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**Corruption in the Civil Service: The Dearth of Effective  
Service Delivery**

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**Abstract**

The paper discussed the origin of the Nigerian Civil Service and the consequences of corruption that has crippled the service in the recent times. The paper was of the opinion that today's Civil Service in Nigeria is a carryover of the British imperialist administrative structure. The paper stated that the reasons for the corrupt civil service which in turn has given room to ineffective service delivery are the weak institutional structures, cumbersome administrative procedure, negative attitude of the civil servants to work and individuals' insatiable appetite for wealth at all cost. The paper discovered that the culture of accountability and ethical behaviour which the service was known for has been thrown overboard. Finally, the paper concluded by suggesting ways forward which include bridging the gap in the remuneration of public and civil servants, enabling civil servants benefit in the monetization process, proper and constant

reforms, training of the civil servants on civil service rules and holding culpable corrupt civil servants.

**Key Word:** Corruption, Lack of accountability, Poor service delivery and cumbersome administrative procedure in the civil service

### Introduction

The origin of the Nigerian civil service is traceable to the British Colonial administration and the Amalgamation in 1914. Although the rudiments of Public Bureaucracy had long been established in the conquered areas, beginning from the annexation of Lagos in 1861, the British Imperialist established administrative structures in the area which metamorphosed into what is called Nigerian Civil Service today (Anazodo 2006). This Civil Service is traceable to Lord Lugard's administration. What we see today is not much different from what we had during the colonial times.

The civil servants are part and parcel of the executive arm of government. There is no modern government that does not depend on a virile civil service to make input into the policy making process and the implementation of such policies. By definition, civil servants are permanent government officials. They enjoy continuity of service and are protected by the Public Service Rules (PSR) which specifies the conditions for appointment into the Federal Civil Service under PSR 02205 and 02206, and situation under which an officer may leave the service particularly, officers in the pensionable establishment under section 8 of chapter 2 of the PSR.

In recent times, most Nigerians are worried about the level of corruption and sluggishness in the Nigerian civil service. The rules of the service have been thrown overboard and the service has been given various nasty and dirty names. The two factors responsible for this attitude are the psychological and the sociological factors or causes.

The psychological factors include greed, drive of an individual to exploit, insatiable appetite and crave to have more, and the fear of the unknown etc. The culture of ethical behaviour and accountability of the service is no longer adhered to (Akindele 2005). The other reason for corruption in the service include weak institutional structures, cumbersome administrative procedure, negative attitudes of the civil servants, non-disclosure of information unless the persons pays for it, the rule of the civil service of impartiality principles, political neutrality etc. which obtain in most government establishments. All these made it easier for the procedure not to be followed.

The compliance theory, according to (James and Olsen 2000) maintains that there are certain factors which motivate the individual to obey and not to obey laws. The compliance theory maintains that the motivation to commit offence increases and

becomes “ripe” where the possibility of being caught is remote and sanctions are not evenly applied. In other words, offence increases because of environmental reasons, for instance where the institutions provided to check offences are weak and the punishment for offences are not severe. This will increase the number people involved in such corruption. Azenebor (2007, p.3) conceives corruption as an immoral or dishonest action or way of offering and accepting bribes (in cash or kinds) or using the power of one’s office or position for personal enrichment. Similarly, Iman (2005, p. 22) sees it as any induced or chi-induced behaviour within a complex or private organization to falsify its integrity, purpose, virtue and ethics for private ends. This very attitude and actions have crippled the Nigerian civil service; it has made it difficult to function and work. Most of them see it as government work and not theirs; hence the statement “I should not carry it on my head.”

### **Conceptual Clarification**

The civil services in Nigeria is supposed to be a vehicle by which government initiates, formulate and implement policies. In other words, it is the Bureaucracy which regulates all aspects of the society. According to the civil service rule PSR 2205 and 02206,

The Nigerian civil services are so strategically, located in roles, functions, activities, resources that their performance determines the state pace and level of development. For some times now, the service has been riddle with inefficiency, corruption, ineffectiveness, mismanagement, shoddiness, inertia, routine, poor responsiveness, conflicts, sectionalism, incompetence and low productivity (Ikelegbe 2005, p.16).

The problems of Nigerian civil service are traceable to lack of management consciousness, the non-application of modern techniques of management, the absence of performance emphasis, the absence of systematic evaluation, the lack of emphasis on accountability and responsible managers and chief executives. It is important to note that during the colonial capitalist rationality who believe on minimum investment for maximum output (Ake 2008, p. 43) only very little reforms were carried out in their colonial service and that was done when it was totally unavoidable.

In Nigeria, the First Republic Politicians (1960–66) had as their primary objective in government to convert political power into a primitive accumulation (Ake 1985). They were more interested in power and wealth and abandoned the importance of civil/service delivery, hence most of them became very rich and neglected the administration of their areas. No wonder why the military that took over from them by force of arms saw the opportunity as their own time to accumulate wealth, thereby multiplying corruption. When they became overfed with the state wealth, they decided

to institute the first major reform measure aimed at restructuring the country's Bureaucracy for effective and better civil service delivery.

*The new encyclopedia Britannica* (2004) defines civil service as the body of government officials who are employed in civil occupations that are neither political nor judicial. It went on to say that, it consists of people employed by the state to run the public service of a country. Abba and Anazodo (2006) argued that civil service in Nigeria comprises workers in the various ministries or departments apart from those who hold political appointments. The civil service reform on the other hand, refers to the purposeful modification of governmental human resource management system, with the goal of maximizing important administrative values Anazode (2009). It was the long rule of the military that facilitated the major problem of corruption in Nigeria, with the creation of many states in Nigeria, particularly, the 12 and the 19 states by Gowon and Obasanjo Regimes in Nigeria. They gave room for corruption and seriously killed or destroyed the Nigerian civil service. When states, particularly the 19 states were created, people were asked to go back to their own states. In this, those who were in lower grade levels were catapulted to grade level '12' so that they could occupy those vacant positions and this seriously destroyed the civil service. Many of those who were not qualified were placed into positions where they could not perform very well. This affected the civil service seriously (Ogunna 1999).

Finally, the retrenchment exercise carried out by Mutala Muhammad regime which was meant to rid off the corrupt civil servants, were not properly handled; this turned into avenue where civil servants had to steal and embezzle much money to prepare for tomorrow, on the grounds that they do not know when they will be thrown out of service. The Retrenchment exercise was not properly carried out. Most of those retrenched had nowhere to lay their hands, they had no houses, no reserve, hence many of them died of shock. So, this instead of bringing security in the service turned out to multiply corruption in the civil service. The military regime in Nigeria instead of correcting the problem, went on to multiply the problems in the civil service. As a result of the fact that the military lack the necessary experience, they went on with their terminating and retirement exercises which brought more problems, such as lack of proper tools and equipment to work which in turn brought frustration and misery in the civil service.

### **Theoretical Framework of Analysis**

There are two contradictory propositions which determine the position and function of the civil service, according to Adamolekun (2004, p.11). However, the two agree on important principles of government. The first principle states that the distinct groups of people - the politicians and Administrators run the executive branch of government in a democratic policy. One group comprises elected political officials who serve for a temporary period of time limited by their term of office before another

election is conducted. The second group consists of officials appointed into permanent careers positions expected to serve the successive sets of political office holders second principle accepted by the two schools of thought is the conception of the civil service as an instrument in the hands of the elected political officials with the latter being the dominated in group and the former, the dominated the power structure or equation. According to Ademolekun the civil service is nothing but an appendage but not a major constituent that stands a strong footing within the executive arm of government. In the first place it occupies an assistant position to the political executive, meaning that the latter can do without if it deems fit.

The second, a mere ministry (an office, or a set of offices) is even more worrisome as it can be changed, maintained or replaced at will by the political executive. Civil service according to (Solar 1999) refers to the body of men including women, employed in a civil capacity and non-political career basis, by the federal, state and local government, primarily to render advice and faithfully implement their decisions. The officials so appointed are called civil servants. The term is also used to refer to the instrument both for policy advice and for implementation of the will of the state as determined by the legitimate political institution to which the service must be both subordinate and subservient (Solarim 1991, p.63).

*The Civil Service Handbook* produced by the office of the Head of the civil service of the federation (1997 Edition) was also incisive and emphatic about the nature of civil service. It states explicitly among other things that the civil service is a body or organ of government which enjoys continuity of existence. Its members are not limited to a short term of office but civil servants remain in office. When a civil servant relinquishes his office for whatever reason, his place is take by another person who similarly enjoys security of employment. The civil service is the instrument of the Government of the day, but neither the service nor its members are partisans of any particular political party. A civil servant is required to assist in formulation and implementing the policies approved by government whatever his personal or private opinions or attitude may be.

### **Corruption in the Civil Service**

The lack of efficiency and effectiveness in the civil service is built on corruption. This was one of the reasons that have prompted various reforms that had taken place in the civil service in the past. For instance, Example, when Chief Olusegun Obasanjo assumed office in 1999, he announced on August 15, 2001, his intention to forward a bill to the National Assembly another reforms of the nation's civil service structure. The reason for the bill was the belief by the executive that the efficiency and effectiveness can only be imbued into the civil service if the president was allowed to fire any civil servant he so deemed fit. By this time people were clamoring for a reform due to corruption that had grown to the level that it could no longer be hidden and was

noticeable by all. The logic for the demand and agitation was based on the provision in the 1999 constitution which allowed the president to hire and fire some top ranking officers in the federal civil service like Secretary to the Federal Government, Ambassadors, Permanent Secretaries and Head of the Civil Service of the Federation. Nigerians have the tendency of getting serious and sitting up to their jobs only when they see some drastic measures taken place, such as when an influential person/a top civil servant is retrenched.

One of these attempts to reform the civil service was in March 2004 which came as a result of corruption and inefficiency noticed in the service. According to former president, Obasanjo, in his address at the service compact retreat in 2004,

Regrettably, Nigerian have for too long been short changed by the quality of civil service/public service delivery by which decisions are not made without undue influence and files do not move without being pushed with inducements. Our public offices have too long been shown cases for the combined evils of ineffectiveness inefficiency and corruption, whilst being impediments to effect implementation of government policies (The Servicom Book 2006, p.1).

The president's speech or address is, to say the least, that there is abuse of offices in the civil service. No wonder Smith (2007) said that corruption in the civil service in Nigeria is ripe and attractive because the possibility of been caught or punished is remote as there is no risk of deterrent, essentially because the institutions and commissions established to curb crime and abuse of office are feeble, which makes it difficult to hold public officers and other privileged Nigerian to any maximum level of conduct. This corruption destroys the socio-economic life of the Nation, makes economic planning difficult, if not impossible, stifles implementation of infrastructural project, while it concentrates wealth in the hands of a few individuals, it equally promotes widespread of poverty and large scale unemployment, inflation, destruction of efficiency in public institutions, destruction of ethical, moral, religious and domestic values, in which an unfair and inequitable environment thrives.

Nye (2010) sees it as a behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of a public role regarding (family, close private clique) pecuniary of status gains or violets rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence. This includes such behaviours as bribery (use of rewards to prevent the judgment of a person in a position of trust). Therefore, a good civil service effectiveness and governance system is defined by its relationship to some key pre-requisites, including accountability, transparency participation and predictability (NDE 2007, p. 2).

### **The Statement of the Problem**

It was recorded that in the economic policy of Gowon's administration, the civil service played a pivotal role. The elaboration of the Second National Development Plan was the handiwork of the civil service with significant input from the academic (Ademolekun 2004, p.112). According to Ademolekun, the higher civil servants deserved to share fully in whatever credit is given for the quality, of the 1970-74 plans. They should equally be blamed for contributing to the proven evidence of mismanagement and corruption recorded against them, especially, their collusion with the military officers to ignore the priorities established in the Second National Development Plan, alienation of the business elite with whom the civil servants should have collaborated in the task of national development. The Plan also established the fact that the civil service as a constitute of the executive arm of government is indispensable regardless of the short comings which of course may be a reflection of the society, an operation that may ultimately call for reforms.

All over the world, nations are making every effort to change and better the standard of the civil service for efficient and effective performance. Nevertheless, the kind of civil service bequeathed to Nigeria by the colonial masters was alien and narrow with poor development oriented. At independence in 1960, many unqualified personnel joined the civil service which resulted in corruption and an oversized workforce. It is believed that the corruption in Nigeria's civil service today is a carryover from what was delivered to her at independence, what was bequeathed to her by the colonial masters. It was structured in such a manner that enabled colonial masters to successfully extract the much coveted financial and material resources needed by their controlling colonial powers. At independence in 1960, when the Nigerian leaders took over the civil service, no attempt was made by our leaders to restructure the civil service to suit our own developmental needs; hence the inbuilt corruption in the system had continued till today despite the series of reforms that have taken place by successive regimes in Nigeria.

The civil service imbibed the colonial mentality of wealth acquisition for self-aggrandizement and self-superiority. Nigerian leaders became colonial masters in a 'black man's skin'. This aggravated the spirit that speaks that "this work is not my father's work", "The cap is not to be put on top of the head but by the shoulder." This consequently led to corruption and underdevelopment.

Several reforms carried out after independence include the Adebo Commission (1971), Udoji Public Service Review Commission of 1974, Dotun Philip Civil Service Reform of 1988, Allison Ayida Committee on Civil Service of 1995 etc. Despite all these reforms the same spirit of colonialism and corruption had continued unabated. In the World Bank (2002), colonialism was marked by lack of accountability and transparency. It stated that the colonial judicial system existed not to administer justice

but to sustain the imposition of the foreign government and laws (Ademolekun 1994, p.4).

When the Military Government came on board, everyone thought that corruption will cease. The opposite, however, was the case. The military co-opted former politicians, academics and top civil servants to ministerial posts thereby giving them enormous powers to initiate economic, social and political policies and they at the same time executed them. This brought about the breakdown of accountability in public spending and lack of probity in the service. Okigbo reported that between 1988 and June 1994, the sum of 12.5 billion in government revenues in “extra ordinary special accounts were unaccounted for and this loot has continued up till today” (Ogunna 1999). The losses in Federal Ministries between 1997 and 2001 as a result of corruption are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Losses in the Federal Ministries 1997 – 2001 Due to corruption

YEAR	NO OF CASH LOSSES	AMOUNT IN NAIRA	LOSSES OF STORES/ EQUIPMENT
1997	12	3,722,019.94	8
1998	10	4,215,871,.42	1
1999	6	1,933,157.45	15
2000	15	3,254,438.86	26
2001	14	1,379,758.47	14

Source: Report of the Auditor General for the Federation to the National Assembly for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 2001.

### The Way Foreword

The Nigerian Civil Service has passed through different government regimes which carried out reforms in several attempts to reduce corruption in the civil service to no avail. The issue of national consciousness has been thrown overboard and has been replaced by ethnicity and sectionalism. Development can only come if the policies of regionalization are de-emphasized. Today, the population of both public and civil servants is over bloated, likewise the appointment of ministers. Jobs and ministries are duplicated to favours the cronies of the people in power. Nigeria needs a change in orientation if corruption must be reduced.

The government must, as a matter of urgent necessity improve on its administrative efficiency and be more responsive to the needs to the public. It should decentralize her civil service to a reasonable extent from the centre to the outpost

offices in order to allow to civil servants discharge their duties effectively and efficiently and be able to attend to emergencies whenever such situation comes up. Also, there is need for increased flexibility in decision making in order to reduce the cost of administrative work.

What increases corruption and cost of running the administration is partly, because of the presence of so many “ghost workers” in the civil service. Efforts should be made to purge the service of such. Some people are clamoring for the reduction in the number of civil servants, this is not the answer considering the rate of unemployment in Nigeria. The last option is to continue with constant reforms of the civil service. A process that will enable the government fish out weak, aged effective and inefficient workers, who should be retired with some benefits.

In addition, recruitment and placement of workers should be on the bases of skills and competence. Appraisal of workers should be objectively done in a way as to train and encourage them. The gap between the salaries of public and civil servants should be minimized. Incentives must be given to deserving work force. This will minimize corruption in the service where feel they work while the politicians take all. It should be noted that the monetization policy is part of those efforts to remove inconsistency in the operation of government. The monetary values of those fringe benefits such as highly subsidized residential accommodation, transport facilities, residential furniture, portable water provided by the government to its workers should be calculated and paid to them. This will in no small measure reduce corruption in the civil service in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

Having identified most of the problems in the civil service and having proffered some solutions, I must add that there is need to carry out proper and constant surveys of the civil service to always nip corruption in the bud. Secondly, it has been observed that Nigeria’s policy makers will always make many wonderful policies but their implementations never work. Proper implementation and monitoring of the programmes are very necessary. Also for the civil service to be rid of corruption, civil servants must keep abreast of the civil service rules and its tenets be made to be binding on them. Civil service reforms can only be meaningful when corrupt civil servants are held culpable of their corrupt offences otherwise the whole effort of reforms and new policies introduced will be an effort in futility.

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