

# Analysing civil services and national development in nigeria politics essay



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Issues of development have been a recurring problem in most countries of the world today. In this write up, this group will analyze who a civil servant is, functions of the civil service in Nigeria and the role of the civil service in socio-economic and political development of the country.

The objective of this work is to enable readers have a thorough understanding of our government, civil service and how the policies and actions of these institutions will enhance the growth and development of our nation. It also focuses on the drawbacks and challenges faced by the civil servants in the delivery of their services.

Finally, recommendations were made in order to resolve issues which have stunted our national development and the achievement of an efficient and effective civil service.

Also, we are enormously indebted to one another in this group for making this work a reality.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Every modern state has three arms of government. These are the legislature, judiciary and executive. While the legislature makes law, the judiciary interprets it and the executive implements it. In the duty of law implementation, the political office holders or the elected representatives of the people do not exercise their power directly. They exercise it through the instrumentality of the civil service.

The civil service is a term used to cover those public servants who are direct employees of the federal and state governments, other than the police, the

armed forces personnel, the judicial personnel and the teachers. Its usage also excludes employees of statutory corporations and boards (Nwosu 1977). According to Adebayo (1981) the civil service comprises all servants of the state other than those holding political appointments who are employed in a civil capacity and whose remuneration is paid out of money voted by the legislature.

It is to be noted that the public service and the civil service are not the same thing. Public service includes not only those who work in the regular government ministries and departments but also statutory corporations, boards and the armed forces (Obiajulu & Obi 2004).

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Evolution of the Civil Service in Nigeria**

In tracing the emergence and growth of the civil service in Nigeria, Nwosu (1977) started from 1900 when Britain formally established the authority in most of the administrative purposes. They were in the colony of Lagos and the protectorate of Northern and Southern Nigeria. Later in 1906, the Lagos colony was merged with the southern protectorate and renamed the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1914, the two protectorates were amalgamated and subsequently became known as the colony and protectorate of Nigeria.

In order to be able to administer the territory, Britain imposed a unified alien civil service on Nigeria without giving much thought to its impact on the Nigerian traditional communities with their conflicting values, interest, norms

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and authority structure (Kingsley 1963). It must be pointed out that despite the amalgamation and its attendant unification of the civil services of the North and South, the two are still developed at their own pace.

The major function of civil service at the time was mainly the maintenance of law and raising enough revenue to sustain the colonial authority. According to Okoli & Onah (2002), the service was geared towards the negative policy of preventing trouble in the areas under its administration. Economic and social development was never a major objective of the administration.

The colonial civil service according to Nwosu 1977 had its structure; at the Head of Public Service was the Governor-General, who was accountable to the colonial secretary in London. The colonial secretary was himself accountable to the British cabinet and the parliament. The governor-general delegated his authority to the Chief Secretary, who was the effective head of the service. The chief secretary coordinated the whole service which was divided into two major parts - the departmental and the political administration. The departmental administration covers the technical and professional functions of the colonial regime. These include education, health, treasury, agriculture, forestry, public works and audit.

The various heads assisted the chief secretary. They not only advised the Governor but initiated policies, participated in legislation and supervised the execution of enacted bills and approved policies. While the head of technical department operated from Lagos. Their subordinates were in charge of field offices. The field officers included the lieutenant-governor, the resident and district officers, the officers who are pillars of colonial civil service were fully

responsible for maintenance of law and order and the mobilization of resources which were the main object of colonial administration.

The field officer did not rule the people directly, rather they owned the people and that is indirect rule. In the north, it was completely successful because of the indigenous political and administrative structure on ground. In the west, it was partially successful because of the peoples contact with western education and in the east; it was a complete failure because of the republican nature of the people's government.

The fusion of western administration with the traditional African system produced a new structure which Nwosu (1977) says corresponded with Fred Riggs description of the pattern of role differentiation in a traditional society. At this early period, Nigerians were restricted to the lower echelons of the civil service. The south and the north; though amalgamated, still had their separate civil services.

## **Principles of the Civil Service**

The civil service is guided by the triple maxims of anonymity, neutrality and impartiality. The principles of permanence are also seen as part of the maxims (Obiajulu & Obi 2004).

Anonymity: this states that civil servants should be seen and not heard. Though they advise political office holders on issues relating to government, they neither take the blame nor the glory of such policies. They are not expected to be seen defending such policies. Civil servants as far as possible are anonymous and should not be seen as craving for publicity.

Neutrality: the civil servant must be politically neutral. His job is to serve the government of the day irrespective of what he feels about that particular government. He should not allow his personal prejudices color his dedication to his duty. He is not expected to be a card carrying member of a political party or get involved in partisan politics though he is expected to vote at election times.

Impartiality: Civil servants are paid from tax payer's money which does not belong to anybody or group in particular. They are therefore expected to discharge their duties without fear or favor in rendering such service to the public. The civil servant is expected to treat everybody with a high degree of impartiality.

Permanence: the civil service is often defined as a permanent body of officials that carryout government decisions. It is permanent and its life is not tied to the life of any particular government. Government come and goes but the civil service remains.

## **Functions of the Civil Service**

According to Obiajulu & Obi (2004), the major function of the civil service is the implementation of government policies. Civil servants are not policy makers and are not really in a position to question government policies. Whenever a policy is made, it becomes the role of the civil servants to implement the policy the way the government of the day wants it to be.

The federal and state civil servants play important role in policy formulation and advice. They play a major economic, social and educational objective of both the federal and state governments.

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The civil service also gathers statistical information for the activities of the government. Senior civil servants also have to inform the public about the achievements, abilities and problems facing the government.

Also, Ezeani (2005) noted that the civil service is a store of knowledge of past government decisions and procedures. Thus, it plays an educative role by assisting professionals and military political executives (as is the case in Nigeria), especially the new ones “ to adapt themselves to the realities of their offices” (This Week, 1988: 19). The civil servants also play investigative and regulatory functions.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Structure of the Nigerian Civil Service**

The civil service is mainly organized around the federal ministries headed by a minister appointed by the president, who must include at least one member of the 36 states in his cabinet. President’s appointment is confirmed by the senate of Nigeria.

There are less than 36 ministries. In some cases, a federal minister is responsible for more than one ministry and a minister may be assisted by one or more ministers of state. Each ministry has a permanent secretary who is a senior civil servant.

The ministries are responsible for various parastatals (government owned corporations) such as education, National Broadcasting Commission (information) and Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). Other parastatals are the responsibility of the office of the presidency such as the



Independent Electoral Commission, the Federal Civil Service Commission, etc.

## **Role of the Civil Service in National Development**

The civil service is a vital part of government machinery and its role is decisive in ensuring the stability of governance, its quality and ability to perform and push the frontiers of national development.

According to Edozien, a former permanent secretary, the civil service inherited from the British was effective, efficient offered a socially responsible service and was well respected and regarded by the political class. So also was the civil service under phase one of the national development plan covering 1960 – 1975).

He said that phase two 1975 – 1999 started with a blow of the morale of the civil service as permanent secretaries were compulsorily retired and were barred from accompanying their ministers to federal executive council (FEC) meetings, while job security was no longer guaranteed.

Engr. Ebele Okeke described the civil service as a critical contact between the government and the people in the area of good government and the people in the area of good governance and service delivery. The success of any government depends on a virile civil service.

Hence, the civil service remains very crucial and critical to national development and democratic stability. In developing states, why years of military and authoritarian rule in most developing societies have impacted

negative political culture on the character and philosophy of the service, yet its role in national development cannot be undervalued.

However, since military regimes and authoritarian rule have lost their appeal in modern government. The need to reform civil and public service to be in tune with democratic values becomes highly imperative. An efficient civil service acts as a catalyst in the development of all nations. While on the other hand, its inefficiency can constitute as one of the heaviest mill stones round the neck of developing nations.

Therefore, it is important to most that the civil service must be efficient to service the newly found democratic project for stability and survival of the polity. Since it is the vehicle and machinery of public policy formulation and implementation, it is also to be noted that democracy with its attractive values will enhance the workings of the public service and redefine, reorient and reposition it to be more affective, mobile and productive partner in national reconstruction agenda (Ayodele and Bolaji).

Bureaucratic bottleneck, high levels of corruption and personalization of governmental affairs exhibited hitherto by the civil service are highly anti-democratic. Democracy is expected to bear on the attitude and change this negative democratic attitude to service. Democracy has rekindled the expectation and optimism of the people in the ability of the civil service to be relevant to he challenges of growth and development.

The strategic relevance of civil service in policy formulation and implementing cannot be over emphasized. In the developing societies

especially in the immediate past independence era the public service  
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assumed the pivotal roles as the vehicle of development. In fact, Ejifor (2003) posits that civil service in the developing societies is everything and that the most important catalyst of development is an efficient service while at the same time its inefficient constitute the heaviest millstones of any nation. This is similar to the view of Agagu (1997: 233) who contends that public and civil service is the continuously active business part of government concerned with carrying out the law, as made by the legislative bodies in the process of organization and management.

In scope, the influence of the civil service is not debatable; it remains definitely a major force in today's governance. The civil service contains a network of human relationships and associations extending from the highly influential government officials to the lowest paid and powerless individual charged with all resources, natural and human and all other aspects of the life of the society with which the government is concerned (Nnoli, 2000: 44). In essence, public service is the totality of how progress and development are made in the society.

The Nigerian civil service has faced a number of challenges, which has considerably undermined its capacity to serve as agent of national development. Such challenges include those of achieving technical competence, coping with public expectation and change, behaving ethically and maintaining constitutional order. The truth is that all these problems are inextricably linked to failure of the civil service to play its rightful role in system maintenance and continuity.

Again, in order to enhance the nation's development, the civil service under the auspices of the public service can partner with the private sector. In Nigeria and other developing countries, sustainable access to healthcare and other socio-economic services and products can be accomplished through public-private partnerships, where the government delivers the minimum standard of services, products and care, the private sector brings skills and core competencies while donors and business bring funding and other resources. Such collaborations will be especially productive in promoting poverty alleviation through partnerships as has been the case with polio eradication and other child immunization efforts.

However, this public-private partnership would help to highlight perspectives on development, from leaders in civil society, government, business and the media, share information of development alternatives, provide forums for informed debate on related issues; seek to accomplish better understanding of the nature of relationships between governmental and non-governmental organizations and introduce conceptual frameworks for understanding such relationships.

Intrinsic in the aforementioned objectives of typical public-private partnerships is the mission to contribute to the economic integration of a country/region accelerate its economic growth and sustainable development, engender and sustain private sector participation in traditionally public sector projects; and expand local access to international markets, thereby ensuring the country's deeper integration into the global economy. For Nigeria in particular, this could be done within the official NEPAD structure,

ECOWAS and other regional economic communities in Africa, governments, private sector, civil society and other stakeholders.

Finally, a vibrant and healthy civil service is the key to good governance and national development.

## **Challenges of the Nigerian Civil Service**

According to Ezeani (2005), the Nigerian Civil Service has over the years been plagued by a number of problems which adversely affected its role as an instrument for socio-economic and political development of the country.

The problems include:

The nature of political competition in the Nigerian environment. The Nigerian civil service has been transformed into a theatre of sharing the national cake among the major ethnic and sub ethnic groups, a factor responsible for the unending demand for fragmentation of governmental structure units of ministries, divisions of major departments etc.) despite the obvious difficulties in sustaining the existing ones.

The conflictual relationship between politicians and administrations

Corruption e. g. looting of national treasury and lack of accountability

Poor remuneration of civil servants

Politicization of the civil service. As Olowu et al (1997) rightly points out “ politicization of the top civil services in an environment of high political instability and high turnover of officials has not only been wasteful of

personnel, it has also led to a weakened role for the civil service in the development process.”

Ethnicity and indiscipline. A family local ethnic and other primordial ties and loyalties, sometimes compete on take precedence over loyalty to the nation and the service (Nwosu 1997)

Social distance existing between the senior civil servants and the masses. Most senior civil servants have contacts with the masses and therefore do not experience their problems

Lack of flexibility among bureaucrats. Civil servants cling tenaciously to routine well established procedures for doing things or red-tapism.

## **The Military Rule and Nigeria Civil Service**

The history of post colonial Nigeria is fraught with military authoritarianism. This has reflected in its bureaucracy. Scholars agree that since 1966 when the military intervened in the Nigeria government and politics up to 1999 civil service has enjoyed enormous popularity due to the inability of the military class to dictate the pace of government without recourse to bureaucrats' wealth of experience. It should be noted that civil servants are often used as stabilizers of the staff under military regimes.

Generally, military administration manifests certain characteristics which are hallmarks of military regimes, these are:

Method of Civil Service Appointment: The civil service has laid down rules and regulations guiding appointment, discipline and promotions. Under the

military these processes are rubbished. Merit and seniority are relegated and mediocrity celebrated. This has brought into the service deep hatred among the rank and file of the system. This has undermined professionalism in the civil service.

**Decision Making Process:** This under the military is usually centralized. There is no constitution, no rule of law, absence of separation of power, no democratic institution with the legislature, executive and judiciary. The decision making process are vested in one centralized body like the Supreme Military Council or Armed Forces Ruling Council. Related to the above is the military often acted with dispatch in administration. The tradition military culture has affected their method of operation even in official bus. By their training and due to their low educational background, they don't know their power limitations. Thus, most of them give appointment, promotions, contract and other forms of state privileges without due process.

**Absence of Separation of Powers and Function:** over-concentration of power and function in one body is another feature of military regime. Military governments don't subscribe to separation of powers. Hence the issue of rule of law is out of the question. The doctrine of separation of powers presupposes that whatever power accruing to one organ shouldn't be interfered with by another. But the precepts of the military regime all governmental powers i. e. legislature, executive and to some extent, the judiciary, are concentrated in few hands.

**Prevalence of Spoilt System in Appointment:** Often, appointments under the military are not done on merit. Successive military regimes often adopted

some faithful members of the public into public administration without regard to their qualification. By this arrangement, sensitive federal and state positions were left for people who aren't competent. This is in line with the military belief that any person can do the art of administration. Again because of military governments could be ousted any day it becomes a tradition among staff office occupiers to appropriate or personalize the trappings of their office.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **How can National Development be fully Realized**

Development has become more crucial in the developing countries to avert the lingering problem of bureaucratic maze paralyzed by partisan politics and ideological imperatives, poor coordination, implementation and sheer miscalculation that bedevil many administrative issues in the developing countries. These problems can be tackled through better monitoring accountability checks and more rigorous project evaluation.

Development does not take place in a vacuum but in an “ environment”, the environment in the field of development is a country's socio-economic and political set up. To be conducive to national development, the civil service as an environment has to have minimum level of stability, peace and order. (Obi & Obikeze 2004).

National development is crucial in developing countries such as Nigerian to help them enhance their level of political economic, social and cultural wellbeing with the aid and instrumentality of the civil service.



## **Recommendations**

Today's civil service needs to rediscover the time-honoured inbuilt system of training, retraining and adaptive skills in consonance with modern work practices and processes. It must imbibe the culture of innovation both in imagination and routine works as well as in developing appropriate tools for anticipating change and challenges. It must be able to institutionalize change in modern governance and societal development. It must see itself as a tool for the promotion of growth, peace, stability, development and democracy.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, for the civil service to be both relevant and effective, it must rediscover its cherished tradition of service, loyalty and excellence and complement them with integrity, credibility, leadership, innovation and transparency in the management of scarce resources. With this, the Nigerian civil service can be capable of meeting modern challenges of national development.