service Reforms, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, was also quoted to have said in 2006 that 'an urgent surgical operation is required to re-engineer the Nigerian public service as a veritable tool for national development' (The Guardian 2006:33). These comments are pointers that all is not well with the Nigerian public service. This means that from the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, when the new wave of public sector reforms commenced, the Nigerian public service has not become more developmental and result orientated than it has ever been in post-independent Nigeria. This means that public sector reforms have delivered mediocre outcomes.

The results of the numerous public sector reforms in post-independent Nigeria have been mixed, ranging from poor to mediocre. The public sector reforms have delivered minimal improvements in the three central problems of development identified by Seers (1969:32), namely poverty, unemployment and inequality. In fact, human development has been on the decline in the country. Nigeria ranked 146th out of 176 countries in the UN's Human Development Index in 1999 and dropped to the 152nd position out of 188 countries in 2017 (United Nations Development Programme 1999, 2018). These statistics above were provided to show that in the core mandates of public administration, the reforms cannot be categorised as a success story.

Jim Yong Kim, the then president of the World Bank, listed Nigeria among the top five countries in terms of the number of poor people still living in extreme poverty, which is defined as earning less than US\$1.25 a day (World Bank 2014). The incidence of poverty of 15% in 1960 when Nigeria gained independence rose to 67.1% of the national population in 2016 and over 70% in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] 2017, 2018). Nigeria overtook India as the country with the highest number of people living in extreme poverty in 2018 (Adebayo 2018). This shows that the idea of public administration as a catalyst to national development has not been effective in Nigeria.

The national unemployment rate based on statistics released by the Central Bank of Nigeria (2003) rose from 4.3% in 1970 to 6.4% in 1980 (NBS 2003). The unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 14.50% from 2006 until 2011. It reached an all-time high of 23.90% in 2011 and a record low of 5.30% in 2006. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria increased to 23.90% in 2011

from 21.10% in 2010 (NBS 2012). The International Monetary Fund (2015) indicated Nigeria's unemployment rate as 13.1% in 2000, increasing to 23.99% in 2011. Nigeria's NBS (2017) indicated the country's current unemployment rate as 18.8%. This figure is, however, doubtful because Nigeria recently suffered a recession that caused massive retrenchments of workers, particularly in the private sector (Nigeria 2018:70).

The income inequality coefficient moved from 0.5 in 1960 to 0.7 in 1975 and 1976 (Ewubare & Okpani 2018). The Gini coefficient (income inequality measure) that was 0.429 in 2004 rose to 0.467 in 2010, indicating a 4.1% increase in income disparity in the country (NBS 2012). According to the NBS (2018), inequality in Nigeria as measured by the Gini coefficient worsened from 0.356 in 2004 to 0.41 in 2013, but improved slightly to 0.391 in 2016. Oxfam International observed in its 2018 report that economic inequality in Nigeria has reached extreme levels despite being the largest economy in Africa. With these disheartening national statistics, the Nigerian public service cannot be said to be developmental as it has not significantly improved the quality of life of the populace. Ejere (2004) provided empirical evidence that the Nigerian public service does not substantially reflect such characteristics as change orientation, result orientation, commitment, client orientation and concern for the time factor, which are the essentials of a development-oriented public administration.

Summary and conclusion

This article clarified the terms 'public sector', 'administrative reform' and 'development' and highlighted the role of public administration in national development. An overview of administrative reforms in post-independent Nigeria was presented. Thereafter, administrative reforms were assessed in terms of their impact on making the Nigerian public administration development orientated.

It is true that to transform society from its relatively underdeveloped polity, the transformation must be a planned one in which the government, through its administrative agencies, must be the principal driver of the development effort (Sharma, Sadana & Kaur 2011). To be an effective agent of socioeconomic development, the public service must adapt itself (through administrative reforms) to cope quickly with dynamic changes and new demands that emanate from its environment. To reduce administrative resistance to change, public servants should be involved in the conception and implementation of public sector reforms. Moreover, the implementation of reforms should be taken seriously. Furthermore, future reform programmes in Nigeria should be sufficiently comprehensive to cover structural, behavioural and motivational aspects.

For reforms of public administration and public sector to be effective and meaningful in the country, it must be consistent and transparent. It must be in the vanguard of actualising national government policies. There has to be a political will on the part of the ruling class to carry out the much needed

reforms of the public service. These reforms must be guided and protected by strong institutions. These institutions should help accentuate the constitutional mandate of those institutions. It must demarcate the limits and functions of public officials in the public service. The patrimonial inclinations of civil servants and politicians like greed, corruption and ineptitude must be curtailed or minimised because they are strong inhibitors in the transformation project.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

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