

Summary of Proceedings (Immediate Report)

Permanent Secretaries Forum
Monday, 14 December 2009

Building Public Service Capacity for V20: 2020

Forum Chair: Dr Mu'azu Aliyu Babangida, Governor (Chief Servant), Niger State

Background Presentation: Building Public Service Capacity for V20: 2020
Mr Stephen Oronsanye, CON, Head of the Civil Service of the Federation

Panelists:

Dr Shamsudeen Usman, Honourable Minister, national planning
Muktar Shagari, Deputy Governor, Sokoto State
Mr. Emeka Ndu, MD, C & I Leasing
Prof. Afolabi, Federal Ministry of Education

~~Alh. Yakubu Abiodun Balogun, Head of Service, Lagos State (scheduled but absent)~~
~~Mrs. Titi Iroche, Retired Permanent Secretary (scheduled but absent)~~

Flow of Proceedings

The forum began on a very lively note. Spicing his opening remarks with personal anecdotes garnered from his career, the Chair (who constantly reminded the audience to refer to him as 'the Chief Servant' of Niger State) flagged off discussions by appreciating and highlighting the critical importance of the civil service to the task of nation building.

He said that capacity building for civil service staff is 'goes beyond sending personnel on training, it is also about exposure, and the sub-total of all it takes to achieve tip top professional on-the-job performance, including character, integrity which must go with paper qualifications, exposure, experience and competence.'

Posing a rhetorical question, he said: 'So how does all these relate to our v20: 2020. Many civil servants, he said, fail to appreciate the importance of the Vision, and the fact that they would be responsible for implementing it. He buttressed this point by citing the annual blame game between the various arms of government (between ministers and legislature especially) on who implements the fiscal budget. Thus he sought for frank and open discussions and pragmatic solutions from delegates attending the session. He also said the forum was a timely one which should avail private sector chieftains present an opportunity to know what to expect from the public (civil) service. The forum must therefore address the following: how do we take Nigeria to be among the top 20 countries in year 2020; what do we need to accelerate growth – do we need to be democratic or do we need to take and treat government as a secret cult, a cabal of characters who answer to no one but their clique?

He then also asked if the house could consider taking a deeper look at the tenure of permanent secretaries and/or perhaps if there is the need to place year terms for these very senior government functionaries.

Introducing the Head of Service of the Federation, he clamoured for a thought provoking presentation which would set the tone for further discussions.

Background Presentation

Mr Stephen Oronsanye's power point presentation was concise. It showcased the features of, ongoing reform efforts, growth and development challenges and inherent limitations of the federal civil service. Highlights:

- The Civil Service, considered to be the engine room of governance, can thus be considered as the Permanent Government. Its multiple roles in the political economy include:

- Policy making / advisory role
- Policy implementation
- Engine room of governance
- Past efforts at making the public service functional:
 - Reforms in civil service have been on since the advent of civil rule in 1989, in several areas of governance: budget, public procurement, tax, judiciary, pension, Information Technology, Account & Audit systems, Ports & Customs, Economic & Financial Crimes, Public Service, Ethics
- Challenges to reforms:
 - These are: disinformation on the intentions of government; scepticism; resistance by those opposed to reforms; misapplication of rules; selfish tendencies; gaps in capacity, ICT and other core areas; deficiencies in Human Resource Management; deep rooted unethical values; subjective, standards for performance assessment; remuneration
- Limitations to overcoming challenges:
 - Tenure policy; career development; leadership development; review of reward system / remuneration; improved working environment; automation of processes; travel desk (a one-stop shop where tickets can be issued to officials of government travelling on official business et al with a view to cost containment and management
- Conclusion
 - Creative and vibrant public services remains key to optimal national development as envisioned in v20: 2020
 - With the permanence if enjoys, the Public Service must strive to remain relevant to achieving the goals of government
 - Fear God and put the country first

The rest of the forum saw presentations and comments from the following individuals:

- Muktari Shagari, Deputy Governor, Sokoto State
He delved into his personal experience as a civil servant working as a lawyer (state counsel) in the state civil service. His paper fingered poor funding and poor human resource development as the bane of the civil service nationally.
- Mr. Emeka Ndu, MD, C & I Leasing
He submitted that public sector wages were not competitive and that most bright youngsters would, given the opportunity choose not to work in the civil service. There was thus a need to improve the compensation structure of the civil service and inject a merit driven culture.
- Prof. Afolabi, Federal Ministry of Education
The ex-university lecturer noted that capacity in the civil service is really about efficient management of resources
- Dr Shamsudeen Usman, Honourable Minister, national planning
He spoke about the struggle to involve public civil servants in the visioning process, and how the private sector participants were so much more committed. Perhaps, the chances of achieving goals of V20:2020 with the present civil service are slim. The civil service as it is presently constituted needs to be revamped, else we are doomed.

There were also comments and questions by/from:

Dr Adegotoye; Mr Kunle Olumide, retired federal permanent secretary; Mr Steven Funso Oladosu, a deputy director in the Federal Civil Service; Mrs Ebechukwu, National Planning Commission; Mohammed Lapai, PM, Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Plateau State

General Remarks made by the Chairman in response to panellists presentations and other remarks

- There should be Civil Service Performance Contracts – judging people by what they do

- There was a need to do consistent audits in the civil service
- Federal Civil Service Commission – need for all to discuss and examine its role and effectiveness in the civil service development process.
- Also gives historical perspective to Mr Olumide’s golden era / talked about the civil service purge of the Murtala regime which purged and decimated the civil service of its highly trained manpower / since 1983 up to 2006 Permanent Secretaries were not allowed in Council meetings (PMs now attend state executive council meeting in Niger State alongside their respective commissioners)
- On the need to actively pursue a revolving door policy of getting folks from academia to work in the civil service and vice versa.
- Noted that capacity and personal development is a two-way street – companies and governments can train you but the main motivator must be you.
- On need for government to be transparent with its plans and programmes with the People (the governed).
- On NEEDS and the demerits of its initiation – the National Planning Commission was not aware or involved in the NEEDS process. So they got involved then, almost forcibly, as civil service. There was general scepticism of the quality of input from the civil service so the originators of NEEDS did not consider this input even though it later turned out that this ‘civil service input’ contained a lot of panaceas to the ills of the political economy as identified by NEEDS.

Closing Remarks by

Frank Nweke, DG, NESG closed the session:

- Thanks panellists for their insightful contributions. Thanks the audience comprising of current and retired civil servants for their input. Cites his four year experience in government – his running battles with the ‘civil service system’: in retrospect, who was really in charge – the permanent secretaries or the Minister; the civil service or the President? Stressed that capacity is about personal development first and foremost, then service to government and then service to the people. And then said that the outcome of NES#15 deliberations, including this Permanent Secretaries Forum, would come out in a Position Paper which would be presented to the HOS and to Government.