



## A REVIEW OF THE STRUCTURES AND FORMATS OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE FROM 1914 TO DATE

By

<sup>1</sup>Tukura, T.P, <sup>2</sup>Adejoh, E, <sup>3</sup>Okpanachi, A.U, <sup>4</sup>Yakubu, S.A, <sup>5</sup>Nasamu, I

<sup>1</sup>First Bank of Nigeria PLC ,Lokoja Bank, Nigeria,

<sup>2</sup>Registry Department , Salem University , Lokoja , Nigeria,

<sup>3</sup>Department of Public Administration, Kogi State Polytechnic , Lokoja, Nigeria

<sup>4</sup>Registry Department , Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, Nigeria

<sup>5</sup>School of Management, Walden University. Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States of America



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### Abstract

*The Nigerian Civil Service went through several structural changes arising from many civil /public service reforms over many decades. This review highlights the various structural and format changes that arose from the many civil service reforms. From 1914 up to the time of the 1957 reforms there were no Ministries under Ministers and Permanent Secretaries as we now know them. Instead the Civil Service was structured along functional lines, There were Departments such as Forestry, Education, Public Works, Agriculture, etc, and each was headed by the most senior professional officer, with the title of Director. These Directors were ex-officio members of the Legislative Council from 1914 until 1954 when the country attained the status of responsible government. During the years when the professional officers, as Director Heads of Departments, sat in the Legislature, they were responsible for all policy matters in their departments; they answered questions and defended their departments in the Legislative Council. They were the chief advisers of government on all matters relating to their Departments. Then came changes which altered their status and position. First, there was the political development which came with the attainment of responsible government in 1954. This was followed by the civil service re-organization of 1957 which featured the integration of departments into Ministries. Each Ministry was under a responsible Minister with a Permanent Secretary as his chief adviser. The Permanent Secretary was, in most cases, an administrative officer. He was responsible for the co-ordination of all the work in the Ministry and took responsibility for policy and all the affairs of the Department under the general control of the Minister as political head. Then came the Udoji reforms of 1974 which abolished the DL grading scale and created Grade Levels 1 to 17 and increased the wages of civil servants, the 1988 reforms changed the nomenclature of the grades, abolished the position of Permanent Secretary and replaced it with the position of Director General, which became a political appointment, the position of head of the civil service was also abolished, The Allison Ayida review Panel of 1994 to 1997 restored the positions of Permanent Secretary and that of Head of Civil Service. The Article concluded by noting that the many reforms were yet to create a satisfactory structure for the civil service and called for another wholistic civil service reforms that will alter the present structure, mitigate corruption and nepotism and place merit ahead of quota system, tribal and religious considerations*

**Keywords:** Civil Service, Corruption, Formats, Nigeria, Structures

### Introduction

The Nigerian Civil Service went through several structural and format changes arising from many civil /public service reforms over many decades. The many reforms did not yield meaningful results ( Ejigbo *et al.*, 2023) Ake and Olowojola, 2016 ;Anazodo *et al* 2012 ; Sekwat, 2002) From 1914 up to the time of the 1957 reforms there were no Ministries under Ministers and Permanent Secretaries as we now know them.

Instead the Civil Service was structured along functional lines, with the most senior professional officer occupying the position of Head of Department. There were Departments such as Forestry, Education, Public Works, Agriculture, etc, and each was headed by the most senior professional officer, with the title of Director. These Directors were ex-officio members of the Legislative Council from 1914 until 1954 when the country attained the status of responsible

government. During the years when the professional officers, as Director Heads of Departments, sat in the Legislature, they were responsible for all policy matters in their departments; they answered questions and defended their departments in the Legislative Council. They were the chief advisers of government on all matters relating to their Departments. Then came changes which altered their status and position. First, there was the political development which came with the attainment of responsible government in 1954. This was followed by the civil service re-organization of 1957 which featured the integration of departments into Ministries. Each Ministry was under a responsible Minister with a Permanent Secretary as his chief adviser. The Permanent Secretary was, in most cases, an administrative officer. He was responsible for the co-ordination of all the works in the Ministry and took responsibility for policy and all the affairs of the Department under the general control of the Minister as political head. Then came the Udoji reforms of 1974 which abolished the DL grading scale and created Grade Levels 1 to 17 and increased the wages of civil servants, the 1988 reforms changed the nomenclature of the grades, abolished the position of Permanent Secretary and replaced it with the position of Director General, which became a political appointment, the position of head of the civil service was also abolished. The Allison Ayiuda review Panel of 1994 to 1997 restored the positions of Permanent Secretary and that of Head of civil service Civil Service. The present structure will require another structural change and wholistic reform to mitigate corruption and nepotism and place merit ahead of quota system, tribal and religious considerations and promote efficiency and service delivery. This article examines the structural and format changes that came with the many civil service reforms up to the current structure and their effects on the Nigerian Civil / Public Service

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The Pre 1957 Structure

At that time, there were no Ministries under Ministers and Permanent Secretaries as we now know them. Instead the Civil Service was structured along functional basis, with the most senior professional officer occupying the position of Head of Department. There were Departments of Forestry, Education, Works, Agriculture, Commerce, Finance, etc, and each was headed by the most senior professional officer, with the title of Director. These Directors were ex-officio members of the Legislative Council from 1914 until 1954 when the country attained the status of responsible government. During the years when the professional officers, as Director Heads of Departments, sat in the Legislature, they were responsible for all policy matters in their departments; they answered questions and defended their departments in the Legislative Council. They were the chief advisers of government on all matters relating to their Departments. Then came changes which altered their status and position. First, there was the political development which came with the attainment of responsible government in 1954. This was followed by the civil service re-organization of 1957 which featured the integration of departments into Ministries. Each Ministry was

under a responsible Minister with a Permanent Secretary as his chief adviser. The Permanent Secretary was, in most cases, an administrative officer. He was responsible for the co-ordination of all the work in the Ministry and took responsibility for policy and all the affairs of the Department under the general control of the Minister as political head. In this way the most senior professional Officer, once the lord of all that he surveyed, became subordinated to the Permanent Secretary. This was the origin of the trouble. From then on came friction between the generalist administrator and the professional expert. The latter regarded the administrator as a lay-man who knew very little of the contents of the work of the Department and regarded him almost as an impostor. According to Adebayo (1978) the 1957 structure was the genesis of the conflict between the generalist Administrator and the professional expert in the Nigerian Civil Service, he further noted that over the years some generalist administrator treated the professional officers with scant regard, due to a feeling of cadre superiority

### 2.2 The Mode of Operation in the 1957 Structure

The normal method of operation in a Department was that the Permanent Secretary asks the professional specialist for his views and advice on proposals being considered in the Department. The Permanent Secretary is expected to take these views and advice into consideration while submitting recommendations and final proposals to the Minister or to the Government. The convention is that where a Permanent Secretary ignores the advice of his professional expert and the expert feels very strongly that the recommendations and advice tendered by his Permanent Secretary to Government are professionally unsound and may lead to disastrous consequences that will not be in the public interest, the professional expert has the right of direct access to the Minister to present his views. One obvious consequence of such a course of action, of course, is that the relationship between the Permanent Secretary and the professional expert becomes immediately strained and this in turn will have adverse effects on the work of the Department/Ministry. For most of the time there is an under-current of feeling on either side that one party hardly ever needs the other and that the presence of the other party in the Department/ Ministry is sheer humbug. (Adebayo, 1978)

### 3.1. The Udoji Reform Commission of 1972 - 74

The Udoji reforms increased wages of civil servants fairly substantially in line with the economic realities of that time and introduced the Grade Levels 1 – 17 grading system to replace the DL Scale grading system. It also made far reaching recommendations on total quality management as well as management development, but these were not implemented (Ake and Olowojola, 2016; Anazodo *et al*, 2012; Adamolekun, 1986). Its recommendations on solving the conflicts between the administrative and professional cadre officers did not yield positive results (Adebayo, 1978), and in the views of Ocheja *et al* (2024) were unsatisfactory

### 3.2. The 1988 Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria

The main objective of the 1988 reform was to make the civil service virile, dynamic and result oriented, but other

objectives were enhanced professionalism, alignment with the presidential system of government, decentralization and delegation, combination of authority with responsibility, enhanced accountability, enhanced checks and balances, general modernization and enhanced effectiveness, efficiency and speed of operation the then head of civil service, the permanent secretaries and some others felt it was a way of reducing the powers of the bureaucracy/civil service especially those of the permanent secretaries and other top civil servants which the military government felt were too powerful. (News Watch Magazine, 1988)

The position of Head of the civil service was abolished. The position of permanent Secretary was redesignated Director General, and became a political appointment such that even non career civil servants were appointed and they had to leave with the government that appointed them, Permanent Secretaries (now Directors General) were no longer chief accounting officers of ministries, the role was given to ministers/commissioners. This made the ministers/commissioners more powerful, with much more work to do and a leeway to be more corrupt. (Ocheja *et al.*, 2023) The ministers/commissioners were not regular in the office to carry out the new roles given to them, this led to lower output. (Bagaji, 2002)

The civil service commission was stripped of some of its functions and given to the ministries, the title of Director General was also used for heads of parastatals or Agencies, this resulted in confusion and conflict between the Directors-General of ministries and those of parastatals and agencies, there were even superiority conflicts. The civil service commission could only recruit officers on GL 7-10 below and above GL 7-10 was to be done by the ministries, it was also stripped of its power of appointments, promotion, discipline, and only left with rules, regulations and interpretation such that the civil service commission only set the rules and played the role of observer during promotion exercises.

All the positions/ranks were redesignated, the ministries were to have a unified structure, with eight (8) departments, so some departments were merged and others were split into two, for instance the department of Administration and Finance was split into two departments, personal management and finance and supplies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then had thirty six departments and had difficulty in merging them into eight departments. The pool system was abolished and each officer was expected to build his/her career in a particular ministry. (This however could not be implemented) The departments were headed by Directors on grade Levels 16/17, followed by Deputy Directors and Assistant Director on GL 15/16 and 14/15 depending on whether it was state or federal. The position of head of the civil service is for career civil servants while that of Secretary to the Government was made a political appointment, Secretaries to the state / Federal Government were career civil servants and also oversaw the civil service, up till the time of return to civilian rule when the two positions became separate, in the 70s and 80s under the military rule and just before the 1988 reforms the

position of Secretary to the government and that of the head of the civil service, were combined and held by one appointee and designated Secretary to the Military Government and Head of the Civil Service (SMG/HOCS)

The 1988 reform concentrated too many functions in the hands of the ministers/commissioners, this impaired efficiency and output, financial accountability was weak, since the internal audit was under the minister/commissioner who appointed, promoted and disciplined staff, there was continuity problem, a change in government will lead to the exit of the minister/commissioner and the Director General. (Omale, 2005; Ocheja, 2005; Omale, 1996)

### 3.3 Resultant Effects of the 1988 Civil Service Reforms on the Nigerian Civil Service

The reform did more harm than good to the civil service

1. On the positive side, it created more career space for officers to rise to the rank of Director (GL 16 and 17 as the case may be)
2. It also helped in reducing the conflict between the administrative and professional cadre officers. As more professional officers could be appointed Directors General
3. There was also elongation of the steps on grade levels on the other hand the civil service became more corrupt, highly politicized and more inefficient. It also promoted nepotism and tribalism. Merit, hard work, seniority, dedication to duty and honesty were eroded (Bagaji, 2002). Having the two top chief executives of a ministry as political appointees was damaging as it encouraged corruption. The minister and Director General could by pass a Director and work directly with a Deputy or even an Assistant Director, this can be demoralizing, this is even worse in the states. There was a case in one of the North central states of Nigeria, in the mid 90s where the Director General of a Ministry engineered the posting of the Director and Deputy Director of Finance and Supplies to other Ministries/Departments and started working with the Chief Finance officer on GL 13, the Director General gave him the official car of the Director of Finance and Finance, and even prevented the posting of another Director /Deputy/ Assistant Director of Finance and Supplies to his ministry, this remained so for many months

It was in realization of the above that the Allison Ayida Review Panel was set up in 1994 to review the 1988 reform. Its recommendations were largely a blend of the old and 1988 styles/format but the damage had already been done and it seems to be irredeemable except something drastic is done

### 3.4 The Allison Ayida Review Panel of 1994

In realization of the damage done to the civil service by the 1988 reforms, the Allison Ayida Review Panel was set up in 1994 to review the 1988 reform. Implementation commenced in 1997, Its recommendations were largely a blend of the old and 1988 styles/formats (Ocheja, *et al.*, 2023) but the damage

had already been done and it seems irredeemable except something drastic is done (Ejigbo., *et al*, 2023) , the positions of Head of the civil service and Permanent Secretary were restored, and only career officers can be appointed, , Ministries ,departments and agencies were merged, the new nomenclature for the ranks introduced from the 1988 reforms were allowed to remain Directors on GL 16 /17 are the heads of departments /divisions, the bar for the Executive Officers cadre was elongated to Grade Level 14 ( Chief Executive Officer) from Grade Level 13.. Other Chief (X) and Assistant Chief (X) Officers are on level 14 and 13 , Principal X officers are on Gl 12. This system paved the leeway for more Professional Cadre officers to be appointed Permanent Secretaries ( Ocheja *et al*, 2023)

## 4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMEDATIONS

### 4.1 Conclusion

The many Civil / Public Service reforms so far has not addressed the structural and other problem of the civil/public service.

Corruption, political interference and poor remuneration are some of the problems of the Nigerian civil service.

### 4.2 Recommendations

A wholistic Civil / Public Service reform that will address the structural defects in the current system to also include the local government civil service. Better remuneration for civil servants should be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Corruption and political interference should be mitigated without further delay

Merit in the appointment of chief executives and promotion of very senior officers should be based on ,merit rather than quota, religious, tribal, nepotism and other pecuniary considerations

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