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## **CAPACITY BUILDING, IMPROVING WORK ETHICS AND ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE**

**PROF. OLU AJAKAIYE.**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

While the building of institutions, business and other social and economic structures for achieving development is crucial, the effective and efficient performance of whatever is built depends on human beings whose talent and technical know-how must be constantly improved. There is therefore the need for capacity building at all levels to provide the human resources base for sustainable development.

In practice, work ethics in the Nigeria civil services has been one where government business is seen nobody's work (colonial legacy); where (possibly until recently) workers report for duty and leave any time they like and buying and selling of items particularly food items and clothes go on during office hours among all cadres with greatest ease and without any eye-brow being raised.

The nature of work of a typical Nigeria civil servant (in view of the aforementioned characteristics) is boring and sometimes unchallenging which leads to sagging productivity. This probably has led some people to think (or believed sometimes) that issue of productivity is irrelevant in the public sector; whereas for increases in productivity to have any serious effect on people's standard of living, it must affect all sectors of the economy. The implication of this is that the public service (government's primary mechanism of effecting development programmes) is unduly neglected to the detriment of people's well-being.

True affluence should be measured by the quality of human beings living in nation and working in organizations of all kinds. (Civil Service inclusive) is in itself a reflection of their (persons') willingness to work, ability to wisely choose from available alternatives, foresightedness, and persistence in the desire to improve on performance. Frequently, there have been strong accusations made against the Nigerian civil servants' poor work ethics and of low productivity

The crisis of the past years has created a deplorable state of human development and capacity in Nigeria. On the one hand, the crisis had resulted in ineffective and inefficient expenditure patterns on health, education and poverty-reduction related programmes. It has, on the other hand, led to drastic reduction in real wages, thereby encouraging many highly educated and skilled Nigerians to migrate to “greener pastures” where they believe their services could be adequately remunerated. This inevitably results in a poor state of human capacity development and utilisation in Nigeria.

Indeed, weak capacity in both the public and private sectors is seem to be an important core of Nigeria’s development crisis. Over the years, the Nigeria government at all levels resorted to sporadic retrenchment of workers in the public sector as a means of combating low worker productivity. In spite of this ‘corrective measure’ the general feeling is still there that the public service is unproductive.

Nigeria may find it increasingly difficult to bridge the gap between it and the developed nations unless it builds the capacity and improves work ethics as means to enhancing productivity of its civil servants. This is so because poor attitude to work or a breach of the work ethics and low capacity building / utilisation are regarded (and rightly too) as the two principal factors militating against high productivity in the Nigeria civil service. There is, therefore, the need to deliberately promote conditions that will develop desired attitudes in workers and increase their level of capacity building and utilisation with a view to increasing their efficiency and effectiveness.

In this paper, therefore, we examine issues that are of great concern to capacity building, improving work ethics and productivity enhancement in the Nigerian civil service with the ultimate objectives of proposing informed ways and means of improving the human capacity for analysing and managing development in a rapidly changing world. The rest of the paper is organised as follows.

The next section discusses conceptual issues where the concepts of capacity building, work ethics and productivity are defined in order for us to focus on the essential attributes of the concepts with special reference to the Nigeria civil service. The contemporary situation in the civil service in respect of capacity building, work ethics and productivity improvement are analysed respectively in sections three, four, and five. The paper ends in section six with conclusions and recommendations.

## II. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Capacity as a concept can be viewed in several ways. It can be viewed in terms of the ability to hold or the maximum amount that an object can contain. It can also be viewed either in relational terms or in terms of the position one occupies or functions and also in connection with power to learn to retain knowledge, that is, mental abilities (Ajakaiye, 2000). Obadan and Adubi (1998), defines capacity building (when viewed from the angle of human resources development) as a variable which “entails investment in human capital, institutions and practices necessary to enhance human skills, overhaul institutions and improve procedures and the system.

**Capacity building** in this regard entails all gamut of programmes directed at improving the ability of human resources and institutions to perform or produce. Capacity building can be viewed as having three distinct elements. The first is human development, especially the provision of basic health, education, nutrition and technical skills. The second is the restructuring of many public and private institutions to create a context in which skilled workers can function effectively. The third is political leadership based on the understanding that institutions are fragile entities, painstakingly built up, easily destroyed, and that these institutions therefore deserve sustained nurturing (ILO, 1991). Capacity building for civil servants therefore entails improving the ability of civil servants to be better positioned to carry out their day-to-day routine administrative functions and execute development projects and programmes effectively and efficiently.

**Work Ethics**, at the elementary level, has to do with morals and rules of conduct in the workplace and the conformity with recognised standards expected of a particular group, association or profession. Over the years, the courts in Nigeria have upheld the position that government employment, by and large, is a privilege extended to employees, who, must as of necessity, abide by conditions imposed by it.

Work ethics, which can also be regarded as “law at work” simultaneously guides both the employers and employees in their relationship in work situation. In other words, it informs and directs the employee on his duties, responsibilities, and ways of conduct and in the service of an organisation, while on the other hand it informs the employer of his responsibilities to his staff as well as the limits in the exercise of his power of prerogative.

Productivity is generally defined as the output per unit of input. It denotes the relationship between output of goods and services and the resource inputs (both human and material) which are utilised in the production of such goods and services. In other

worlds, it is the measurement of the yield of resources utilised in the production process. At certain level of reasoning, the rate of yield of resource inputs may be tangible, physical or visible as in quantities while at another level it may be intangible and invisible, in which case it can be deduced from turn-over, profit or even the rate at which objectives are being achieved. The level of productivity however varies from one establishment, sector and even country to the other because factor inputs and production mixes vary. In so far as we have various factor inputs and also because of the great difficulty in disaggregating, analysing and quantifying the relative contribution of each factor input in the production process, the widely acceptable single measure of productivity is that of labour input. Labour productivity is commonly used to refer to the volume of goods and services produced per worker within some specified time period.

There are many definitions of the civil service and each has its peculiar vision of what the service is and what it ought to do. Civil service can be regarded as the generic name for paid non-military service in non-elective office in the executive branch of government. The civil service is the major instrument used by government to implement its policies. It is composed of the ministries and departments of government and the bureaucrats and professionals who work in them (Phillips, 1988). The civil service is an apolitical branch of government providing the technical administrative expertise which elected officials lacked. Civil servants are most closely (not exclusively) identified with democracies where they are regarded as servants of the people rather than the tools of the state.

They are the professional advisors to those who are constitutionally empowered to formulate state policy. Every country therefore expects the bulk of its civil servants to be impartial and neutral in matters of ideology and party preference; they are called upon to advise, caution and assist those in political positions, and to provide a framework for proper implementation, once a policy has been decided upon (Abiola, 1991).

As the primary instrument of government, the effectiveness and efficiency with which the civil service performs its function cannot be over-emphasised in view of the fact that the health of the country (social, economic and political) is a close reflection of the degree of effectiveness, efficiency and sensitivity of its civil service. It is therefore imperative to examine the nature of capacity building, work ethics and productivity in the Nigerian civil service.

### **III. CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE**

The Nigerian civil service, like its counterparts in other democracies of the world, performs three essential functions expected of a viable civil service. First, the service plays an indispensable advisory role in studying and identifying problems, articulating various policy options, predicting their consequences on the society, and recommending the most viable course of action to government. Once the political leadership commits itself to a specific policy, it then falls on the civil service to ensure faithful implementation and the attainment of policy, objectives.

Secondly, the civil service provides a vital link or bridge between the government and the governed. Without the two-way traffic in information provided by the civil service, the result would be a wide gulf between the people and their elected officials. Thirdly, the service provides a solid platform for continuity in the policies of successive governments and chief executives.

Capacity building (in this context) as the process of achieving self-reliance through the strengthening of human and organisational capabilities within an economy is concerned with human and institutional development directed at creating and / or augmenting the capabilities to identify, plan and carry out government's policies and programmes which serve the interest of human, political and economic development.

The Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) through its annual monitoring research activities called NISER Annual Monitoring Research Project (NAMRP) has found that there is an increasing recognition in the public sector of the need for capacity building.

However, resources voted for capacity building are grossly inadequate, while the emphasis on capacity building is on the officers who are in the middle cadre. There is a flaw in this arrangement as junior officers who are to feed the middle level offices with needed information, and the senior officers who utilise the inputs of the middle-level officers, are not given adequate attention in provision of training and development. To that extent, the arrangement cannot provide the needed comprehensive and all embracing capacity building for productivity enhancement.

As the sector which must create the enabling environment for the private sector and general social, political and economic development, the civil servants who design and manage development policies must acquire the necessary tools for this task. It is this realisation which must have been the main determinant of the observed renewed public

sector emphasis on capacity building.

Many of the capacity building programmes of local institutions like the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Centre for Management Development (CMD), National Centre for Economic Management Administration (NCEMA), universities, polytechnics and the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (NISER) were patronised largely by the public sector establishments. The courses mostly attended by civil service employees include Planning, Research and Statistics; Personnel Management, Project Monitoring and Evaluation Method; Information Technology, Secretarial and Typist courses. Though we are cognisant of the fact that there are some training and retraining programmes established by various levels of government aimed at increasing the capabilities of civil servants at various cadres, there is however the urgent need to provide them with training programmes in such disciplines as public sector employment, labour, debt problem, wages and wages policies and marco-economic environment which includes socio-economic and political re-structuring, poverty alleviation and basic needs. The support of credible international organisation such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), jobs and Skills Programme for Africa (JASPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and some local educational and training institutions, in this regard, can be highly advantageous. Furthermore, we need to avoid duplication and overlapping of efforts and activities of certain agencies, departments and ministries with a view to harmonising their efforts and activities and reducing wastes.

#### **IV. WORK ETHICS IN THE NIGERIA CIVIL SERVICE**

Work can simply be defined as any physical or mental effort performed in a purposeful activity. One of the basic functions of work in any society is to produce and distribute goods and services, which serve the needs and desires of consumers. Work, for the individual worker, plays a crucial and perhaps unparalleled psychological role in the formation of self-esteem, identity and a sense of order (Khan, 1972). People who have negative attitudes to work are some prone to breach work ethics because of their inadequate or wrong knowledge of the essence of work.

Work Ethics in the Nigerian Civil service usually prohibits bad practices such as lateness to work, acceptance of questionable gifts or gratifications, use of government property or confidential information for private gain, loitering at work, sleeping on duty, tardiness, unauthorised absenteeism and other unwholesome acts that can mitigate against

the achievement of goals of the civil service. In a more inclusive sense, work ethics involves appropriate staff conduct, safety and health standards at work, management prerogatives, union recognition, and casual workers' rights.

Work Ethics is much more than minimization or elimination of bribery and corruption but should be seen as a veritable mechanism of control, conformity, and performance measurement. Thus, in any work situation, work ethics aims at reducing tension and frustration, facilitating work process, asserting control and modifying behaviour of job performers at all levels.

A breach of work ethics is any act by the employee which runs contrary to the laid down rules and regulations of the organisation. Work ethics in the Nigeria civil service frowns at misconduct which include refusal to accept reasonable orders, failure to take reasonable care, dereliction of duty, habitual lateness to work, theft of government property, misuse and abuse of government property, unauthorised divulging of information, and so on. Penalties for violating the work ethics (depending on the seriousness or severity of the act) include oral warning, written query or warning, withholding or deferment of salary, surcharge, suspension, interdiction, termination of appointment and dismissal.

As good as majority of the stipulations governing secrecy and the public access to information should be given a critical look. As much as quite agree that certain government/public affairs may be conducted in secret particularly in war or emergency periods, we would not subscribe to the idea of the having laws and statutes which guarantee secrecy in the routine affairs which properly concern people's welfare in a democratic environment. We should appreciate the fact that transparency and accountability that everybody clamours for will continue to elude the nation except there is a drastic change of orientation.

## **V. PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT IN THE CIVIL SERVICE**

The peculiarity of the civil service (where majority of its outputs are invisible or intangible has promoted some analysts to regard productivity as the ability to accomplish some specified objectives (output centered). This was the yard-stick employed when in 1975, several public servants were retired on grounds of "declining productivity" (Balogun 1983). Another school of thought regards productivity as being synonymous with the ability to allocate resources judiciously and to avoid waste. While the former stresses achievement of objective (s), the latter emphasises economic use of resources.



We have to state here that there are, as yet, fewer empirical studies on productivity measurement in the public sector when compared with what prevails of the private sector in the Nigerian economy. One major problem in the bid to increase productivity in Nigerian civil service is the problem of measuring and quantifying productivity in the sub sector. The total lack of work study and work measurement in the public service makes it extremely difficult for any serious attention to be paid to productivity. A situation, therefore, exists in the public service such that there is a religious adherence to maintaining the status quo, preoccupation with maintaining of approved establishments in the budget, and insatiable desire for more staff and materials when the existing staff and materials are sub-optimally used (Uche, 1991).

In the interim, we may propose that productivity measurement in the civil service should be carried out at the micro level, because any meaningful attempt at enhancing productivity in the civil service at the aggregate level must be done at the individual civil servant's level. Furthermore, productivity measurement at the macro level would make it rather impossible to identify and deal appropriately with the dormant, inefficient and unproductive civil servants.

Any meaningful attempt at increasing productivity in the civil service must also take into consideration the issues of red tapism and undue endless bureaucratic process, inadequate supervision, absence of incentives, stagnation on particular grade level for a long time, poor attitude to public service work, serious underemployment, unclear goal setting, incessant strikes, unreliable water and electricity supplies, inadequate attention to training and retraining of civil servants, obsolete/inadequate machinery, equipment, tools and implements, low worker morale, poor management, unenlightened trade unionism and government's lack of diplomacy on union matters, and so on.

The issue of capacity building and work ethics in productivity enhancement needs further analysis. No matter how vigorously the issue of capacity building is pursued, productivity improvement will be an illusion unless equal attention is paid to improving work ethics (and vice versa). Whereas capacity building entails investment in human capital, institutions and practices necessary to enhance human skills, overhaul institutions and improve procedures and the system (Ajakaiye, 2000) good work ethics produces right attitude to work.

undivided loyalty, reasonable care in handling government's property and low level of tension and frustration. In other words, when capacity is built, adequate effort must be geared towards providing work ethics that is conducive to productivity improvement.

If we agree that the ultimate objective of capacity building and improving work ethics productivity, clear job specification, provision of necessary materials, tools and funds, must be made so that capacity improvement can be judiciously put on use. The wastes will be colossal and the frustration severe if the capacity built cannot be effectively used on account of lack of these cooperant factors.

There has not been serious analysis done on the linkage between the price and quality of labour. In Nigeria, the fact is that declining real incomes have pushed wage earners into secondary activities which has resulted in divided loyalty of most of civil servants to their calling and "braindrain" of highly qualified and competent Nigeria professionals to other countries where they believe better wages are being paid.

Excuses abound for explaining the apparent low productivity in the Nigeria public service, such as grossly inadequate provision of basic rights (education, housing, health, job food security etc) and secondary needs (electricity, adequate pay, water roads) to the Nigeria people by all levels of government. The prevalence of these anomalies increases the problem of fraud, inflation of government contract, embezzlement of funds and diversion of government's property to private use. Incessant/ erratic failure of electricity and water supply and telephone services adversely affects workers productivity; workers remain idle for a sizable proportion of their working hours particularly when NEPA puts off light.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **VI.1. Conclusions**

No matter how knowledge and experienced our politicians may be, they need the accumulated and professional knowledge and experienced of career civil servants in the task of policy formulation, implementation and execution. They (civil servants) must be people with broad, generalised and specialised whose career prospects, training, tenure and job satisfaction must be well ensured.

While there seems to be a consensus on the problems of the civil service in Nigeria, the solutions defy any form of agreement. However, we tend to agree that there are certain

qualities which are necessary for efficiency in an organisation. These are adequate and relevant knowledge, experience, skill, handwork, aptitude, commitment, availability and discipline (Ujo, 1987). We tend to agree that if all the variables are present in the Nigeria civil service, its productivity would increase. The civil servant is he/she who is results – oriented, makes things happen by organising men, money and materials in order to achieve the stated objectives of his /her departments or ministry.

The issue of capacity building, improving work ethics and enhancing productivity in the Nigeria civil service is a holistic one; therefore, all the recommendations must be taken as a package and be implemented simultaneously.

## **VI.2 Recommendations**

Consequently, the following recommendations are hereby put forward to eliminate some critical factors militating against increases in productivity in the Nigeria civil service. In general, there should be outright and purposeful war against embezzlement of funds, fraud and contract inflation. Therefore, the Anti –Corruption Bill recently signed into law by the President is a step in the right direction. Its implementation should be swift and decisive. Relatedly, it should be realized that confidentiality should not be equated with secrecy. While confidentiality ensures non-disclosure of vital information until such a time when the public is ready to receive such information, secrecy is permanent withholding of information. Openness in government affairs encourages transparency and honesty whereas secrecy encourages all shades of fraudulent practices in government business. Therefore, one way of reducing the degree of fraud, embezzlement and theft not only in the civil service but in government business in general is to eliminate secrecy in the conduct of governmental affairs.

With respect to capacity building, the programme of training and retraining of civil servants should be given adequate attention in terms of improved funding. Also, the present situation whereby attention is disproportionately paid to middle level manpower training needs should be avoided. The training needs of all cadres must be adequately addressed in order to guarantee holistic capacity building. In this connection, short courses (one or two days) should be designed for the senior civil servants who may not be able to leave their desks for longer duration courses. Practical job performance oriented courses should also be arranged for the junior staff who may not be able to assimilate complicated concepts. Such courses may also be for short duration as well.

In order to improve work ethics, advancement and reward system in the civil service should be based on performance and not on considerations such as stateism, ethnicity, god-fatherism, and other forms of sponsored mobility. Adequate remuneration should also be paid. A situation whereby the pay in the civil service is reviewed once in a while should be discontinued. There should be a framework for regular and systematic review of wages in the public service generally.

With respect to productivity, there should be clear job specification, performance targets should be clearly set and adequate tools, equipment and materials needed by worker should be provided. This is a pre-requisites for performance assessment and productivity measurement which should be carried out regularly. In this regard, the staff performance evaluation form should be designed to include explicit measurement of performance and the assessment process should be participatory. Finally, necessary enabling environment should be created ensuring that necessary infrastructural facilities, especially electricity and telecommunication facilities are in place and that the materials required by the worker to perform the tasks are provided timely and adequately. A situation whereby capacity is built, remuneration is improved, work ethics is enhanced but the operating cost is not adequately provided for will prevent the realization of improved productivity thereby preventing the realization of the full benefits of improved capacity building and work ethics.

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