

Analysis of Ethiopian Civil Service Reform

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ABSTRACT

Civil Service is the operational arm of the government charged with the implementation and administration of public policy. Civil servants are an engine who mobilizes resources of a country to the direction of functional activities. However, this sector cannot play its decisive role in traditional and back ward management systems unless it is updated and reformed to the changing circumstances. The Ethiopian Civil Service Reform Programme is one effort by the government implemented to alleviate some of the problems associated with low level of service delivery in the Ethiopian Civil Service which is characterized by high inefficiency and ineffectiveness. The purpose of the reform is to reorient the Civil Services into a dynamic, efficient and accountable apparatus for public service delivery built on the ethos and values of integrity, impartiality and neutrality. This article proceeds to analyze the Ethiopian Civil Service Reform with special emphasis on the Failures of the Ethiopian civil service reform by reviewing Bamidele Olowu article and on the basis of data collected from secondary sources.

Keywords: Civil Service, Civil Service reform

INTRODUCTION

Civil services are those in which the preponderance of non-elected public sector jobs are filled through a process of credentialing based on education, examination, or some other test of merit; in which a career ladder exists and is accessed through regularized demonstration of credentials of education, examination, tenure in office, or other form of assessing merit; in which tenure is secure barring malfeasance in office; and in which movement in and out (through retirement, for example) is regulated and compensated (Grindle and Hilderbrand, 1995).

Civil service is a neutral body accountable to the citizenry and should not be used, in any manner, as a surrogate for political will of ruling parties. It is a vehicle through which public policies get implemented for the development of the society as a whole. Historically, many governments have used the civil service to patronize the politics through the appointment of political affiliates in to political offices.

It is apparent that efficient and effective civil service sector that plays a major role for the development of a nation in all dimensions. In other words, civil servants are an engine who

mobilizes resources of a country to the direction of functional activities. However, this sector cannot play its decisive role in traditional and back ward management systems unless it is updated and reformed to the changing circumstances. In most developing countries including Ethiopia, traditional management techniques play immense ingredient that influence working cultures almost in all sectors.

The civil service is one of the agents of development in any nation. The transformation of any society or system depends on the effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service, particularly in developing societies. Minding these different African countries has tried to reform their civil service.

The Ethiopian civil service like other African countries has been in the process of major structural change since 1992. The government has initiated comprehensive civil service reform program primarily aimed at improving service delivery as well as in improving the efficiency and competence of officials and workers in the public sector. Even though in some areas and contexts, the reform has been succeeded but as many developing countries the Ethiopian civil service reform has its own challenges and

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failures that encountered during the implementation as indicated in the given article.

ANALYSIS OF BAMIDELE OLOWU ARTICLE

Failures of the Ethiopian Civil Service Reform

The writer of the article, Bamidele Olowu, explained failure of African civil service reform which is presented as diagnosis and prognosis. To begin with the Diagnosis failure, the Ethiopian context is not that much different from other African countries especially in declining of compensation.

In fact in the recent time with civil service reform, the government increased salaries of employment and also it improves the daily per diem of compensation but due to inflation and currency devaluation the increment of such compensation is insignificant where the inflation rate has been grew by more than two digits. For instance, according to the data obtained from ministry of Ethiopian civil service, among permanent civil service employees almost half (43%) of them paid less than 1000 Birr, 25.5% of them paid between 1000 – 2000 Birr, 5.1% paid above 2000 Birr and amazingly the remaining (25.7%) of the employee's salary range is not exactly specified on the obtained data.

The salaries of civil servant are also very low when compared with other sectors like private, NGOs and even in public enterprise. It is apparent that in many NGOs and private sectors, the salary of employee having the same educational qualification and experience with government civil servant, are being paid many times higher than in the civil service as indicated in the article.

The Ethiopian civil service lack competitive salary and benefit schemes which in other way is the reason for the migration of professionals from civil service to other NGOs and private sectors. Moreover this low payment in the system results in widespread corruption problems. This has eaten down to the root of the civil service in Ethiopia, where recruitment is not done by merit but by knowing someone or by paying bribe to recruiter or whoever it may concern. As the result, the merit system is weakening due to migration of professionals and some senior positions are given for political officials without considering the educational qualification and experience. Olowu suggested that the African civil service lack structures for imposing accountability from outside the civil

service. He expressed that there is weak system of accountability in most African counties including Ethiopia. However it is practically observable that, in Ethiopia there are structures or institutions which ensure accountability in civil service like general auditor, anti-corruption and ethical commission, ombudsman, the house of people representative permanent committees and others.

In most cases the people engaged in main governance process especially to ensure accountability, the system is designed so that citizens have an opportunity to claim their right and also can complain their dissatisfaction on the delivery of services. Generally even if we cannot able to say that there is absolute accountability because of our young and immature democratic system and institutions that can be able to ensure accountability, it is practically apparent that the accountability of the civil service to the general citizen has been showing a great progress.

Olowu indicated that there is excessive politicization and centralization of civil service in most African countries. When we come to our context, Ethiopian, excessive politicization is a bottle neck for the civil service because most of the time political leaders interfere within the affair of the civil service. It is undeniable that civil service organizations should serve all parties irrespective of the political ideology of political party in power. But the reality does not show that every managerial positions of public organization are held on the basis of merit principle. This in turn eroded the motivation of competent and well qualified employees.

On context of centralization we don't agree with Olowu because our civil service has changed to decentralized system by considering the social, economic and political environment of the nation. Regarding the inadequacy of resources the Ethiopian civil service is not as such different from other African countries which results in losses of highly qualified professionals and office equipments.

The other type of problem which is indicated on the Olowu article is Prognosis failure of African civil service reform. He explained this failure in terms of reduction or retrenchment of mandatory personnel, freezing new staff hiring and stopping the salary increment. With regard to this point in Ethiopia, no significant reduction of employment has been done which brings political and financial calamities. But to some

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extent freeze was placed on hiring new staff and on salary increment during the implementation of the reforms at the begging.

Olowu believe that African civil service is characteristically much smaller per head of population than their counter part in other parts of the world. So, African civil Service lacked the number and quality of civil servants they required. Furthermore whereas it was true that African countries have a large (excess) staff in the junior grades they lacked the appropriate numbers in the critical skilled grades. When we come to Ethiopian context we agreed that civil service is very small in terms of the number of civil servants per population. As the civil service ministry data shows, in Ethiopia there are around 800,000 employees in civil service which is around 1% of Ethiopian population. This shows that Ethiopian civil service is not big as other African countries in terms of number of civil servants. Moreover more than 85% of the employees are under first degree holders. Even if we haven't got the actual figure of the civil servants required to deliver efficient and effective service to the general public, from the above data we can easily understand how the civil service is suffering from problems of skilled and qualified man power.

Capacity of Ethiopian Civil Service

Olowu also argued that the erosion of the capacity of the African civil service including Ethiopian is chiefly due to the inability to recruit and retain competent professionals. As per the data we get from the Ethiopian ministry of civil service, the total number of employees in all government organization is around 800,000.

From which 12.5% is below grade 12 and 18.75% is above grade 12 but have no certificate and 20% of which has certificate and 18.75% has diploma and 10% of the employees are bachelor degree graduate.

As can be seen from the figures above, more than 85% of the employees are below first degree holders. The turnover rate is also the other important angle to view civil services.

In the year 2003 E.C the total turnover rate was around 15% from which large percentage of the employees are Bachelor of Art (BA) holders and above. To come to one structured idea from the very beginning the Ethiopian civil service has employees much of whom is not qualified professionals.

To promote employees in to higher position political commitment is given due consideration even more than educational qualification.

On the other hand qualified employees are leaving their job in need of better position and pay. For this reason the Ethiopian civil service capacity is seriously eroding which could tell us nothing but the poor performance of the civil service to retain and recruit competent and professional employees.

Ethiopian civil service has a severe problem because of its inability to compete for critical human resources that could provide professional leadership to effectively provide government services to citizens as result of poor payment scale. However civil service require highly qualified professionals that can plan, organize, lead and control strategies of the government and provide citizens with fair and equitable services. As the scholar mentioned in the article in large part of Africa low morale and little or no commitment prevalent among the civil servants is due chiefly to 'the sharp decline in civil service salaries and the consequent melt down of the merit system'.

This is true when Ethiopian civil service is examined because of poor remuneration, despite the increment in salary, and the meltdown of the merit within the civil service, underpaid civil servants especially highly skilled personnel are forced to take 2nd or 3rd jobs and/or to squeeze whatever extra they can from the government service.

This has the effect that many civil servants spend very little time or attention on the government work. It also has the effect that when the officials negotiate with NGOs and donors over the design of projects, the official's main concern is their own financial benefit instead of focusing on the interest of the general public.

Another major problem as per Olowu mentioned is the breakdown of the merit system which is characterized in terms of senior managerial positions has been given to the politicians at the expense of professionalism. Another point that Olowu has not mentioned is that the bureaucracy of the civil service is not suitable for most highly skilled professionals. In most civil services highly committed personnel with good educational background don't have an opportunity to promote to the higher position unless they support the ruling party.

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So, due to the above reasons the civil service affected by low morale and little commitment of civil servant.

Mechanisms of Instituting Vibrant Civil Service System

Olowu suggested that in order to institute a vibrant civil service system in Africa among other thing is reassertion of meritocracy. For instance some African countries like Botswana, South Africa and Uganda have tried to ensure the civil service salaries to be competitive with

Table1. Salary Distribution

| Type of organization | Lowest salary | Medium salary | Highest salary |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
| Government | 300-999 | 1000-2999 | 3000 and above |
| Private(ETCON plc) | 594-1954 | 1955-5429 | 6473 and above |

Source: Compiled from data obtained from Ethiopian civil service ministry and ETCON plc.

The above Table 1 illustrate the initial salary of a civil servant with a position of messenger will start his or her salary from 300 birr whereas when we see the ETCON plc the initial salary of an employee with low status like a messenger is 594 birr.

This shows that the salary of employees with the same educational qualification and experience with government civil servant are being paid many times higher than them. The same is true for the highest and medium civil servants.

CONCLUSIONS

From the commencement of the implementation of civil service reform program in Ethiopia, the public service delivery reform objectives wanted to achieve efficiency and effectiveness, render better quality services and be accountable for its failure, produce committed citizen and to bring attitudinal change.

The implementation of the civil service reform program covers a lot of things that will change public institutions in the provision of services. The civil services reform implementation in Ethiopian has faced different challenges at the beginning awareness creation is not well done by the responsible body which create confusion and misunderstanding about the reform.

Not only this but also different challenges has become a bottleneck for successful implementation of the reform like lack of competitive salary and benefit schemes which is the reason for the migration of professionals from civil service to other NGOs and private sectors.

those private sectors and the large number of well-paid NGOs. However in Ethiopia there is no such kind of measure which was undertaken by the government to attract talented and professional employees to the civil service. As a result there is a large salary gap between the private employee, employees of NGOs and the government civil servant within the same position and qualification. For comparison let us look the following table which demonstrates the salary scale of a given private company and the Civil service salary scale.

Moreover this low payment in the system results in widespread corruption problems. It is undeniable that civil service organizations should serve all parties irrespective of the political ideology of political party in power. But the reality does not show that every managerial positions of public organization are held on the basis of merit principle.

Over all, not only the professionals even the semi- skilled civil servants have no interest to stay as a government employee. It is also clear that there is huge difference in terms of payment between the civil service and the NGOs.

Primarily because of this reason employees do not have an interest to stay and to be recruited as a new employee in the civil service. This in turn results in melt down of meritocracy. So to build vibrant civil service system adjusting the merit system is the turning point.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The civil servant should be trained and retrained on regular basis. Such training should be deliberately planned, made compulsory and geared towards the achievement of specialization and professionalism.
- The appointment into civil service must be based on merit and qualification instead of political commitment alone.
- Promotion should be based on merit system, concrete achievement, because the merit principle helps to preserve objectivity, rationality and consistency in handling

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personnel matters in the loyalty and commitment.

- The civil service should be made attractive in all respects, and accorded greater recognition and responsibility. Civil servant should be motivated to stimulate them to contribute efforts, because individual productive capacity depends very largely on one's level of psychological satisfaction. This will increase the level of commitment, hard work, creativity and disposition among the civil servants.

- It is important for the administration to strive to improve employees 'remuneration and rewards to make them more committed.

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