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TOWARDS A RESULT-ORIENTED PUBLIC SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

The role of public service has become a crucial one for national growth and development because the managerial responsibility for many vital areas of economic and social life of the nation has been increasingly assumed by the Government. Not only is Government concerned with such traditional instruments of controlling the life of the nation as fiscal policy, incentives for agriculture and industry, but with the direct management of institutions that are to point out the way growth shall take place. Due largely to this shift in its tasks, the success of the vital social and economic sector of government would depend on the efficiency of its public services. It is in this context that we have to understand the concern for administrative reforms in most countries of the world. Public service is expected to be the source for leadership, in most countries, and for the ethical and moral values from which private organisations and the public take their cue.

Assuming this central role of the public service for national development, I shall address myself to two questions: one, what are the conditions necessary for developing result-oriented public service, and two, what would the government have to do to achieve such a system?

I. CONDITIONS NECESSARY FOR RESULT-ORIENTED PUBLIC SERVICE

There have been several Commissions to suggest changes in public service. Udoji Commission of Enquiry, and the others set up to enquire into the performance and activities of our State and Federal public services, have catalogued the deficiencies that plague the performance of public service institutions. Some of these include the lack of appreciation of managerial and supervisory practices and techniques, low technical know-how, poor coordination and leadership. The Public Service Review Commission has pointed out some of the cultural and environmental reasons such as lack of animosity and jealousy among members, elitism, nepotism, language and many others.

The Public Service Review Commission noted with great emphasis the need for the effectiveness, efficiency and adequacy of the public services. Towards this end, the Commission devoted much of its time and energy to outlining the need for introducing a new style of public service to meet the challenge of development. In a nutshell, the Commission laid emphasis on three new concepts, viz:

- (1) the need for a new conception of management providing a more results-oriented approach to public service, concentrating attention and resources on the purposes for which public institutions are created as servants of society;

*This paper was the text of a lecture delivered by the author on 28 January, 1977 under the auspices of the PUBLIC SERVICE FORUM of Bendel State of Nigeria.

- (ii) the need for the public service to recruit and train specialised personnel and use scientific knowledge to a much greater extent than at present by drawing upon the resources of research and educational institutions and the experience of the private sector, both in Nigeria and abroad; and
- (iii) the need for the new public service to manage its human resources in such a way as to motivate them to achieve defined goals more effectively to make the public institution a better place of work, so that the employees will be inspired to give their best as members of teams engaged in a common enterprise for public good.

Changes in these areas are yet to come. Hence I feel I must emphasise some of these aspects for achieving the kind of administration that the Review Commission had visualised for the country and one that is essential to manage the leap-frogging development that is now beginning to take place in the country.

From the management point of view, a result-oriented public service assumes at least three things:

- (a) a clear definition of the results that are expected;
- (b) availability of a structure and a system of working that is best equipped to achieve the agreed results;
- (c) timely feedback of operational data to know what results are being achieved; and having the feedback, making use of it to take remedial action where required.

We need to examine very carefully whether these conditions exist in public service, conditions without which result-oriented service is unlikely to come about. Several studies of government administration, the kind of studies we should promote in Nigeria, show that there are several dynamic changes that may be required for establishing the Government on the path of result-oriented systems of administration. The most important of these are the following:

1. The management control system in government is poor even if it exists in some rare cases. It is weak because:
 - (a) the objectives are poorly defined. Objectives lay down precisely what a ministry and its units would, as a team, achieve. In this sense, a distinction has to be made between objectives and targets. The first relates to expected results of the total ministry or department, and the latter concerns the individual activity, which should cumulatively achieve the objectives of the ministry.

(b) the coordination between several ministries and departments, so vital for development, is difficult in public services. This is so because ministries are organised on the logic of vertical command and have poor machinery to coordinate responsibility among them. The result of poor coordination is that decisions have to be taken at a high level of administration and the responsibility of ministries is often found to be overlapping, and field level operations get delayed.

(c) the preparation for civil service careers is less effective than it was several years ago. The civil service in the past was able to provide useful on-the-job experience to its personnel. They were posted in different positions to acquire experience and gain maturity in handling administrative matters. My first assignment as an Assistant Secretary was under a distinguished public servant, Chief J.O.I. Longe. He was then appointed in 1957 as a Senior Assistant Secretary (Supernumerary). Supernumerary was a term used for selected Nigerian high-flyers appointed to a position of higher administrative experience instead of an acting appointment. It also meant to us at that time that if a vigorous Nigerianisation policy had not been adopted, he and his colleagues would not have been appointed Senior Assistant Secretaries. The crux of the matter is that he was (officially) about 42; about 13 years or more older than I was. Discounting his years of experience in the junior service, he had spent over two years acting on scale A post after graduation, three years on probation after promotion, and over ten years meritorious service as a confirmed senior official before his promotion to the supernumerary post. There were only three Assistant Secretaries reporting directly to him. The type of experience and training on the job; the intensiveness and quality of direction, and guidance; the degree of alertness, respect for authority and discipline that pervaded the Division; the stigma of inefficiency and corruption; and the consequences of being rendered unemployed, all put together, were formidable factors in inducing a results-oriented public service.

Today, the civil service is unable to plan career progression as carefully as it was done before, though importance of doing so must be recognised. On-the-job training can be supplemented by formal programmes and the combination of the two can give the necessary help that civil service personnel may need.

2. Personnel administration is too poorly organised to plan for the growth and development of individuals. Their career progression rarely prepares them for the jobs they are to perform. Lack of identification of talent in public service and of giving them relevant experience prepares the personnel insufficiently for the vast challenge that they must face in their young careers. Neither on-the-job training, nor formal training is integrated well with career planning of officers in public services.

3. The infra-structure to carry out the managerial responsibility well is inadequate. The most important areas of deficiency are three:

- (a) data collection machinery,
- (b) data processing and analysis, and
- (c) use of data in planning and in decision making.

On the massive scale on which public service has to act, the use of data becomes a most essential tool in order to avoid waste and because no developing nation can afford hit-or-miss action today.

There are really no ideal public services anywhere. I do not know of any country where the citizens do not complain about bureaucracy and mismanagement in the public service institutions. I do not imply that we should take consolation in the fact that we are not alone. On the contrary, I wish to emphasize that the need for efficient management and delivery of public goods and services to the citizens is worldwide. The bureaucracy of the government must be responsible and responsive. In Nigeria, it must be positively responsive to the unprecedented challenge of an almost boundless opportunity for rapid economic and social development.

The findings of a recent national survey carried out by the Centre for Management Development indicated that management performance in the public sector enterprises was appreciably lower than in the private sector enterprises in Nigeria. Public sector enterprises received a performance rating of 23 per cent below that of the private sector in financial management and control. In other specific management functions, like personnel, marketing, production, materials management, organisation and supervision, public sector enterprises received performance ratings of 13-20 per cent below those of the private sector enterprises. The findings of this study gave support to some of the recommendations of Udoji Commission, and have demonstrated the need for performance improvement in the management of public service organisations.

I must confess that it is not easy to set a basis for comparison between public service and the private sector; between present and past performance in public service; or between performance in the public service of one country and another. The Civil Service in

India was noted for its efficiency in maintaining law and order; and yet it was abhorred after independence for fostering an elitist group and considered inadequate for a development-oriented society. Mr. Allison Ayida, the Secretary to the Federal Military Government, in his paper entitled "The Government and Management Education and Training in Nigeria" did not mince words in proclaiming that "there is clearly a crisis situation in the area of management in the economy." According to him, the crisis is attributable to three main causes:

Firstly, there is the explosion of economic activity which has given rise to excessive expansion of existing institutions and creation of new ones both in government and in the private sector. This has tended to spread very thinly the existing management material in circumstances in which the stock cannot be readily supplemented.

Secondly, partly as a result of the above, there is the element of creeping ineffectiveness of management exemplified by the growing level of indiscipline, high-handedness and "authoritarian" tendencies both in the public and private sectors. This situation gets worse as one surveys down the hierarchy from top management levels.

Thirdly, there is the related fact that it is now becoming increasingly difficult both in the private and the public sectors to release staff, particularly good staff, for any extended period of training. The reason for this is understandable, in that the burden of day-to-day management has become so great that institutions can no longer spare existing manpower for purposes of training."

There is no immediate panacea to this crisis, short of reducing development projects and government expenditure and thereby slowing down the rate of progress. Cogent arguments can be advanced for and against this proposition but this is not, I presume the occasion or the forum for delving into a subject of this nature. Instead, I shall discuss what steps may be necessary to enhance the effectiveness of public services.

II. SOME DIRECTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Critics of the public service often blame poor performance on the fact that these services are not run in a businesslike manner. Public service personnel are often stereotyped as incompetent, obstructionist, power-wielding bureaucrats. The term "bureaucracy" which is a normal stage in the development of every organisation - public or private - has come to have a bad connotation all over the world in specific relations to public services machinery and personnel. I am at this point reminded of the commendable effort of the Bendel State Public Service to remove the stigma attached to the term "bureaucracy" by publishing a Journal entitled "THE BUREAUCRAT". Secondly, armchair critics feel that the public

services do not have the "good" men who are to be found abundantly in the private sector and thirdly, that the public services have intangible objectives and results.

Peter Drucker in an outstanding article entitled "Managing the Public Service Institution" dismisses these criticisms as *clibis*. For public service enterprises that are not in business, how can they be businesslike and not public service-like and yet be efficient. The characteristic features of a business is focus on share of market, return on capital, etc. The craving to be businesslike has led to the creation of several autonomous corporations free from the so-called petty bureaucratic civil service regulations. Their creation has led to the fall of several institutions from the frying pan into fire. Assume that they become efficient and free from corruption, they tend to overlook the policy and political considerations for their existence, and sometimes ignore or relegate to the background their social responsibilities. I can state categorically that in Nigeria, we have better qualified personnel in the public service than in the private sector. Let's look at it from a more generous angle; there is no reason to believe that the people who staff the managerial and professional positions in our public services are any less qualified, or less competent, or less honest, or less hardworking than the people who manage businesses in the private sector. There is no reason to believe, either, that business managers, put in control of public service organisations, would do better than the so-called bureaucrats. I suspect that such managers would sooner than later become bureaucrats themselves.

The solutions to the problems that hinder effective public service do not, then, lie in merely having better or more qualified men. The solutions have to be found in the improvement of the system, the overhauling of the machinery that is no longer suited for the new tasks of governing. Only then does it follow that qualified men can perform effective tasks. A continuous vigilance for improvement in the personnel practices in civil service and for the training of its personnel is needed. But even these changes can be effective only when some of the important aspects of the work system are changed. Some of these changes are identified in this paper.

Misdirection by Budgets

One basic difference between a public service institution and a private sector organisation is what Peter Drucker describes as "Misdirection by Budget." Businesses are paid, hopefully, for satisfying the needs of its customers. Satisfaction of customer needs becomes the basis for performance evaluation. Such clear-cut measures are not applicable to the public services because the nature of work does not lend itself to simple measurement. Public Service Institutions, unlike businesses, are paid out of a budget allocation or revenue that has little bearing to what they are doing. Certain

public institutions receive subsidy, donations, grants, unnecessary protection and sometimes monopolistic powers. Now, let us examine carefully together how this situation works in practice to make our public institutions less effective or ineffective.

First, the budget allocation system changes the meaning of performance or results. To parastatals, public institutions and departments, results mean in effect a larger budget and performance is measured by their ability to maintain or increase their budget. In Peter Drucker's words, "the budget is, by definition, related not to the achievement of any goals, but to the intention of achieving those goals." Reward is in accordance with what a public institution "deserves" and not what it "earns".

Second, the larger the budget and staff of a public institution or department, the more important is it considered as an arm of government. Therefore, any effort to achieve greater results with a smaller budget or a smaller staff is not recognised as an improvement in performance. Hence, you find officials making frantic efforts to spend the last kobo in the vote especially towards the end of the financial year. A balance in the vote is an indication to the Budget Masters that the vote can safely be cut down the following year.

Third, and this is more pertinent to poor performance in the public service institutions, failure to achieve a given target means invariably the need to redouble the inputs and efforts towards its attainment. In businesses, as much as in public institutions, there is the tendency to build empires and stick to old activities with this difference: in business, once an activity becomes unproductive it is quickly put aside and effort is made to concentrate on activities that are more profitable; whereas, in the public institution, lack of profitability is sought to be corrected by increasing the budget.

In the public services, budget must, more than ever, become an instrument of action and management control, and not an accounting activity that has little relation to performance. Change in the system of budgeting should achieve the following:

- (i) the financial allocations must relate to performance and a system of performance budgeting would have to be developed. There are isolated experiences in Nigeria, as in the Ministry of Agriculture, Oyo State, in which performance budgeting has been instituted with many beneficial results.
- (ii) budget should be used for the development of a management control system of such a kind that early corrective steps can be taken when managerial intervention can correct shortfalls in performance.
- (iii) the concerned ministry has to be responsible for both planning and results and the civil service must be held responsible for shortfalls. Dividing responsibility and finance respectively between the subject ministry and the finance ministry is a practice that has been antithetical to developing a system of management by results.

Leadership

The problem of leadership in our circumstance is a difficult one. In meeting it, three important peculiarities of leadership in public service need to be borne in mind:

First, the rewards for effective leadership and management in public service are invariably inadequate not only in Nigeria but in most other countries of the world as well. Perhaps the role that civil service plays in regulating, coordinating and what may seem to be symbols of power and authority in national affairs make them unpopular for many, a subject of resentment by the public. At the same time, the central role that public service play in national affairs and in national reconstruction gives them a role of honour and being a partner in the task of reviving a nation must be a source of satisfaction to many.

Second, a public service institution or enterprise goes through several stages of development; from its creation, early survival and striving towards its objectives, to growth and expansion. Each stage demands a different set of knowledge, skills and leadership. A leader/manager or administrator may be good at one stage of development and not at another. Some may be good at adapting to several stages of the developmental process. This notion suggests that if leaders or managers do not fulfil their role, they must be replaced or the organisation's capacity for achieving results will suffer.

Third, we still need to evolve in our public service, a rational policy on the professional administrator. There is as much shortage of competent professionals as there is of competent administrators. A good professional need not be a good administrator.

Against the strenuous requirements of the task, leadership in public service has to fulfil several demands. Of these, the most significant are the following:

- (i) The public services essentially require leaders of integrity, of high ethical standards with vision for the future, empathy for the public whom he must serve, and the recognition of his role of service to the people. The selection system has to emphasise the importance of character as much as the intellectual attainments of the public servant.
- (ii) Flexibility in civil service personnel to adjust to the requirements of the changing situations in a developing country is essential for a leader to be able to perform the varied tasks that he is called upon to perform. To be able to recognise and appreciate that development tasks and conventional activities require two different ways of dealing with situations, and with the public, is difficult; but it is an ability that is necessary to handle these tasks well.

- (iii) The ability to motivate the subordinate as well as members of the public is as necessary for leadership among civil service personnel as any. We cannot ignore the behavioural science approach in understanding the present attitude to work in the public services. This is important. By any standard, the average Nigerian is invariably regarded as adventurous, enterprising, hardworking and ambitious. Observers have often remarked with amazement and admiration the adventurous and enterprising spirit of several prosperous Nigerian businessmen, the eminence of administrators and managers and intellectuals at national and international levels. Performance and efficiency are determined not only by the level of skill and knowledge but also by the structure and functioning of the organisation and the external factors both of which can motivate workers and influence their attitude to work. Above all, there is nothing that motivates the worker and influences his attitude more than the quality and nature of the leadership.

Nigerians are easily motivated towards performance and efficiency by expectations of obvious and immediate personal rewards. But this enthusiasm tends to diminish when collective and impersonal action is required. The readiness to make some sacrifice for a national cause and the motivation for achievement without much material reward are traits not too evident in Nigeria even though they are essential traits for developing the right attitude to work especially in the public service. Why are material rewards the only motivation for work? This is a field which gives considerable scope for research and on which very little interest has yet been shown; moreover, most of the factors affecting attitudes also relate to issues like cultural traits, corruption, nepotism, leadership problem and so on, all of which are difficult to identify or evaluate.

- (iv) Appropriate use of personnel is necessary for rapid national development. At times the talents of a person, and his contribution in his field of specialisation are lost if he is given assignments not suited to him. A glaring example of this phenomenon is reported in the Daily Times of December 18, 1976:*

"Those of us who have been opporteduned to work with this legend of a surgeon cannot but feel sad at the departure of Dr. Adebola Bailey from Igbabi Orthopaedic Hospital He would pick up the smallest bones and nail them together like a carpenter. He would pick up the nerve endings and repair the complex circuit of tendos like a qualified electrician

* Daily times Issue of December 18, 1976: Letter to the Editor by Dr. R.B. Ransome-Kuti and Dr. O Ogunkoya.

There is yet an orthopaedic surgeon in Africa (black or white) who can match his ability and experience. One fault we all know about him is that he is too nice, too pleasant to be a strict administrator. One would be asking too much from his creator if one should expect the pleasantness that made him such a kind and competent doctor to help make him a strict administrator."

We should be able to compensate the professional in such a way that he does not look up to any administrative post as a promotion. His rewards should be given for professional competence and must carry the kind of satisfaction that comes with administrative promotion.

Measurement of Performance and Evaluation

The public service in Nigeria needs to define measurements of performance and establish an organised audit of objectives that no longer serve a useful purpose and are unsatisfactory and unproductive activities. It is in this way that self-control is built into the system. Let us face it, how many Nigerian Heads of Parastatals, Departments, etc. have ever thought of taking the initiative to review and evaluate critically their objectives, targets and performance especially on completion of a major project? It is in this area more than any other that Nigerians as individuals falter. We shy away, consciously or unconsciously from uncovering our own weaknesses, from admitting them, and imbibing lessons for future action. Instead, we tend to react violently to criticisms no matter how genuine. The paradox of it all is that faults detected in-house and dealt with accordingly in the nick of time forestall future Commissions of Inquiry; the genuine, but bitterly opposed criticisms of yesterday are usually the open scandals of tomorrow's enquiries. Governments come and go, Heads of Organisations come and go, public servants, no matter how permanent, come and go. To use the biblical saying, there will one day be "a new king who knew not Joseph" and the prevailing practice of godfathers and ethnicity in the public service in place of actual performance can act as a boomerang.

Developing an effective system of management control requires that measures of performance are specific and measurable in quantitative terms. In our experience of consulting with public enterprises we have found that with patience and perseverance it is possible to define objectives and identify measures of performance which are the first steps to developing a management control system. However, difficult, a result-oriented public service would hardly function without developing an effective control system.

Infrastructure for Public Service

I am going to skip several obvious but important infrastructural problems like communications, the educational system, etc. that a result-oriented public service must tackle. I will however raise

the important issue of developing a system of decision making and formulating public policy based on data rather than intuition and hunch. For this purpose, three different kinds of things would have to be done:

- (a) creating a machinery for collecting relevant data,
- (b) developing the ability among the civil service to interpret data, and
- (c) using data in decision making and in day-to-day work of administration.

Current and sufficiently detailed information about the Nigerian environment is difficult to come by, especially in regard to the labour market, distributive trades, industry, commerce or agricultural production. Even where information exist, very few organisations have the proper resources for utilising them. Only scanty socio-economic data are available in the country for planning at the national and state level.

Research and Development in Public Service

Today, development in all countries is based on the findings of science and technology. Public service has two simultaneous tasks: the task of developing innovative organisations to promote science and technology, and the task of adjusting itself to new knowledge in the social and mathematical sciences with the aim of applying the knowledge. To remain dynamic, public service would have to develop self-consciousness about its own activities, undertake introspection and initiate self directed change. Failure on the part of the civil service to do so makes it ineffective and affects the entire range of national development as a whole. As far back as 1959, a Research and Development body was established under Mr. McGrath in the old Western Region Public Service. It was the "Think Tank" of the service in those days. I wonder if such a high-powered department exists in the State Public Service. If not, I strongly recommend its creation. Innovation like training are continuous processes within a development and result-oriented public service. For innovation and training to be continuously useful, they have to be backed by new ideas, research and the lessons learnt from experience and evaluation exercises within and outside the public service.

III. TRAINING AND CONSULTANCY

I would consider my lecture incomplete without adding a few words on the relevance of training and consultancy in attaining a result-oriented public service. Or, should I say with all modesty, the role of the Centre for Management Development in helping to attain a result-oriented public service. Within the last three years, there has been a rapid growth in training consciousness in Nigeria. In response, the number of management training programmes, many of them of questionable standards, have more than tripled within the last two years. I hope that it will not be a shock to the audience if

I state that most of the classroom, off-the-job training has limited impact on the actual performance of an organisation or individuals unless it forms a part of an overall plan of improvement by the concerned organisation. There is no substitute for a carefully planned and executed on-the-job training. Experience is an important teacher and with practice comes skill. Here again, the quality of management as well as the leader, the manager, the boss or superior is of vital importance. A dynamic development programme should therefore pay as much attention to developing the system as the individual.

Consultancy as a means of enhancing performance within an organisation is hardly recognised in many public services of Nigeria. It has three significant advantages: first, it exposes the public service to fresh ideas and innovation from outside; second, a non-member of an organisation is more likely to identify problem areas than a person who has been part of the organisation; third, the entire transfer of knowledge, new ideas, and technology emanating from consultancy are carried out on the job. The Centre for Management Development has taken the initiative by providing consultancy services in the form of Programming for Improved Performance (P.I.P.) in public enterprises, and institutions. These exercises have been useful and the Centre is now enlarging its resources to carry out this work.

May I say in conclusion that for national reconstruction, we need a vision of the future as importantly as the will to cooperate among the doers and helpers. It is only through that kind of joint endeavour that we would come nearer to the goals that all of us cherish for Nigeria.