

REINFORCING THE CIVIL SERVICE ETHICS TO ENHANCE GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC

Martin UGBUDU,

Department of Political Science, College of Education, Oju, Benue State, Nigeria,

ugbudumartins@gmail.com

Abstract

An honest, selfless, non-partisan, neutral and accountable civil service is a sine qua non for the realization of the policies and programs of the government meant to enhance the socio-economic well-being of the citizens. This study interrogates the Nigerian Civil Service vis-a vis its core values. The central problematic is to find out whether the Nigerian Civil Service functions in accordance with its ethics? And if not; what is the impact of the collapse of the civil service ethics on the performance of the service; and what can be done to re-invigorate the civil service ethics to enhance effective and efficient service delivery to promote good governance. The study which is analytical relies on secondary sources of data and adopts the Public Choice Theory as its frame work of analysis. The study found out that there is collapse of ethics in the Nigerian Civil Service and this has inadvertently enthroned corruption and undermined its efficiency and effectiveness in policy implementation thus diminishing the sectors' qualitative input to the development of the country. Amongst, other recommendations, the study suggests improvement in the working conditions of civil servants and strengthening institutions and laws that promote accountability.

Keywords: *Civil Service, Politicization, Ethics, Governance.*

DOI: 10.58934/jgss.v5i19.290

1. INTRODUCTION

As the arm of government responsible for the formulation and implementation of government policies and programs, the civil service is central in the administrative activities and the performance of the government. Hence, the nature of the civil service, its character and form determine the extent to which the society can be transformed for the better (Kujenya, 2008).

Where the civil service is inept, the government becomes ineffective and development gets retarded. The civil service is therefore central in the realization of government policies and programs meant to alleviate poverty, provide employment, reduce illiteracy and inequality in the society. In Nigeria today, due to the severe economic dislocation that has affected both the rich and the poor, the wider society looks up to the civil service not only to implement development goals and administer government policies but also to play a significant role in formulating development strategies, policies and programmes to stimulate social and economic changes (Okpata, 2014.)

However, the civil service cannot discharge its responsibility effectively without an underlying ethical code. Ethics are indispensable in enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the career civil servant and the government in the delivery of public goods and services. They serve to promote integrity and transparency in public administration ensuring that civil servants uphold the highest standards of honesty, fairness and impartiality in the performance of their duties. Civil service ethics also serve as a hedge against corruption and abuse of public resources as they provide guides for ethical behaviour and rules for financial management. Above all, they help to enhance public trust and confidence in the government as citizens expect public officials to be accountable.

In Nigeria, the code of conduct of civil servants is clearly spelt in the Civil Service Handbook (2000). It specifies virtues such as discipline, good conduct, loyalty, honesty, courage, courtesy, co-operation, tact, industry, avoidance of delay, tidiness, national consciousness and good image of the service. This ethical code is meant not only to minimize individual misbehavior, group aggrandizement and excessive use of power (Sorkaa, 2001) but also to entrench loyalty and commitment which are the hallmark of efficiency and effectiveness vital for effective service delivery. But, in recent times, it has been observed by (Kujenya,2008) that there has been gradual erosion of ethics in the civil service and civil servants now function against the ethics and regulations of the Service. Conversely, corruption, nepotism and utter disregard for basic civil service values have been accepted as normal in the civil service. It is against this backdrop that this study undertakes to interrogate the impact of the erosion of civil service ethics on good governance in Nigeria.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

Civil service

This refers to government employees in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial. Section 169 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines the civil service as the service of the Federation (State) in a civil capacity such as staff of the office of the President, the Vice President, a Ministry or Department of the Government of the Federation (State) assigned with the responsibility for any business of the government of the Federation (State). The civil service is part of the Public Service but is narrower than the Public Service because it excludes Judicial officers, Board and officers of Statutory Corporations or Companies which the government has an interest, members of the Armed Forces and the police (Maduabum, 2002). This means that civil servants are public servants but not all public servants are civil servants. In other words, within the public service, we have the civil service which is the inner core of the public service. The civil service is the middle ground between the government and the citizens in providing essential goods and services that will guarantee and enhance the well-being of the citizens (Asaju & Ayeni, 2020).

Entrance in the civil service is supposed to be through competitive examination for both the administrative and the executive cadre and promotion is supposed to be on merit. Also, as a permanent institution of government that has developed an ethos of political neutrality, civil servants are meant to be willing and able to advise and serve an elected government of any political party. The operations of the civil service are bureaucratic in nature characterized by hierarchy, division of labour based on specialization, merit-based recruitment and promotion, security of tenure, application of formal rules to guide official conduct and impersonality in the conduct of official roles (Weber, 1958).

Civil Service Ethics

Civil service ethics refer to the principles and standards that guide the behaviour and conduct of civil servants. In other words, it connotes the most accepted or cherished norm of practice that undergird the civil service. These practices are to be internalized by civil servants to enhance the effectiveness of the civil service in service delivery. Inadvertently, ethics define the limits of civil servants' behavior during service performance. Since the task of the civil service is the implementation of government policies and programs to enhance the welfare of the citizens based on the principles of integrity, impartiality, effectiveness, equity and

accountability, it behooves on civil servants to adhere to certain ethical code. In Nigeria, the Civil Service Handbook (2000) has elaborately specified the code of conduct for civil servants to abide to in the discharge of their duties. These include the following;

Integrity: civil servants are supposed to exhibit a high degree of integrity in the performance of their duties so as to enhance efficient service delivery to promote good governance. They are required not to use their official positions to benefit themselves, family business or other ties. They are to resist corruption and live above board by not accepting 'kola' as appreciation or gifts in the performance of their official duties. This is meant to stem corruption in the civil service.

Objectivity: Civil Servants are supposed to base their advice on evidence and not to be swayed by sentiments to the political heads. They should be guided by expert and professional advice and should discountenance incorrect facts or seek to frustrate policy decisions.

Political neutrality. Civil servants are prohibited from having political affiliations. They are not allowed to be card carrying members of any political party. Neither are they allowed to seek nomination or to stand for elective position but to serve government of different political persuasions with equal commitment. This is meant to insulate them from politics and serve any government that comes to power faithfully without prejudice. This is also meant to enhance effective policy implementation because if civil servants are allowed to join politics and a particular civil servant is saddled with the responsibility of implementing a particular government program from a rival party that is against the interest of his/her political party, the civil servant may try to frustrate or jeopardize the success of the program.

Anonymity: civil servants are supposed to work behind the scenes and not to be heard and seen. They are to place their skills and energies at the disposal of the political head who takes the credit or blame for the failure of policy. It is the political master that makes the final decision and he receives credit for good work and jeers for bad work. This therefore prohibits the civil servant from criticizing the political head as he/she is absolved from blame. Other ethical code specified in the Civil Service Handbook (2000) include honesty, courtesy, co-operation, tact, industry, avoidance of delay, tidiness and discipline.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the Public Choice Theory. It is an economic approach in studying politics, bureaucracy and decision-making in the public sector developed by Buchanan and Tullock (1986). The theory dwells fundamentally on economic principles to understand how individuals and groups make choices in the political arena. The main assumption of the theory is that politicians and bureaucrats act in their own self-interest. Since, emphasis is on individual interest, bureaucrats may not act in the best interest of the citizens. The over emphasis on self-interest that drives bureaucratic behaviour may push civil servants to influence policies to benefit themselves and not the general public.

Though this theory has been criticized as laying overemphasis on individual self-interest, it is relevant in analyzing the declining ethics in the Nigerian civil service. It is a truism that the Nigerian civil service is fast becoming a drain in the pipe of the government because of poor service delivery (Kujenya, 2008, Apeh, 2018). This is largely a result of dishonest exploitation of power for personal gain at the top level. The core source of corruption in Nigeria is the political class, they have corrupted the civil service and the service has become a handy tool for politicians. The rule is if you do not co-operate, that is your end in the public service. It is the civil servants that know the rules and procedures and what to do to cover the shady deals by their political masters. They end collaborating with them not just to enhance their career advancement but to enhance their own personal financial interest thus undermining service ethics. This is facilitated by the design of marginally relevant prestige projects that have little or no bearing to the welfare of the masses that require humongous amount of money which is often awarded to close family/ ethnic or old boys' network to get 10% kick-back.

4. CIVIL SERVICE ETHICS FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Colonial Legacy and the Nigerian Civil Service Ethics 1960-1970

For us to properly comprehend the collapse of ethics that has metamorphosed to the dwindling reputation of the Nigerian Civil Service, we need to take a retrospective look at the nature of the civil service inherited at independence and its changing phase overtime in post-independence Nigeria.

The origin of the present day Nigerian civil in Nigeria is subject to debate and there is no consensus (Jaja, 1996). Many have argued that the origin of the Nigerian Civil service can be

traced back to 1861 when Lagos was annexed as territory and direct British rule was established over the territory (Yellowstone, 1975). However, this perspective has been countered by those who point out that the British direct administration then was restricted to Lagos and there was no unified entity as Nigeria until 1st January, 1900 when the colonial civil service as an institution was established in Southern Nigeria and in Northern Nigeria and a new instrument was issued to re-organize and bolster the old civil service (London Gazette, 1899). And this should mark the beginning of the present day Nigerian civil service. There is still another perspective that has argued persuasively that the origin of the Nigerian civil service dates back to 1914 with the amalgamation of the Southern Protectorate and Northern Protectorate when Nigeria became a unified entity and there emerged a colonial civil service for a unified Nigeria (Jaja,1996). Be that as it may, we will not delve into the arguments of the diverse perspectives as that is not our main concern in this discourse. But the point one is trying to buttress is that the origin of what we have today as the Nigerian civil service is traceable to British colonial administration. The question here is what legacy did the colonial civil service bequeath to the Nigerian civil service as it pertains to civil service ethos and ethics?

The Nigerian civil service is a colonial creation and it has been observed that the Nigerian Civil service was built on the foundations and structures inherited from colonialism (Sorkaa, 2001, Okpata, 2014). The British introduced a Weberian type bureaucratic administration in Nigeria based on the British civil service model characterized by professionalism, meritocracy, security of tenure, hierarchy, rule of law and impartiality. To enhance these, Civil Service Commissions were set up to ensure impartiality in selection procedures and to lay down broad principles for personnel management in the civil service

This bureaucratic structure was inherited at independence in 1960 with its concomitant ethos and ethics. At independence in 1960 there was established a culture of discipline, adherence to rules and procedures. Above all, civil servants were expected to be apolitical and loyal to the government of the day. They were also expected to work within a wide range of ethical constraints which were taken seriously such as honesty and objectivity, personal impartiality, appointment on merit and accountability. These were reinforced by the establishment of various personnel and financial controls in the system. This legacy it has been emphasized; “instilled in civil servants some mental conditioning towards and response against the consequences of exceptional behaviour in and outside their place of work” (Jaja,1996) and this made them to be wary of disciplinary repercussions. Meanwhile, the Financial Controls such

as audit queries accentuated accountability, while on the other hand Management Controls such as Seniority list reinforced discipline and enhanced respect for constituted authority.

It should be noted that elements of these colonial legacies are still extant in the modern-day bureaucracy in Nigeria but have suffered erosion over time and there is near collapse of ethics in the Nigerian Civil Service. But why is it so? Answers to this question and the consequences thereof will take us to the next section of this discourse.

Civil Service Ethics in post-Independent Nigeria

After political independence in 1960, the period of military interregnum 1966 -1979 and 1983-1999 was a period of transformation in the Nigerian Civil Service which inadvertently made the civil servants to start functioning against the ethics and regulations of the Civil Service. The service metamorphosed from a disciplined, dedicated, apolitical and selfless institution to a corrupt, inept and nepotic institution. With the return to democratic rule in 1999, there were great expectations that the civil service would have a turn around by creating new values and work ethics to enhance service delivery and promote good governance. But contrary to this, the Nigerian Civil service is today bogged down with corruption, mal-administration, favoritism and indiscipline and this has been attributed to the collapse of ethics (Sorkaa, 2001, Kujenya, 2008, Asaju & Ayeni, 2020).

The question now is, what is responsible for the collapse of ethics in the Nigerian Civil Service? This again is attributed to the military intervention in politics. It has been argued that the military actually altered the tradition in the civil service by instituting a watered-down bureaucracy that plunged Nigeria from a nation of the norms into one of structural anomalies (Kujenya, 2008, Dahida & Ojenemi, 2016). The values of the civil service such as permanence, anonymity and neutrality became disrupted during the military era. It should be noted that civil servants are guided basically by what is called Civil Service Orders and Financial Orders. However, when the military intervened in politics in Nigeria, in line with the military tradition of doing things with dispatch, they started bending the rules. Hence, civil servants were compelled to either give them support or they find themselves kicked out of office or rendered redundant. Consequently, a good number of civil servants who resisted the military tradition of 'obey before complain' and stuck to the civil service tradition had their jobs terminated with immediate effect. This practice did not only contradict the civil service value of permanence but it also undermined the merit principle because many of those fired as noted by Sorkaa

(2001) were the ablest civil servants. The Murtala Mohammed regime 1975- 1976 for instance carried out the great purge of the civil service in which thousands of civil servants were fired without adequate reason. Under the Babangida regime, the post of Permanent secretary was even abolished and replaced by the post of Director General which was politicized. The politicization of the post of Permanent Secretary is still visible under the current democratic dispensation, at the state government level for instance, once there is a change of government after elections, the first thing that the state Governors do is to retire most of the serving permanent secretaries and appoint loyalists. This does not only make the position political but it also violates the value of permanence.

The civil service tradition of anonymity was also compromised during the military era. Generally civil servants are supposed to work behind the scene and not to be heard. The kudos and the blame go to the political head. But the military started to infringe this tradition. Under the Yakubu Gowon era for example, Permanent Secretaries took their seats as members of the Federal Executive Council which is the highest decision- making body in the country and they were even more relied upon by the administration than Commissioners (now Ministers). Above all, they made policy statements on the prosecution of the war (Maduabum, 2002, Teniola,2015). This exposed the civil service to public space and in the circumstance, the Civil Servants were no longer neutral nor impartial but became politicized. Which is a sharp deviation to the tradition inherited in the 1960's.

It has been pointed out by Madubuna (2002), Kujenya (2008) that the politicization of the Civil Service reached its nadir during the first civilian regime through the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria, which gave power to the President and the Governors to remove top civil servants such as Permanent Secretaries and Chief Executives of Agencies, Parastatals and Departments which were hitherto exercised by the Civil Service Commission under the British inherited system. Even positions like the Secretary to the Government which formerly were reserved for technocrats have now become a reward for politicians. This has made the Civil Service a handy tool for politicians. In the present political dispensation, it is not uncommon to hear Governors directing civil servants to go and vote for the ruling party or they will be sacked. In Benue State for instance, during General Elections, Governors have been heard giving directives to directors in the Civil Service to go home and mobilize voters to vote for the ruling party. This has inevitably compelled top officials in the Civil Service to come out openly supporting the government and thus end up having political affiliation.

In addition, the application of quota system of recruitment and promotion, adherence to the federal-character principle and the constant interference of the government in the day-to-day operation of the civil service particularly, the top echelon and mass purges has unfortunately made the civil service an arm of the ruling party. At the State level for instance, evidence abound where some Commissioners request that some directors or permanent secretaries be posted out of their ministries because they are not comfortable working with them. This has made the Civil Service lost its steam and is no longer a disciplined institution composed of well-educated and committed individuals. Many unqualified people are employed to man key positions as a result of political affiliation. There is high level of nepotism in the civil service evident through recruitment and promotion. These days, many a time vacancy are not advertised and list of party faithful members are compiled in Government House and sent to the Civil Service Commission to issue letters of employment. Above all, seniority in the civil service is not respected again, once a political leader comes to power from a particular local Government or Senatorial Zone of the State, those from that particular Zone or Local Government are favored with appointment in the service and find themselves elevated.

This brazen politicization of the civil service has unwittingly diminished the civil service as a handy tool for politicians and the aftermath has been an unholy alliance between criminally minded politicians motivated by gullible masses driven by tribal parochialism to circumvent rules and manipulate the system to meet the iron triangle of politicians, bureaucrats and close cliques. This in the long run has made civil servants to no longer work according to rules and inevitably the service is fast becoming a drain in the pipe of the government leading to poor government performance

5. WAY FORWARD

To enhance work ethics and improve the productivity of the civil service in the implementation of government policies and programs meant to enhance the socio-economic development of the country, the following recommendations are made.

The independence of the Civil Service Commission should be guaranteed: There is a compelling need to grant the Civil Service Commission (CSC) autonomy to recruit, promote and discipline staff. It should be given free hands to advertise jobs and recruit staff for the Civil Service. Candidates should be subjected to aptitude test or qualifying examination and only those that pass and met the clearly stipulated guidelines should be employed. This will help to

instill discipline and professionalism in the Civil Service and insulate it from political interference whereby people get in through political influence and feel they cannot be subjected to rules because they have a political god-father that can protect them and do not even take orders from above. So, if recruitment is based on merit, even if the Federal Principle is applied, the most competent will be engaged to take their work seriously and abide by the rules. This will also stem politicization of the civil service and improve professionalism, efficiency and productivity.

There should be ethical orientation: there is an urgent need to re-orient Nigerians to imbibe the virtues of honesty, integrity, selflessness, loyalty and patriotism. In Nigeria today, there is high moral decadence in the society and vice is fast becoming the norm in society. Those that embezzle public funds suddenly become heroes and awarded chieftaincy titles by the community. Sudden wealth is glorified while honesty and due diligence is scorned. Since social institutions are mirrored after societal values, under such circumstance, the civil service nay public service will be a reflection of the society. We need to take a cue from the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which suddenly instilled in Nigerians the virtue of patience, courtesy and orderliness. When we have ethical re-orientation in the society it will go a long way to re-orient the civil service.

There is need to enhancing the watch-dog role of occupational associations: occupational associations are formed to protect the interest of their member as well as instill discipline and uphold the ethics of the profession. These associations have their Do's and Don'ts which members are supposed to comply with. There is need for the government to encourage professional bodies like the Nigerian Medical Association, Nigerian Union of Teachers, Nigerian Bar Association, and other occupational unions Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees and Civil Service Union to constantly organize workshops and seminars to educate their members to uphold the ideals and values of their profession. They should also be encouraged to set up Disciplinary Committee to try erring members. This will go a long way to sanitize the Civil Service

Conscious efforts to strengthen anti-corruption bodies. There is need to strengthen institutions created to enhance public accountability in the country such as Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Public Complaints Commission (PCC), the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT), by providing them with the necessary logistics to execute their mandate and

these bodies should be insulated from political interference. Also, citizens should take advantage of the Whistle-blower's Protection Act of 2017 to expose corrupt officials.

Enhanced pay and welfare of civil servants: the take home pay of the average Nigerian worker is below-living wage. Especially the removal of fuel subsidy has triggered inflation and high cost of living. Many workers find it to cope with the economic realities and often indulge in unethical practices. Increasing the pay package of civil servants will help to stem this. In addition, the government should take pragmatic measures to provide housing loans or affordable houses to civil servants. The disparity in salary and allowances between political office holders and civil servants also should be addressed. This will help reduce the temptation of those servants in-charge of the peoples' commonwealth to touch a bit of it.

Enforcement of standards: the public bureaucracy is supposed to be characterized by security of tenure and application, application of formal rules and impersonal in the conduct of government roles. Government should demonstrate the political will to abide by these rules and regulations. There should be a stop to tenure elongation. Putting people to act when there are competent people to be confirmed. These days the government is found of side-tracking rules for political expediency which is negatively affecting discipline in the civil service and impinging on service ethics.

Incentivizing ethics: government should make efforts to reward ethical conduct. Hard work, honesty should be rewarded in the civil service. This could be done by commendation letters, enhancement of steps or even through special promotion.

6. CONCLUSION

The study examined the civil service ethics in Nigeria with a bias on the impact of the erosion of service ethics on the efficiency and effectiveness of the civil service in implementing government policies and programs to enhance national development. The study found out that politics has permeated the civil service milieu and this has birthed a subaltern relationship between politicians, bureaucrats and close cliques to undermine rules for self-serving purposes. The civil service today is no longer a disciplined institution but a far cry from what was bequeathed to Nigeria at independence in 1960. What is going on in Nigeria is at variance to world- wide expectations that the public bureaucracy should be composed of non-partisan, well-educated and committed individuals who seek their role in defining and implementing

government policies. The Nigerian Civil Service today has become bastardized, characterized by corruption, dwindling reputation and poor service delivery.

REFERNCES

- Apeh, E. A. (2018). 'Public administration and national development in Nigeria: Challenges and possible solutions', *International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research*, Vol.4, No.3, Pp.49-59
- Asaju, K. & Ayeni, E. (2020). Public bureaucracy and national development in Nigeria: Issues and challenges, *Nigerian Journal of Political and Administrative Studies*, Vol.5, No.1, Pp.69-90
- Buchanan, J. (2012) *Genesis, Public Choice 152 (3) Specia Issue: The Calculus of Consent After Fifty Years*, pp.252-255
- Dahida, D. & Paul, O. (2016). The civil service ethical question and Nigerian change agenda, *Nigerian Journal of Public Administration and Local Government*, Vol. xviii. no.1, Pp.51-57
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000) *Civil Service Handbook*: Federal Government Publisher
- Jaja, S. O, (1996). 'The colonial civil service' in Eliagwu, J.I & G. N. Uzoigwe (ed) *Foundations of Nigerian Federalism 1900-1960*, pp. 87-117
- Kujenya, J. (2008). 'Civil service or idle service' *The Nation*, Vol.02, No.0849, pp13-14
- Maduabum, C. (2002). 'Transition and the Nigerian civil service, in Onuaha, B. & M. Fadakine (ed) *Transition Politics in Nigeria 1970-1999*.Ikeja: Malthouse press limited, pp.157-176
- Okpata, F. O (2014). 'Re-enacting the civil service core values and strategic policy approaches for sustainable restoration of the values in Nigeria, in African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies (AJPAS) Vol.6, No. 1, pp.14-23

Sorkaa, A. P (2001). 'Nigerian civil service and national development' in *Nigerian Journal of Political and Administrative Studies, Vol.1, No.2*, pp.76-84

Teniola, E. (2015, June, 27). 'The old bureaucracy is coming back', *The Punch daily Newspaper (viewpoint)*, 39(20,950).

Tullock, G. (1961). *An Economic Analysis of Political Choice*, 26(1) Pp.234-249

Weber, M. (1958). 'The three types of legitimate rule', *Berkely publications in society and Institutions vol.4, No.1*, Pp.1-11

Yellowstone, G. O. (1975). *The Evolution of the Nigerian Civil Service 1861-1960*, Lagos: University of Lagos press.