

EXPERIENCE WITH PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATORS AND SECRETARIES

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Introduction:

The Service (in our case here, ‘public service’ and ‘civil service’) have seen one form of reform or the other but the traditional responsibilities of administrators have not changed significantly over the preceding decades, yet the way and manner of task delivery have come under serious public scrutiny and criticisms. In developing economies like Nigeria, issues of poor accountability and lack of transparency in the conduct of government business have brought to question as to whether administrators have not deviate from their core mandate of providing services to the ‘public’.

Looking at the Nigerian case, evident from copious disclosure by International Monetary Fund (IMF), Transparency International and other local and international concerned institutions, point to official abuses, mismanagement, monumental corruption and wastages of public resources. This is largely due poor accountability and transparency by both politicians and administrator responsible for public service delivery in Nigeria (Abdullahi, 2015).

This may not be unconnected to the fact that reform efforts in the country do not includes reforming the ‘Reformers’ – the public servants who undertakes the management of the Service. Attention of past reforms does not cover deep troubling issues to government officers like character remodelling, poor service condition, remuneration and monumental abuse of rules, processes, procedures, resources etc.

To improve the Service and enhance service delivery to the citizens, several countries have moved from ‘public administration’ paradigm to ‘public management’ depicting a better structure and process in public sector having as its main objective, getting things done efficiently, effectively and in an accountable way (Pollitt and Bouckaet, 2011).

Accountability and transparency should be fully entrenched governance in Nigeria. There is the need for accountability by all officers of government and in its entire ramification. Accountability and transparency speaks where there is an existence of relationship between an individual or body, and the performance of tasks or functions by that individual or body. They are subjected to another’s oversight, direction or request to provide information or justification for their actions and decisions and which must in public interest as against personal interest (Broven, 2006).

Administrative and Public Service

The Services of the federation is made up of officials of government, at the federal, state and local government levels in the ministries, parastatals, extra-ministerial departments and the paramilitary organizations.

There is distinguished difference between administrative reform and administrative changes which could result from a normal process of administrative development or modernization. Administrative change is a self-adjusting (not a result of deliberate effort) response to fluctuating

conditions. Consequently, administrative reform results from the malfunctioning in the self-adjusting process of administrative changes, (Matahaba, 1989).

The concept of administrative reform in Nigeria had generally implied periodic review of a part or the whole of the machinery of government. Such review always produces a blue-print that is the basis of a white paper, which are mostly not implemented comprehensively.

For the purpose of on-going reforms in Nigeria, reform refers to the process of aligning public service structures, systems and processes, human and material resources to government policies, targets and plans. The underlying principle which must be followed is 'form follows function', which means that it is only when comprehensive plans have been prepared, it will be possible to determine the appropriate public sector organizations to implement them. In other words, reform is essentially challenging the way government does its work in view of current or anticipated reality or a desired state.

What is Reform and what should Administrators do?

One useful way of having a good understanding of term *Reform* is go through its synonyms. These synonyms often enable the explanation of new words through the associational comparison with the other word. In this case, the synonyms of 'reform' include: 'improvement', 'reorganization', 'restructuring', 'modification', 'transformation', 'alteration', 'amendment', 'overhauling', 'restoration', 'change', 'adjustment', among others, (Olaopa, 2011). An organization being reformed therefore is an organization that is being improved, reorganized, restructured, modified, transformed, altered, amended, overhauled, restored etc.

Reform, in simple terms, implies the readjustment or repositioning of an organization in order to be able to effectively and efficiently meet the dynamism and challenges of its universe of operation. It often requires a trajectory of moving from a present but unfavourable state through series of strategic and institutional stages of change, towards a future state marked by efficient and effective improvements leading to better performance (ECA, 2009). Public sector reforms on the other hand usually include a range of reform measures dealing with core government functions such as civil service reform, financial and fiscal reform, decentralization, enhancing accountability, legal and judicial reform, and improving corporate regulatory frameworks (ADB, 1995).

Post independence reforms seen as home grown have not fare much better. Reforms such as Ayida Commission, Udoji Commission, Dasuki Civil Service Reform Commission etc have done what could be best described as cosmetics changes to the Service rather than deliver deep-down multifaceted restructuring and reorganisation of the system of government in the country.

Administrators in Nigeria must see themselves as public managers that have to deliver value-for-money services by all means necessary. Administrators must position themselves as 'Agents of Change' and of 'Service Reform' in Nigeria. Unless and until services delivery by present and future generation of administrators in Nigeria lend itself to public scrutiny and purge itself of the negative image it has currently earned, the Public being the custodian of governmental institutions and also beneficiary of services delivered by officials of the institutions will continue to view administrators with disdain and reforms in the country may continue to create no meaningful impact.

Administrators in Nigeria must harness such machineries like e-government and Public Management Reforms (PMR) to wash itself of the old sins and inject a new life into the Nigerian public sector. This could be achieved within shortest time possible if the following recommended issues find way into our government and public life:

- Public administrators should be transparent and information should be handled as openly as the law allows.
- Public bodies should give people information and, if appropriate, advice that is clear, accurate, complete, relevant and timely.
- Public bodies should be open and truthful when accounting for their decisions and actions.
- They should state their criteria for decision making and give reasons for their decisions.
- Public bodies should handle and process information properly and appropriately in line with the law. The policies and procedures of the Service must be transparent. Public bodies should, as the law requires, respect the privacy of personal and guarantee the confidentiality of informants, especially in this era of *whistle blowing*.
- Administrators should create and maintain reliable and usable records as evidence of their activities. They should manage records in line with recognised standards to ensure that they can be retrieved and that they are kept for as long as there is a statutory duty or business need.
- Public bodies should take responsibility for the actions of their staff.
- The role of Legislative and Judicial institutions can be further delineated in that parliament holds the executive politically accountable, whilst the judiciary holds the executive legally accountable.
- We must build social accountability that relies on civic engagement, by creating an environment where ordinary citizens and/or civil society organizations participate directly or indirectly in exacting accountability.
- Public policies and institutions must meet the needs of citizens and uphold their rights

Conclusion

A new service in Nigeria that is product of sound reform would continue to be saddled by Administrators and supported Secretaries. We must reinvent ourselves like the administrators of the olden days. They old generation of administrators were highly revered due to their role as custodians of the common heritage of state, providing basic quality services of road, electricity, water, sanitation, health, security, order etc. Administrators were trusted, respected and celebrated. These, among other good images should create the rainbow upon which the future of public service reform should rest in Nigeria. It is only on the basis of the new deal that our relevance as administrators and secretaries shall remain.

Further Reading:

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