

Personnel Deployment in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service

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ABSTRACT The paper examined personnel deployment in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service. The thrust of the paper is that effective distribution and utilization of personnel is *sine-qu-a-non* to the success of an organization, and the civil service organization in particular. The paper also examined and discussed the problematic of personnel distribution in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service and the attendant effects on government policies and programmes.

I. INTRODUCTION

The paper examines personnel deployment as an aspect of field administration in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service with reference to Oyo and Kwara States. In another breadth, personnel deployment in this paper is considered as an aspect of public personnel management. It has been argued that out of the three major factors of production, namely, manpower, money and material, manpower is the most important. (Okotoni, 1997:1). It has been further argued that the success of any organization depends largely on the quality and the quantity of its personnel: (Ubeku, 1975; Okotoni, 1997). This point was corroborated by Terry George in his book *The Principle of Management* that, "people are by far the most important resource available to manager". The reason is not far fetched. Organisations are managed and staffed by people; and without people organizations cannot exist. (Cascio, 1992). While agreeing with these analysts, it is the view of this paper that personnel management with emphasis on staff deployment is equally important as an aspect of production process. According to the Committee for Economic Development, one of the most important ingredients of overall management is the effective utilization of people. But unfortunately, because of the centralized nature of many countries particularly in the Third World, little attention is paid to effective deployment of

personnel in the public services. (Olowu, 1996). In other words, centralization stifles personnel deployment and this in turn leaves indelible imprints on personnel management in general.

The argument of this paper is that decentralization of personnel and as well as reasonable level of authority is desirable. The Nigerian federal civil service like any other organization has its own problems; some of which have been identified and dealt with, while others are yet to be identified and researched into. One of such neglected areas is personnel deployment to field offices. Government hardly realizes the damages done to its policies by concentrating its best and most experienced workers at the headquarters rather than deploying them to the field offices where they are most needed to implement government's policies and programmes. Policies and programmes enunciated by government hardly make any positive impact on the target groups, because "inexperienced and junior officers located in the more populated countryside have to wait for instructions even on routine matters." (Wunsch and Olowu, 1995).

This paper seeks to address this problem, using three federal ministries and two states (Oyo and Kwara states) as the main focus. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections.

II. EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE

The Nigerian federal civil service has its roots in the British colonial administration, which dated back to the second half of the 19th century. What is known as Nigeria today came into existence as a result of the artificial amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern Protectorates and the Lagos Colony on January 1, 1914. However, the civil service has been in existence before this date. Various parts of the territories known as Nigeria today were ceded to the British colonial masters at different periods. Lagos was ceded to Britain in 1861, and a rudimentary civil

service was established. (Olusanya, 1975). The Southern Protectorate was transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office in 1899. The Northern part of the country which, was administered by the Royal Niger Company whose interest was more or less commercial, was taken over by the British colonial administration on January 1, 1900. Each of these territories had its own civil service in a very modest form. The service, in fact, was a civil-military organization – as it was a combination of civil and military officers. For instance, it had the following departments: Public Works Department, Military, Forestry, Botanical, Judiciary, Medical and Sanitary, Prisons, Treasury, Customs Post Office, Marine and Printing. (Ikoiwak, 1980).

A major development came in the history of the Nigerian civil service on January 1, 1914 when the Southern and Northern Protectorates were amalgamated. Lagos became the seat of government both politically and administratively, and this remained until 1992 when it was moved to Abuja. A major epoch in the evolution of Nigerian civil service came on October 1, 1960 when Nigeria attained her independence. During this period, Nigeria operated a civilian Westminster parliamentary system of government with three regions (and four regions in 1963) under a federal system. The best civil servants in the country were found in the regions – as many civil servants from the federal civil service withdrew to their respective regions after the creation of regional civil services in 1954. Besides the need to transfer their allegiance to their regions, most of those who transferred to the regions were on promotion. The only exception was the Northern Region, which hardly had qualified indigenes from the North to fill the posts in the Northern Region civil service. The major lasting development during this period was what Dotun Philips refers to as “the transformation and redefinition of the role of the civil service to that of nation building, that is assisting the new government to plan and accelerate the pace of Nigeria’s socio-economic development.” (Nigeria, 1985:15).

The latter part of this period witnessed unprecedented political crises, which led to the demise of the First Republic and culminated into the thirty-month civil war that seriously threatened the survival of Nigeria as a nation. The war, which started in 1966, ended on January 15, 1970.

Thirteen Years of Military Rule in Nigeria (1966-79)

The First Republic, which fell in 1966, ushered in the first military regime in Nigeria. During this period, Nigerian Federal Civil Service rose to the challenge of political crisis, which engulfed the nation. The top civil servants openly assumed political responsibilities. They were not only seen; they were heard. They were in effect, responsible for policy formulation and implementation, while the military were preoccupied more with the civil war, and the task to keep Nigeria one and integrated. The era also witnessed the emergence of higher civil servants, dubbed “Supper Permanent Secretaries”. They became highly influential political technocrats, particularly between 1970 and 1975. It was an era of highly bureaucratic power. But the fall of General Yakubu Gowon on July 29, 1975 marked the end of the ‘golden age’ of the civil servants in the act of governance.

The regime of Generals Murtala/Obasanjo embarked on massive purge unknown in the history of the Nigerian Civil Service. About 12,000 civil servants were removed for one reason or the other. The autocratic and dictatorial character of the military was clearly revealed here. The procedures for dismissal and termination of appointment as contained in the *Federal Public Service of Nigeria, Notes for Guidance of 1972*, and the fourth chapter of the *Federal Republic of Nigeria Civil Service Rules of 1974* were both ignored. It became hard to explain the criteria for the dismissals and terminations, which were not only arbitrary, but also prejudicial, discriminatory in many instances, and injurious to the system. Most of the best and well-experienced civil servants were removed from the service, thus creating a vacuum that could not be filled for years after. The morale of the civil servants was greatly dampened. The sense of sanctity and security of tenure disappeared from the service. Loyalty gave way to laxity, since many loyal civil servants were removed without cause. Such environment was certainly not conducive for productivity. Merkl’s (1972:293) remarks became relevant here:

In a career civil service where the individual administrator expects to spend a lifetime at his career, the rewards and punishments can be quite subtle without losing their

effectiveness. In fact drastic measures or a constant threat of dismissal would be more likely to create poor working climate and feelings of job insecurity that can be just as injurious to productivity in the public service as they are in industry. It is far wiser to engage a person's pride and ambition in his optimal performance than to worry about how to deter him from wrongdoing.

How apt and predictive was Merkl's statement with respect to the Nigerian federal civil service in the aftermath of the mass retrenchment and dismissal! Even General Olusegun Obasanjo, a chief actor in the drama, later came to realize that the "purge in the public service has not revitalized the service as envisaged."¹ The situation virtually remained the same when the civilian administration assumed office on October 1, 1979.

The Second Republic and After (1979-90)

Between 1979 and 1983, a civilian presidential regime emerged on October 1, 1979, after 13 years of military rule. During this period the civil service witnessed a significant growth, politicisation, and bastardisation. At the end of 1983, the size of the Nigerian federal civil service, which were 157,000 in 1978 rose to 292,000.² Jobs were created for party loyalists. Arbitrary appointments were made without regard for qualifications and qualities. The size of the service, which had become very large, coupled with high level of political and bureaucratic corruption made it very difficult for government to pay workers' salaries regularly.

Buhari/Idiagbon Military Regime (1983-1985)

This period marked the return of the military to the Nigerian political arena. The regime, too, like Murtala/Obasanjo's clamped down on the civil service, confusing purge, retirement and retrenchment. Many who were 'retired' were actually not tired! "By the end of October 1984 the total number of public employees affected by the purge and retrenchment was estimated between 150,000 and 200,000." (*West Africa*, 1985:215). This measure like the previous one undertaken by Murtala/Obasanjo regime had negative effects on the civil service. It

heightened the fears of insecurity and uncertainty of the civil servants, which had begun since mid 1970s. This action was not only devastating to the system, but also led to much money being spent on payment of retirement benefits and pensions. It did not go without creating social ills in the society. The country was turned to a place where hooligans, armed bandits and robbers were bred, especially in the big cities; a legacy that remains with the society until today.

The Fourth Republic: From End of Abubakar Government to the Present (May 1999- Present)

General Ibrahim Babangida's decision to step aside amidst the crisis that followed the cancellation of June 12, 1993 presidential election in Nigeria led to the formation of Interim National Government, headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan. General Sani Abacha, the defence secretary, removed him in a palace coup in November 1993. The emergence of a ruthless and tyrannical dictator, General Sani Abacha, further bastardised the civil service. The general had an ambition of becoming president for life – a project that was only aborted by his sudden death in mysterious circumstances on June 8, 1998. His death ushered in General Abdulsalam Abubakar as the military head of state until May 29, 1999 when a democratically elected civilian administration came into power headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo. One of the achievements of the new civilian administration is the repeal of Civil service reform of 1988, which politicised policy-making positions in the civil service and also the restoration of policy role-collaboration between political and technical teams—the Whitehall mode. Another important achievement was the general increase (118%) in public service salaries. (Olowu and Okotoni, 2002).

The size of the civil service was significantly negligible until Independence in 1960. As late as 1945, the permanent senior civil servants in Nigeria were less than 1,400; there were 1,300 expatriates and 75 Africans. (Nicholson, 1969:258). By the middle of 1948, out of the 3,786 posts in the Nigerian public service, 1,245 were vacant. (ibid, 260). The amputation of regional services in 1954 from the old unitary service brought about the number of senior posts in the

federal civil service to 2,450; out these only 550 of them were filled by Nigerians - all Southerners (ibid, 296).

In 1960/61, the federal civil service personnel strength was 30,390. This rose to 292,985 in 1983, representing almost ten-fold increase within two decades. (See table one). This phenomenal growth was facilitated by the "great laxity in the recruitment activities of the various ministries and departments especially under the civilian presidential administration." (Nigeria, 1985:40). The growth was further aided by Nigeria oil boom in the early 1970s up till early 1980s, which led to a great increase in government expenditure. However, before mid 1980s the economy of Nigeria had begun to experience a serious slump. One of the steps taken by the Buhari/Idiagbon regime to arrest the situation was a reduction in the staff strength of the federal civil service in particular, and to some extent the state civil services. By 1986, the size had been drastically reduced to 254,748 - a reduction of 38,237 personnel in less than three years. (See table one). Under General Ibrahim Babangida military administration, which assumed power on August 27, 1985, the figure began to appreciate again, and as at September 30, 1990 it stood at 273,392. This was another era of wasteful spending and highly bureaucratic corruption worse than the civilian administration, which the military claimed to come in to correct. This was rather a great paradox under an administration, which claimed to pursue privatisation and commercialisation under a deregulated economy, which emphasized minimal government.

Besides the growth in personnel of the federal civil service, the number of ministries also witnessed significant increase. In 1977 under General Obasanjo military regime, the number of the federal ministries was twenty, and this remained until the regime handed over to a civilian administration on October 1, 1979. In 1981, under the Shagari civilian administration, the number slightly rose to twenty-two, and to twenty-three in 1983, until the administration was booted out in a military coup d'etat on December 31, 1983. The new military regime under Buhari/Idiagbon reduced the number to twenty. Babangida administration known for its prolific wasteful spending, increased the number of federal ministries to twenty-four, until the eleventh hour when he announced the

rationalization of the public sector on January 1, 1992; thereby reducing the number of federal ministries to sixteen. Unfortunately, the new steps were not in the true spirit of the biblical prodigal son - as evident from the events that followed until he was finally forced out of office on August 26, 1993.

The size of the Nigerian civil once increased under the military regime of General Abacha when it reached 287,533 in 1997. The reduction in the size of the federal civil service between 1998 and 2000 as seen from table can be explained in two ways. First, the federal government has made frantic efforts to fish out "ghost workers" by conducting several manpower audits in all federal ministries and parastatals. Secondly, some of the newly created states had no data during the period.

Table 1: The federal civil service personnel strength (1966- 2000)

Year	Junior staff	Senior staff	Total
1966	46,676	8,313	54,989
1967	31,056	6,252	37,308
1968	30,330	6,011	36,341
1969	36,276	8,585	44,861
1970	32,736	12,418	45,154
1971	45,477	12,418	58,964
1972	56,757	16,576	73,333
1973	59,630	18,588	78,218
1974	74,198	24,679	98,877
1975	-	-	115,518
1976	-	-	125,580
1977	-	-	116,544
1978	-	-	187,677
1979	-	-	195,919
1980	-	-	231,802
1981	-	-	256,334
1982	-	-	266,345
1983	-	-	292,985
1984	-	-	256,575
1985	-	-	255,156
1986	-	-	254,748
1987	-	-	255,881
1988	-	-	251,657
1989	-	-	270,745
1990	-	-	273,392
1994	-	-	254,737
1995	-	-	255,579
1996	-	-	271,191
1997	-	-	287,533
1998	-	-	182,254
1999	-	-	191,329
2000	-	-	197,202

Sources: 1. Federal Civil Service Manpower Statistics for various years.
2. Annual Report of the Federal Civil Service for various years.

III. DEPLOYMENT SYSTEM

Central deployment system is used by all federal ministries to deploy officers on Grade Level 07 and above to their respective field offices. For the purpose of this paper central deployment is used to mean that officials of the federal ministries are centrally deployed from their headquarters to the field offices. Whereas in the case of the junior staff, (i.e. those on grades level 01-06), each state field-headquarters is empowered to recruit locally, and as far as possible, from the indigenes of the state concerned. This exercise is carried out with the assistance of an *Employment Committee* in each field-headquarters. This committee comprises representatives of the administrative section and at least two other sections of the headquarters – one of which shall be the section from which the affected junior staff are recruited.

Among those interviewed, 45.3; 75.0; 50.0 per cent from the federal Ministries of Agriculture in Abuja; Education in Lagos; and Works and Housing in Lagos respectively recommended that the central deployment system should be discontinued. The central deployment system has often turned the field offices into a dumping ground – where all kinds of civil servants are dumped with little or no consideration for their relevance. This has partly contributed to the redundancy and idleness of some civil servants in the field offices. Furthermore, the central deployment system has often resulted in actions that frustrate individual officers and prevent the various segments of the civil service organisation from having control over their key human resources. (Adamolekun, 1986). For an effective administrative system, it is important that adequate decentralisation is encouraged, whereby recruitment of personnel should be localised, as far as practicable. The field office should be allowed to take initiatives on the calibre of personnel that are best suited for it.

Factors influencing deployment of personnel to field offices

The deployment of federal staff to field offices in the states are affected by several factors. These factors which are ranked in their order of importance include qualifications and area of specialization; departmental needs and

vacancies; on-going projects; personal influence and lobby; performance and ability; health ground. Deployment is also carried out as a punitive measure. It is rather disturbing that qualifications and areas of specialisation rather than needs in the field offices ranked first among the factors influencing deployment of personnel. One can now understand the reason why some field officers are redundant in the field, since their services are actually not required in their stations. Ideally, needs should constitute the primary basis for deployment of personnel while other factors should be secondary.

Reasons for Headquarters' Preference

Statistics show that 39.0 per cent of federal staff resided at the headquarters of the federal ministries. This section examines the reasons why senior civil servants prefer to reside at their Ministry's Headquarters – the seat of Government. In a survey carried out in three federal ministries (Education, Works/Housing and Agriculture in Kwara and Oyo States affirmed that a significant percentage of senior civil servants preferred to reside at their ministry's headquarters in Abuja because of several reasons. These reasons include access to more authority and power (32%); facilities and privileges (20%); lesser workloads (14%); infrastructural facilities (12%); proximity to family/family ties (9%).

The 1988 Civil Service Reforms and Personnel Deployment

President Babangida in his Budget Speech introduced the 1988 Civil Service Reform on January 1, 1988. The reforms, which brought about some important changes in the structure of Nigerian civil service, actually took effect on April 1, 1989. The major elements of the reforms can be summarized as follows:

The Minister: The minister became both the chief executive and the accounting officer of his ministry.

The Permanent Secretary: The permanent secretary was re-designated 'Director-General'.³ The post became a political one, and must leave with the government that appoints him. He also ceased to be the accounting officer of his ministry.

Professionalisation of the Civil Service: Civil servants were now to be deployed on the basis of their profession or area of specialization.

Ministerial Autonomy in Personnel Management: Each ministry was empowered to employ, promote and discipline their staff. Civil servants were to spend their entire career in their respective ministries.

Presidential Direct Control of Economic Policy Institutions: The Central Bank of Nigeria; the Planning Commission and the Federal Budget Department were placed directly under the Presidency.

The deployment of personnel in the Nigerian Civil Services is a subject that has failed to receive attention from the past reforms in the country. The 1988 Civil Service reforms attempted to discuss the subject, though not in great details. Its emphasis is on the junior staff. Section IV (paragraphs 3.6) of the Implementation Guidelines states:

The irregular practice of recruiting junior staff, that is, staff at Grade Level 01-06, centrally and deploying them to state offices (field offices) shall cease forthwith as it is in conflict with the existing regulations. Each Ministry/Extra-Ministerial Department shall work out the actual establishment or requirement for each Area of State Office and the Local Junior Staff Committee in each State shall be allowed to fill such vacancies with the real indigenes of that state who possess the prescribed qualifications. Such requirements should also reflect the geographical spread within the state. Applicants identified and recommended by the State Civil Service Commission may also be considered for such appointments.

This new provision in the reforms is a good step in the right direction, but unfortunately this provision is not extended to the senior staff. In essence, the senior staff are still centrally recruited and deployed from the Ministry's headquarters. Section four of the Implementation Guidelines states that:

The Federal Civil Service Commission shall now appoint and recruit staff into Grade Level 07 - Grade Level 10. Ministries/Extra-Ministerial Departments shall now have power to make appointments to Grade Level 11 and above in their Departments. It will no longer be necessary for them to seek approval of the Federal Civil Service Commission before exercising such

power. Appointment of staff shall be done as need arises and must follow strictly the approved scheme of service which shall be updated from time to time.

As comprehensive as the reform was, it did not make provision for the deployment of staff to the field offices in the various states of the federation. It would have been interesting if the reforms had attempted to review the present deployment strategy and recommended new strategies on how to deal with the problems of personnel being deployed to the field, and ways to improve their efficiency in the field. The fact that nothing was mentioned about field administration in a reform of this magnitude designed to ensure management efficiency and effectiveness, clearly reveals that government has not realized the importance of field administration in implementing its policies. Government is still insensitive to this crucial area. It is hoped that future reforms in Nigeria will address this subject squarely.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined personnel deployment in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service. The thrust of the paper is that effective distribution and utilization of personnel is *sine-quanon* to the success of an organization, and the civil service organization in particular. To this end, the paper also examined and discussed the problematic of personnel distribution in the Nigerian Federal Civil Service and the attendant effects on government policies and programmes. It was found that large number of senior civil servants resided at the Ministry's headquarters. Trained and experienced senior officers hardly wanted to be posted to the field where they are most needed. The findings revealed that lack of power, authority, and absence of infrastructural facilities and social amenities and other privileges that are only available at the headquarters make many of these senior officers prefer to reside at the headquarters. However, states with more federal projects attract larger federal personnel. A total overhauling is required for the Nigerian Federal Civil Service in general and the personnel deployment strategy in particular. It is only then that it can fulfil its role as an agent of implementing government policies and development.

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