

CIVIL SERVICE REFORMS: A CASE STUDY OF THE GAMBIAN CIVIL SERVICE

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Abstract: *The paper examines the Civil Service Reform (CSR) agenda in The Gambia from 2008 – 2015. The study identifies the motives for the civil service reforms in the country during the study period. The paper reviewed theoretical concepts to provide context and clear understanding of terms and concepts used in the paper. CSRs have been undertaken across the world for various reasons. The civil service is an important machinery for the delivery of services to the citizenry and development of the society. Initial attempts on civil service reforms focused more on affordability in terms of the wage bill. This has been a key pillar of the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s. The focus has evolved to include performance management, capacity building, and improving service delivery. The paper employed desk review and documentary analysis as research method in analysing CSRs in The Gambia. The study reviewed CSR strategy 2008 – 2011 and the CSR programme 2012 – 2015 with a view to establishing the objectives of the reforms and the extent to which these objectives were achieved. As part of its efforts to reform the Gambian civil service and to control the wage bill, the government conducted a nationwide staff and/or payroll verification exercise to eliminate ghost workers and enhance the integrity of the payroll. However, this paper established that some of the key objectives of the civil service reform agenda have not been achieved. The objectives of improved pay and pension, control of the wage bill, the establishment of a performance management system and culture, and capacity building of key institutions have not been achieved.*

Keywords: *civil service, reform, programme, strategy, service delivery, public sector*

Introduction

Public administration as an area of study and practice has evolved over time. It has transcended its politics - administration dichotomy. Public administration has evolved over time with increasing focus on service delivery. The civil service is considered as the “steel frame” (Wilder, 2009:19) for the delivery of services, development of countries and the

“backbone of the state that underpins governance” (Repucci, 2014:207). The role of the civil service has received increased attention (Anazodo, Okoye, & Chukwuemeka, 2012). This is due to the fact that the civil service is a crucial institution for the provision and production of public services, achieving development objectives and good governance (Oluwo, 2010; Sekwat, 2002). The New Public Management (NPM) has focused on the importance of efficient and effective service delivery in the public sector. NPM has led to the rethinking of the role of government and how it could be reoriented with a view to improving performance, accountability, and service delivery (Lamidi, Agboola & Taleat, 2016).

Many developing countries inherited civil services from the colonial administrations which were perceived not to be responsive to the challenges of meeting the expectations of the citizens of the newly independent countries (Lamidi et al., 2016; Oluwo, 2010). The desire to meet the huge development needs of the newly independent nations led to an increase in the size of the civil service. Lienert and Modi (1997) indicated that in the decades prior to 1980, many African countries registered increase in the annual growth rate of the civil service in excess of 5 per cent. This fuelled expansion in the wage bill, especially when measured as a proportion of tax revenue. This coupled with the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s exacerbated the economic problems of the countries which further undermined the delivery of public services. Other challenges that bedevilled the civil service include lack of transparency, initiative, and corruption (Lamidi et al., 2016; Prijono, 2015; Anazodo, Okoye, & Chukwuemeka, 2012). These challenges necessitated the need for the reform of the civil service.

In many developing countries including The Gambia, reforms of the public sector, which importantly includes the civil service aim to enhance efficiency and service delivery. Civil service reforms have a long history globally and in Africa. The New Public Management (NPM) has been a major driving force behind civil service reform. Broadly, civil service reforms either quantitatively focused on macroeconomic stabilisation or qualitatively focused on remuneration, promotion and performance (Lienert & Modi, 1997). The “first-generation reforms” (Lienert & Modi, 1997:4) became the main focus of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment programmes and lending aimed at macroeconomic stabilisation. The drive to enhance good governance and efficient and effective service delivery which was also boosted by the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) led to a shift in focus on more quality centred reforms.

There are several reasons why governments embark on civil service reforms. Civil service reforms are not an end in themselves. The justification lies “either directly in terms of service delivery, or indirectly through their impact on macroeconomic stability or improved economic and social policy formulation and implementation” (World Bank & IMF, 2002:3). Some of the key motivating factors include the desire to enhance accountability, review of salaries and wages (Anazodo et al., 2012), and pay for performance, decentralisation of personnel authority (Brewer, 2016). Lienert (1997) identified three key objectives of Civil Service Reform (CSR) in Sub Saharan Africa as the downsizing of the civil service, restructuring of remuneration, and improving management and accountability.

The Gambia has embarked on civil service reforms since the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s. It has formulated the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP 2012-2015) which was preceded by the CSRP 2008-2011. To address gaps and build on

gains, the Government of The Gambia formulated the Civil Service Reform Programme 2018 – 2027. This is in recognition of the importance of a civil service which has the required capacity and performs to meet national development objectives. While there has been earlier attempts at CSR in The Gambia, this study focuses on civil service reform in The Gambia from 2008 to 2015. The reason for choosing this period for the study is informed by the dearth of relevant official documentation for previous civil service reform programmes in the country.

Despite these efforts at CSR from 2008 in The Gambia, there has been little or no known comprehensive study that assessed the reforms. A study by Nkala and Sonko (2021) focused mainly on civil service pay reforms from 2008 – 2015. Tarro (2021) assessed of the goals of Civil Service Reforms in The Gambia and their implementation. The objectives of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge around civil service reform in The Gambia. Specifically, this paper sought to:

- i. examine civil service reform in The Gambia from 2008 to 2015;
- ii. identify the motives for civil service reforms in the country; and
- iii. analyse the achievements of civil service reforms during the study period.

To address these, the paper aimed to answer the following questions:

- i. What were the objectives of the civil service reform agenda in The Gambia from 2008 - 2015?
- ii. To what extent has the objectives of the civil service reform been achieved?

Literature Review

This section of the paper reviews relevant literature around concepts and empirical studies of civil service reforms with a special focus on Africa. The paper then reviews civil service reform in The Gambia, discusses the evolution of the objectives of CSR and the extent to which these objectives have been achieved before concluding.

Conceptual and Theoretical Review

In this section, we present a review of relevant literature of previous research and scholarly works in civil service reform. We also review the concept of public sector, civil service, administrative reforms, and civil service reforms with special focus on Africa. Civil services are very important engines of development in every country. In developing countries, their roles go beyond policy making to include policy implementation (Ayee, 2001). Effective implementation of policies and programmes are required to improve the lives and the livelihoods of the population (Prijono, 2015) and the main tool available to governments to achieve development goals and objectives (Fatile & Adejuwo, 2010).

Public Sector

The public sector is an amalgam of institutions that depend on the power of the state. This means the public sector consists of institutions that derive their existence, authority, and power from the state. Lamidi et al., (2016) identified three broad groups namely ministries, departments, agencies, and local government units; state enterprises, boards, corporations, and parastatals; and professional bodies who can enforce certain decisions based on powers conferred by the state.

Civil Service

It is difficult to define and delineate the civil service. The civil service is generally recognised as part of the public sector. It is the core, permanent administrative arm of government that consists of ministries, departments, and agencies (Rao, 2013). According to Anazodo et al. (2012:16), the “civil service ... comprises workers in the various ministries or departments apart from those who hold political appointments”.

The civil service can thus be described as a sub set of the public sector consisting of ministries, departments and agencies who are at the forefront of developing and implementing policies and programmes (Rao, 2013).

Administrative Reforms

Administrative reform is the purposeful attempt to change the thrust and orientation of public administration (Ayee, 2008). Dror (1976:127) sees reforms as “directed change of main features of an administrative system ... [through] goal orientation ... and the comprehensiveness of change”. Administrative reforms must include efforts to effect changes in public administrative systems with a view to improving its components for enhanced management and administration.

Olowu (1992) states that reforms are aimed at transforming developing country bureaucracies to enable them to accommodate new development demands. Farazmand (1999: 806) defines reforms within developing country context as “attempts to modernize and change society by using the administrative system as an instrument for social and economic transformation”. Williams and Yecaló-Teclé (2019:4) defined “reform or reform episode as a strategic and intentional structural or managerial change to the internal administration of civil service organizations”.

Civil Service Reforms (CSR)

CSRs are reforms that are geared towards enhancing the effectiveness of service delivery and promotion of development and good governance. CSRs are not an end in themselves. Their justification lies in their impact on service delivery or macroeconomic stability (World Bank & IMF, 2002). They attempt to achieve this by addressing challenges that impede the functioning of the civil service. These problems include poor remuneration, lack of clearly defined institutional roles and responsibilities among others. Anazodo (2009) defined civil service reform as deliberate changes to the management of human resources with the ultimate objective of maximising administrative values.

Schiavo-Campo and Sundaram (2001) advanced six main importance of the civil service. These are governance, delivery of public goods and services, economic policy improvements, management of public expenditure and revenue, fiscal sustainability, and institutional development. According to McCourt (2013), the thrusts of civil service reforms are determined by the key challenges faced by the civil service. These include enhancing the performance of government in terms of service delivery, making government affordable, and making government more responsive to the citizenry.

Theoretical Review

Various theories have been used to explain political and administrative systems and the need for reform. Every reform is geared towards achieving set or defined objectives.

Lamidi et al, (2016) used the open system theory by Katz and Kahn to analyse public sector reform in Africa.

A system could be understood as a collection of interdependent components. The system receive inputs from the environment which is converted into outputs in the environment. An organisation can thus be seen as an open system that interacts with its environment. The civil service can thus be seen as a system with subsystems which depend on inputs such as “personnel, other resources and information from outside it” (Lamidi et al., 2016:8). Thus reforms are geared towards improving the civil service for efficient and effective service delivery.

Agency theory has also been seen as a theoretical driver of public sector reform in Africa (Ayee, 2008). It is concerned with the relationship between principals and agents and the contracts that arise. The principal agent relationship is crucial to the understanding of administrative theory. “Principals (either politicians on behalf of the citizens or departments on behalf of the politicians) employ agents (either individuals or organizations) who have “professional” knowledge to fulfil public services” (Kutlu, 2011:86). Agency theory sees organisations as implicit and explicit contracts. Agents exercise authority on behalf of their principals. Ayee (2008) posits that policy making and implementation in the public sector is also prone to the agency problem.

Agency theory aims to control the agent’s behaviour towards meeting organisational objectives as envisaged by the principal. Civil service reform is a tool that provides options to “limit agent opportunism” (Kutlu, 2011:88) through key civil service reform objectives such as capacity building, performance-related pay, personnel management among others.

Empirical Review

In trying to establish why public sector reforms fail in Sub Saharan Africa, Crooke (2010) explored three reform periods. The first generation reforms were donor driven civil or public service reforms which began with the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1980s spurred by neo-liberal policies aimed at reducing the role of the state and fixing macroeconomic imbalances. The second generation reforms went a step further in the 1990s to complement downsizing with restructuring the civil service, “performance management and budget/financial management and marketization of service delivery” (Crook, 2010:482). The third generation reforms emerged after the publication of the World Development Report of 1997 which focused on a responsive state placed emphasis on the improvement of service delivery to the citizenry. In reviewing the results of the public service reforms across the African continent, Crook (2010) contested the attainment of the key objectives of downsizing, pay reforms, and performance and service delivery. He has argued that the reforms “efforts have failed to change the situation – if anything, it has got worse (Crook, 2010:499).

Ayee (2001) reviews the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) 1987 – 1993 in Ghana, its rationale, and analyse the progress registered, given the obstacles and constraints. His analysis was based on five key components of the reform programme that is (i) control of the size of the civil service; (ii) pay and grading; (iii) organization and management reform; (iv) the management of retrenchment; and (v) training.

Adopting documentary review and interviews Williams and Yecaló-Teclé (2019) researched performance-oriented civil service reform in Ghana and Zambia since 1990.

While they were unable to establish successful linkages between individual performance and rewards and sanctions, they showed how such reforms could achieve results through “measurement and dialogue” (Williams & Yecaló-Teclé, 2019:1).

Nwanolue and Iwuoha (2012) using documentary analysis of relevant records explored the contribution of the Nigerian civil service to the promotion of sustainable development. They traced the evolution of the Nigerian civil service reform since independence including the establishment of several commissions such as the “Morgan Commission of 1963, the Adebo Commission of 1971 and the Udoji Commission of 1972 – 74” (Nwanolue & Iwuoha, 2012:12). Despite these and further efforts at reforming the Nigerian civil service, there has not been significant improvement and efficiency with limited impact on promoting sustainable development.

Tracing the challenges of the Nigerian civil service to its colonial legacy, Anazodo, Okoye, and Chukwuemeka (2012) explored civil service reforms from independence and how they impacted efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery. While advancing corruption as being a key factor for civil service reform, scholars like Nwanolue and Iwuoha (2012) also traced the various commissions set up to reform the Nigerian civil service. They concluded that there is limited improvement in the “quality of service provided to the citizenry” (Anazodo, Okoye, & Chukwuemeka, 2012).

Tarro (2021) assessed of the goals of Civil Service Reforms in The Gambia and their implementation. Drawing respondents from four ministries, departments and agencies identified the objectives of the CSR. These objectives include “reinforcement of meritocracy, due process and professionalism, enhancement of administrative culture, improvement of efficiency and quality service delivery, [and] institutionalization of a system that engenders separation between politics and administration” (Tarro, 2021: 13). Despite these objectives, the study indicated that challenges around capacity in the form of human and material resources remain, Nkala and Sonko (2021) in a study of civil service pay reforms 2008 to 2015 in the Gambia found that civil service has not improved and if anything poor pay is one of the root causes of poor performance.

Using open systems and agency theories as framework of analysis this study adopted documentary review and analysis of relevant records. The study reviewed government documents on civil service reforms from 2008 to 2015 to garner an insight into the objectives and achievements of the civil service reform agenda in The Gambia. It also looked at assessments and other secondary materials to analyse and assess the attainment of the objectives or progress registered.

Civil Service Reforms in The Gambia

The civil service has been considered as an important vehicle for the attainment of The Gambia’s development objectives as enshrined in the national development strategies such as the Vision 2020, the Poverty Reductions Strategy Papers, Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE 2012 - 2015), and National Development Plan (NDP 2018 – 2021), as well as conduit for public service delivery (Personnel Management Office of the President, PMO-OP, 2017). In recognition of this, the government has embarked on civil service reform agenda over time. One notable attempt at reforming the public service including the civil service was during the Structural Adjustment Programme. Since then, government has elaborated the Civil Service Reform

Strategy 2008 – 2011, the Civil Service Reform Programme 2012 – 2015. Following the change of government in 2017, the Barrow administration formulated the Civil Service Reform Programme 2018 – 2027 Strategy.

The Civil Service Reform Strategy 2008 – 2011 was borne out of the recognition that the capacity of the civil service has deteriorated overtime. The erosion of capacity was blamed on “over expansion, patronage hiring, corruption, informality and an exodus of professional and technical personnel” (PMO-OP, 2008:2). Earlier attempts at civil service reform during the Structural Adjustment Programme focused mainly on controlling the size of the civil service and the wage bill. An overarching goal of the Civil Service Reform Strategy 2008 – 2011 has been to “create a civil service based on merit which will be leaner and better remunerated” (PMO-OP, 2008:1). The Civil Service Reform Strategy was informed by an analysis which culminated in a World Bank report (2002) titled “The Gambia: Improving civil service performance”.

The major thrust of the Civil Service Reform Strategy 2008 – 2011 was to address challenges related to capacity within the civil service, incentives, and the wage bill, and personnel management. To surmount these challenges, the strategic priorities revolve around competitive pay for recruitment and retention of talent, control of the wage bill, training that is driven by structural change, policy change such as merit and competency-based promotion. The reform also aims at building reform capability of the Personnel Management Office and key institutions, and managing behaviour and performance management in the Gambian civil service. These strategic priorities have driven five programmes. These programme areas are personnel management policies, processes and capabilities, pay reform, pension reform, performance management, and policy management processes.

The Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) 2012 – 2015 was formulated with the overarching goal of having “a competent, professional and results oriented civil service at all times that delivers quality services to the people in a cost effective and efficient manner” (PMO-OP, 2011:8). This overarching goal has led to four focus areas such as capacity building of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to execute their mandates, improve remuneration and pension levels to attract and retain staff, inculcation and nurturing a performance culture, and the provision of tools and systems for improving delivery of services.

The reform programme is very clear in terms of expected results. Each focus area is disaggregated into components and expected outputs. In order to achieve the objective of strengthening the capacity of MDAs to execute their mandates, it is envisaged that institutional mandates, development goals, policies, structures, and staffing will be aligned. Pay and pension reforms are planned to be developed and implemented to help improve remuneration to attract and retain talent. A performance management culture is envisaged through the development and implementation of a civil service performance management policy. Development of basic e-governance capacities and citizens score card frameworks are planned to be implemented to improve public service delivery and accountability for service provision.

Discussion

In this section we discuss and review the objectives of the civil service reform agenda in The Gambia from 2008 to 2015, and the extent to which the objectives of the civil service reform have been achieved. Civil service reforms in The Gambia date back to the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s which aimed to curtail the size of the civil service with a view to controlling the wage bill and enhancing fiscal sustainability. Since 2008, the Government of The Gambia has embarked on series of civil service reform programmes. These are the Civil Service Reform Strategy 2008 – 2011, Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) 2012 – 2015, and the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) 2018 – 2027. In the previous section, we highlighted the objectives of the civil service reform agenda in The Gambia. The objectives of the various civil service reform programmes/strategies have gone beyond a simple focus on size and controlling the wage bill to include issues relating to capacity, improving public service delivery, and performance management.

There has not been a fundamental shift in objectives from Civil Service Reform Strategy 2008 -2011 to the Civil Service Reform Programme 2012 – 2015. The two programmes aimed at achieving improved remuneration for recruitment and retention of talent in the civil service, capacity building in the civil service, and performance management. From the similarity of the objectives one can infer that civil service reform is not a one-time exercise but a reform agenda which spans over time with recurring themes. This is not unique to The Gambia. Sekwat (2002) and Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka's (2012) review of the Nigerian civil service reforms indicate recurring themes across different reform programmes.

As part of the efforts to reform the civil service, the government under President Barrow conducted a nationwide staff or payroll verification exercise. The exercise covered the entire civil service and the security forces. It aimed to eliminate ghost workers and enhance the integrity of the payroll (GoTG, 2018). This has in a way contributed to the objective of controlling the wage bill, albeit in a limited way. In many parts of the world, civil service reforms have not achieved intended objectives. One of the objectives of the civil service reform agenda is control of the wage bill or optimal organisation and staffing. This is to be achieved through control over staffing to manage the hiring pressures. There has not been much progress in achieving this objective despite the conduct of staff or payroll verification exercise. An analysis of progress on this front by the CSRP 2018 – 2027 indicate growth in civil service numbers and the wage bill straining fiscal capacity. The analysis indicate a 69 per cent increase in civil service numbers between 2013 and May 2017 despite the “poor and disabling macroeconomic and fiscal environment in the period of the CSRP 2012-2015” (PMO-OP, 2017:19).

A major objective of the civil service reform programmes and strategies is to achieve improved remuneration that is competitive to attract and retain staff. However, despite the efforts, review of performance indicate low pay and pensions (GoTG, 2018). A survey conducted to inform the CSRP 2018 – 2027 revealed low pay and remuneration as the foremost issue. Inflation has led to low real salaries and eroded the annual increments built into the salary grading system. The salary and grading structure has been found to be defective by a study of Civil Service Pay and Grading Structure that was conducted in 2014. Given the low salaries, pensions which are determined by basic salary level is even

more problematic. The review by the CSRP 2018 – 2027 has shown that in some instances, pensions are inadequate to meet the cost of a bag of rice. Nkala and Sonko (2021) found that the civil service in The Gambia has not improved and poor pay is one of the root causes of poor performance. It is thus apparent that the objective of improving pay and remuneration and making them competitive is yet to be achieved. The health strategic plan highlights poor remuneration and the problem of retention of health professional as major challenges (Ministry of Health, 2014).

Another priority area of the civil service reform agenda is the issue of performance management with a view to improving service delivery. The National Development Plan acknowledges the lack of a performance management system which has led to low productivity (GoTG, 2018). The “lack of [an] appraisal system” (Tarro, 2021:13) undermines the CSR objective of merit and competency based promotion. Without a robust appraisal system, it is difficult to establish and nurture a merit based promotion system. The continued deficit of capacity in key institutions, including the Personnel Management Office (PMO) (Tarro, 2021), undermines the civil service reform objective of capacity building. Inadequate capacity in key institutions poses a challenge to the implementation of civil service reform strategies and sustainability of the reforms.

These challenges have been recognised in the Civil Service Reform Programme (2018 – 2027) strategy. It has clearly articulated the challenges facing the civil service which points to the gaps in terms of the achievement of the objectives of the CSR strategy 2008 – 2011 and the CSRP 2011 – 2015. These challenges include among others the growth in civil service and the wage bill putting pressure on fiscal space, poor remuneration and incentives, and inadequate capacity building. The National Development Plan of The Gambia (2018 – 2021) also highlighted the problems in the civil service such as increased number of ministries, departments and agencies, lack of performance management systems, and low pay and pension levels. This is an indication of gaps in the attainment of the objectives of the CSR over the period 2008 – 2015.

Conclusion

This study examined civil service reforms in The Gambia between 2008 and 2015. CSR is an important reform agenda for governments around the world. While they have a long history, the history of CSR in Sub Saharan African has been divided into three periods. The first generation of reforms were mainly driven by donors and coincided with the Structural Adjustment Programmes. They were mainly driven by the desire to address macroeconomic imbalances and thus reducing the size of the civil service. The second generation reforms went further to include performance management with the third generation focusing on a responsive state and improved service delivery to the citizenry. In The Gambia, like many other Sub-Saharan Countries, CSR was a key part of the Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1980s. This study looked at the Civil Service Reform strategy of 2008 – 2011 and the Civil Service Reform programme of 2012 – 2015. The study examined the motives for CSR strategy 2008 – 2011 and the CSR programme 2012 – 2015 with a view to establishing the objectives of the reform and the extent to which these objectives were achieved. The key objectives of the CSR agenda during this period revolved around improving pay, pensions, and incentives, establishing performance

management system and culture, capacity building particularly of key institutions responsible for the reform, and control of the wage bill.

The study indicated that some of the key objectives of the CSR agenda from 2008 to 2015 were not achieved. Low pay, pensions and incentives continue to be a challenge in the Gambian civil service. The envisaged performance management systems has not been established by 2015 and continues to be a key objective of the Civil Service reform programme 2018 – 2027.

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