

Civil Service as a Catalyst for Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The primary function of the civil service is formulation and implementation of governmental policies in line with the welfare of the citizens, sustainability of the state, regulating commercial operations, and providing social service. Civil service plays a crucial role in any country's economic development, particularly in Nigeria where the public sector is directly involved in national development. It serves as a pivot for design and execution sustainable economic development programmes. This necessitated the civil service to adopt more management methods, develop the necessary managerial abilities, and adopt a new strategy that includes project management in order to secure and ensure sustainability. This study explored the role of the civil service as a contributor to Nigeria's sustainable economic development. The methodology adopted was a documentary review and contextual analysis of past and current literature on the impact of civil service on sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The inefficiency and incompetency of the Nigerian civil service are evident due to the poor execution of the national budgets and public policies geared towards economic development. Furthermore, the unpredictability of the Nigerian political and economic sector and the high cost of doing business which is undermining investors' confidence is another important negative effect on Nigerian civil service performance in promotion of sustainable economic development. Therefore, for the Nigerian civil service to contribute to sustainable economic development it must be made more appealing and supported, modern equipment and technologies should be introduced across all levels of the civil service, continuous professional development should be made mandatory in the civil service, and appointment and promotion in the civil service must be based on merit and qualifications.

Background to the Study

In any country, civil service is one of the primary drivers of development. The efficacy and efficiency of a society's or system's civil service, particularly in emerging countries, is crucial to its development (Tolu and Abe 2011). Governments bear the brunt of the burden of economic growth in Nigeria, as in other developing countries due to the lack of a well-developed private sector, thus making the government the largest employer of labour. (Ola, 1990). Nigeria, probably more than any other African country, presents higher problems of growth and efficient use of social resources due to its diverse social environment marked by strong opposition to the governmental authority (Nwosu, 1997). The public service in Nigeria is looked to not just to carry out development goals and administer government policies daily, and but also to play key roles in establishing development plans, policies, and programs such as reduced unemployment, increased social products and more equitable redistribution of income that would drive rapid social and economic transformation (Tolu and Abe, 2011). The major hindrance to Nigeria's development is not a lack of political authority, rather the existence of various constituted authorities in the wider society that restricts the exercise of national political authority, thus endangering the survival of the political community. Nigerians civil service today is a broken organization that has lost its qualities of anonymity, neutrality, and tenure security. The institution appears to be resistant to reform, where undue bureaucratic practice and endless delays have become the norm, thus subjecting it to a target of public criticism (FRN, 1988). In an attempt to shape the civil service into an institution that can contribute to the growth of the nation, successive administrations have purged the civil service to reduce its complexity and duties in wake of the economic recession in Nigeria, however, the problems of the civil service's remained persistent, consequently hindering the civil service's ability to contribute meaningfully to the development process of the nation. This study aims to explore the role of the civil service as a contributor to Nigeria's sustained socio-economic development.

Civil Service, National Economic Development, and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

According to Adamolekun (2002), in developed countries and most low-income nations in Sub-Saharan Africa, the civil service is often used as a synonym for government machinery. According to section 318 subsections 1 of the 1999 constitution, the civil service is defined as "service of the Federation (state) in a civil capacity, staff of the office of the President (Governor), Vice President (Deputy Governor), a ministry or department of the federation (state) assigned with the responsibility for any business of the federation's government" (state) (FRN,1999).

Ipinlaiye (2001), described civil service as the group of individuals engaged by the governments on a civil and non-political basis to render and holistically carry out its decisions and policies in a bureaucratic manner. Olaleye (2004), described development as the improvement of the economy through a desirable increase in the gross national output, equitable distribution of resources, high productivity and full employment, and relative stability in general price levels of goods. In addition, Gboyega (2003) in simple

terms describes development as an increase in the overall well-being of everybody in the society, rather than only a selected group of people. He further pointed out that development drastically reduces poverty and inequity to life goods. Nigeria is constantly hunted by the phantom of development. In its sixty-one years of independence, development have been a constant flux, with almost all theories and models of development have been tested (Aremu, 2003). The first National Development Plan policy was established between 1962 and 1968 with the goals of expanding development possibilities in health, education, and employment, as well as enhancing access to these opportunities. However, this plan was disrupted due to the collapse of the First Republic and the start of the civil war. After the end of the civil war in 1970, the second National Development Plan was established between 1970-1974. The plan was focused on agriculture, industry, transportation, manpower, defence, electricity, communication, water supply, and social services. However, the third plan, which covered the period 1975-1980, was seen as more extensive than the second. The focus was on rural development and initiatives to revitalize the agricultural industry. The fourth plan, which stretched from 1981 to 1985, emphasized the importance of social and health services and the goal of improving the living condition of the people (Tolu and Abe, 2011).

Sustainable development is a framework for achieving human development goals while also ensuring natural systems' ability to supply the natural resources and ecosystem services that the economy and society rely on. Lynn et.al. (2014) defined sustainable development as the concept of sustaining productivity by replacing resources consumed with resources of equal or higher value without damaging or harming natural biotic systems. As the idea of sustainable development evolved, its attention shifted to the development of economic, social, and environmental and political development for the future generation. Poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice are the major challenges addressed by the current UN's Sustainable Development Goals (UN 2020 Report). Nigeria's progress toward the Millennium Development Goals fell short of expectations. However, several broad poverty-reduction programs that were put in place at the time have now become a cornerstone in addressing the challenges. Various challenges hindered the actualization of the sustainable development goals at the state and local government levels. This was mostly due to the lack of coordination with the private sector and shortage of technical assistance at the local government level.

Previous and Current Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria Geared Towards Sustainable Economic Development

Since the outset, a permanent body of officials has been given great acknowledgement for the express purpose of carrying out governmental decisions. With the emergence of modern states, the civil service of a state is a reflection of its political system. According to Ajayi (1997), the primary function of the civil service is the formulation and implementation of governmental policy in line with the welfare of the citizens, sustainability of the state, regulating commercial operations, and providing social

service. He further pointed that the civil service also plays a crucial role in any country's economic development, particularly in Nigeria, where the public sector is directly involved in national development.

In Nigeria, the civil service plays a unique role in the design and execution of national development goals. The primary report of the Public Service Review Commission from 2004 is largely focused on the development and the utilization of the public service for this goal. Furthermore, the commission emphasized increasing sustainable development as one of the primary goals of the Nigerian government. This necessitated that public services, particularly the civil service, adopt more management methods, develop the necessary managerial abilities, and adopt a new strategy that includes project management in order to secure and ensure sustainability. The framework for the development of Nigeria's Civil Service into a centralized bureaucratic organization was laid during the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates by the British. The civil service during the colonial era was tasked with maintaining peace and order and mobilizing sufficient local resources to achieve self-sufficiency for the colonial masters. Following independence, the focus shifted to social and economic growth. With the inception of the military administration in 1966 and the suspension of the constitution, the civil service was subjected to tasks that were basically incompatible with its conventional roles, thus, it had to change its fundamental role in order to meet the new challenges (Olagunju, 2000). The focus of the civil service changed to maintaining national unity, reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction, following the civil war of 1967-1970. Furthermore, the emphasis turned to infrastructure construction and supply of social services supply with the increase in oil revenue. However, since early 1979, the civil service has had to adapt to the challenges of managing an ailing economy, including the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), Rationalization, Nationalization, and, more recently, Privatization, Poverty Alleviation, Empowerment, and other initiatives. These reforms are being implemented in order to bring stability to the system and to position the Civil Service for effective service delivery capable of supporting Nigeria's sustainable development (Tolu and Abe, 2011).

The Current State on the Impact of Civil Service on Sustainable Economic Development in Nigeria

The civil service is tasked with the management of the government's daily operations, as well as coordinating the actions of other government agencies in order to bring about national development. However, the performance of the Nigerian civil service has been a subject of growing concern in recent times. According to Babura (2003), the Nigerian civil service has become increasingly partisan, inefficient, incompetent, and corrupt in nearly all of its operations. He further pointed that activities of the civil service are lacking in responsibility, integrity, and accountability. In addition, Okunbade (1990), stressed that the Nigerian civil service has deteriorated into an organization where ethics has reached an abyss, and excessive bureaucratic procedures and interminable delays have become the norm. However, according to Omotoso (2011), this is mostly due to the poor remuneration of the civil service. Despite the increment in the minimum wage in Nigeria,

the civil service salary in Nigeria is still very low. As a result, most civil servants engage in unethical practices including bureaucratic corruption. Several civil service officials have defrauded and stolen government money, while most would want money before they would offer their alleged service to the public.

Also, Inadequate training and lack of commitment to development undermine the productivity of the civil service, hence the development of the nation. In addition, most parastatals at the various level of government, still operate using obsolete and outdated equipment. The inefficiency and incompetency of the Nigerian civil service are evident due to the poor execution of the national budgets and public policies. Consequently, it has resulted in the poor performance of the national development plans including inadequate power supply, poor education and health care system. Furthermore, the unpredictability of the Nigerian political and economic sector and the high cost of doing business which is undermining investors' confidence is another important negative effect on Nigerian civil service performance. Thus leading to a high unemployment and poverty rate, low per capita income, poor infrastructure and standard of living.

It is, therefore, logical to say that Nigeria's development remains difficult since there is no competent and efficient civil service. Ekeh (2009), pointed that the economic development of a nation is linked to the ethics and competency of their civil service. He further stressed that societies with long traditions of competent civil service have made more advances in economic development. Thus, a competent and efficient civil service with professional ethics is therefore significant for rapid socio-economic development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The importance of the civil service in the sustainable development of any nation cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, for the Nigerian civil service to contribute to economic development, the following recommendation should be adopted;

1. Firstly, the civil service must be made more appealing and accorded more respect and support. In addition, modern equipment and technologies should be introduced across all levels of the civil service. This will in turn help improve the efficiency and productivity of the civil service.
2. Secondly, continuous professional development should be made mandatory in the civil service. In that way, their knowledge and skills would not become obsolete.
3. Lastly, appointment and promotion in the civil service must be based on merit and qualifications. The merit principle will help attract competent personnel to man positions in various parastatals of the civil service, thus maintaining the quality and efficiency of the civil service.

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