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## Introduction

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**Funmi Adewumi & William Idowu**

‘A civilisation that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilisation,

A civilisation that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilisation,

A civilisation that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilisation’ (Aime Cesaire, in: ‘Discourse on Colonialism’)

The above quotation aptly describes the attitude of the Nigerian state to the resolution of its crises of development since independence from Britain in 1960. All the attempts so far made in this direction would appear to have failed to address the fundamentals of the crises, which lie in the nature of the neo-colonial dependent satellite economy. This explains why the problems keep recurring. The problem of the public service, the focus of this volume, is not an exception in the failure of policy measures designed to address problems that they were meant to solve in the first place.

The emergence of government as the custodian of public interests imposes certain obligations on it. These include the provision of basic services and infrastructure needed to sustain and improve the quality of life of the people. Most people cannot afford these services were they left for private individuals to provide. In addition, the manner of the emergence of modern societies has not made the private sector sufficiently well developed and positioned to lead in the provision of such services, partly because of the huge financial resources required. This is partly the reason why governments are involved in the running of enterprises, and Nigeria is not an exception.

The participation of the state in enterprises in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era. The task of providing infrastructure such as railways, roads, bridges, water, electricity and port facilities fell on the colonial government due to the absence of indigenous companies with the required capital as well as the inability or unwillingness of foreign trading companies to embark on these capital-intensive projects. It also should be added that at that point in time the colonial government was almost solely involved in running the affairs of colonial Nigeria. This involvement was expanded and consolidated by the colonial welfare development plan (1946-56) that was formulated when the Labour Party came to power in the United Kingdom.

The need to fill the void created by the virtual non-existence of a private sector and perhaps, the more compelling need to let the citizenry enjoy the benefits of independent nationhood equally dictated the involvement of government in these areas in the immediate post-independence period. At independence in 1960, the government ventured into a wide range of business activities, ranging from municipal services through air transportation, banking and financial services to telecommunications. This was in line with the practice that obtained in a large number of countries which adopted the model of development termed a mixed economy, i.e., a combination of public and private ownership of the means of production (in actual fact a variant of capitalism). The involvement of government was sustained by successive administrations and by 1999, it was estimated that about ₦800 billion had been so invested in running the various services and enterprises.

The machinery of government is usually coordinated by a corps of officials with the necessary education, training and skills needed to ensure delivery of services to the people. They are to be found in ministries, departments and agencies that constitute the public service. Given that government constitutes the executive committee of the state, it means that those who control the apparatus of government would expect public or civil servants to help in implementing their agenda; that is, translating political manifestoes and electoral promises into action. Essentially, it is through the public service that the direction and agenda of development are determined, even if government's direct involvement in specific economic development activities is minimal. According to Adegoye (DG, BPSR) (2005), 'Public Service refers to an agglomeration of all organisations that exist as part of government machinery for the delivery of services... The Public Service is the administrative machinery for implementing policies and programmes and for ensuring continuity of administration'. In a similar vein, Awosika (2006) argues that 'the civil/

public service is the major instrument used by government to manage development'. The men and women employed in the service are expected to help in translating government policies and programmes into action. The public service can then be regarded as the engine room of the development process or the fulcrum on which the wheel of development revolves. The service is thus 'the policy adviser, programme formulator, executor and agent of political communication' (Awosika 2006:395).

As such, the vibrancy, efficiency and effectiveness (or lack of these) of the public/civil service have implications for national development. No matter the extent of government's direct involvement in economic activities or ventures, governments all over the world regulate the activities of all those involved in different spheres of national life. Deriving from the foregoing, it is probably not totally misplaced to blame problems of the economy on those who control or operate the apparatus of government, both the political office holders who decide on policy direction or programmes to implement and the career public servants who assist the politicians in policy implementation. Quite often, politicians lacking in character and integrity are always eager to blame their non-performance on the civil servants who they have virtually supplanted by the use of consultants and whose professional advice they routinely disregard. There is also the additional problem of each regime trying to employ their cronies into positions within the service, irrespective of their qualifications.

Since the end of the Cold War and the ascendancy of capitalism as the dominant ideology in a new world order championed by the United States of America, conscious efforts have been ongoing to impose the current version of capitalism, neo-liberalism, on the rest of the world. The push for less involvement of the state in running enterprises as well as the cut in public expenditure are components of this paradigm shift, that are well articulated in the economic reform package of the Obasanjo government labelled National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategies (NEEDS), put together at the behest of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as a follow-up to the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) presented to the Fund by Nigeria like some other debtor countries in order to obtain some relief. All the sundry excuses given by the Nigerian government as justifications for the PSR are meant to create the false impression that the reform was its own initiative. The major aim of the reform was cost-cutting, hence the obsession with down-sizing the public service workforce and selling off of public enterprises allegedly because they have not justified investments in them over time. The fact that two out of the four key 'legs' of NEEDS address 'macroeconomic stability as

well as accelerated privatisation and liberalisation of the economy' and 'public service reform, including reform of public expenditure, budgeting, accounting, etc' (Adegoroye 2005) underscore the obsession with cost reduction.

It is against this background that the chapters in this book examine the public sector reform agenda of the Obasanjo government, bringing to the fore many issues, some fundamental, which those driving the reform have conveniently ignored or downplayed. Critical questions such as the rationale for the reforms, the efficacy of the policy options, among other things, are posed. The first two chapters, by Monye-Emina and Omar respectively, raise questions about the theoretical assumptions underpinning the entire reforms in the public sector. Of course, this runs through all the contributions. It is in a similar vein that all the contributions correctly locate the PSR within the broader context of the regime's economic reform package.

While Monye-Emina examines 'The Theoretical Basis of Public Sector Reform in Nigeria' Omar writes on 'Rethinking Public Sector Reforms in Nigeria'. Monye-Emina's contribution attempts a general critique of the outline and theoretical basis of the public sector reform programme in Nigeria, calling to question its theoretical basis as well as its design and implementation. He examines the framework of the reform, which is the New Public Management model which is rooted in the public choice theory. Of course, one fact that the advocates of the model refuse to appreciate is that it cannot be applied wholesale without coming to terms with the reality that the private and public sectors do not operate on the same basis or philosophy. As such, the same criteria cannot be used in assessing their performance. The reform exercise, though not peculiar to Nigeria, has seen increased divestment of government from the production and provision of hitherto public goods with collective ownership, which he believes may have adverse implications for the attainment of economic growth as well as national goals and aspirations.

In chapter 3, Omar further interrogates the reforms in the public sector, arguing forcefully that since the essence of government is to cater for the common good of the citizenry, policy instruments and policy outcomes of government should be tailored towards this end. Providing for the common good, he contends, includes providing the citizenry with gainful employment, adequate food, water, housing, health, education, roads, energy and security of lives and property. In other words, the *raison d'être* for the management of an economy and other government institutions is the material wellbeing of the people. This position is in tandem with the idea of the French political philosopher Jean Rousseau by governance as

a social contract between the government and the governed. He then argues correctly that any government policy in public sector management, which falls short of this, is thus deemed to have failed, and thus calls into question, the legitimacy of the government.

After an analysis of certain aspects of Nigeria's public sector reform as enumerated in the 'National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy' (NEEDS), Omar concludes that instead of empowering the people, the reform has rather succeeded in disempowering them, making life difficult for a majority of Nigerians. Rather than generating wealth, reducing poverty and creating employment, it is only a few people, members and allies of the political elite that have been enriched. In Omar's words, 'The reform has succeeded in creating wealth for the super rich, selling off government utilities to this class at concessionary rates, often using state institutions to give them credit lines'. This is the paradox of neo-liberalism, which makes the majority of the people 'victims of development'. According to Seabrook (1993:7), 'all over the world, more and more people are being disadvantaged by a version of development which, even as it creates wealth, leaves them with a sense of loss and impoverishment'. The chapter then insists that there is an imperative to search for alternative strategies, whose overriding focus should be in tandem with what positively affects the lives of the people. In other words, there is an urgent need for a rethink of public sector reform in Nigeria, which should focus on tackling microeconomic issues such as health, employment, education, and security.

The way successive Nigerian governments have approached the resolution of the crises of economic development suggests that the state has no obligation or responsibility to the people. The 'roll back the state' philosophy driving the entire reform agenda since the adjustment years of the mid 1980s has led to divestment of government interests in public enterprises, privatisation of basic social services and drastic reduction in the size of the public service. These have ended up denying the majority of the people benefits accruable from the commonwealth of the country held in trust on behalf of the people by the government. The approach of government raises the question as to whether they regard the Nigerian people as citizens who have rights or as slaves who should be at the mercy of their taskmasters in government. Unfortunately, this is an issue many commentators on the so-called reforms have refused to address, particularly in respect of the privatisation of public enterprises. Everything is viewed from the prism of the dubious neo-liberal economic perspective. This is the refreshing insight brought into this volume by Idowu's

contribution in chapter 4 entitled 'Privatisation and Public Sector Reforms in Nigeria: Implication for Social Democratic Conception of Citizenship', where he highlights the dominant strategies for infrastructure investment and general economic growth and development. These include state ownership of the means of production as found in the socialist model and private ownership of the means of production, promoted by the capitalist model. His central argument is that the privatisation and commercialisation of government owned enterprises, a major plank of economic reform projects across Africa, is theoretically rooted in the paradigm shift that emphasises the private ownership of the means of production. In other words, the recession of the state from the control of public enterprises, thereby enthroning private ownership of the means of production, is considered the only viable approach to the efficient production of goods and services, as well as economic growth and development.

The chapter then examines the implications of this paradigm shift for the social democratic conception of citizenship in Nigeria. He submits that privatising erstwhile government enterprises, a move that prices the services hitherto rendered by government agencies out of the reach of the people, is a direct assault on citizens' rights as defined in the social democratic conception of citizenship. This is in addition to the fact that privatisation would likely make it impossible for most Nigerians to participate fully in its public life. In other words, according to Idowu, 'privatisation is likely to exclude members of the Nigerian society through the way the economy operates, leading to deprivation'. This is a major challenge for Nigerians and socially conscious scholars to take up, since the apostles of privatisation are conscious of what they are doing.

Within the Nigerian context, there is often a yawning gap between government's intention as enunciated in various policies and plans of action and the actual implementation, even when the plans are well conceived. It may as well be that there was no real intention by government to do what it claims. These are partly evident in the implementation of the public sector reforms in Nigeria and are addressed in Maikudi's contribution in chapter 5. Written against the background of government's consistent failure to 'achieve stated goals and objectives' this chapter addresses the negative consequences of the public service reforms. The contribution, entitled 'Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria (1999-2007): Dimensions and Consequences', looks at the dimensions of the reforms and government's justification for undertaking them. The gap between plan and outcome should not come as a surprise to keen followers of the development policy formulation process, particular since the seizure of

the apparatus of government by agents of international finance capital during the SAP years. Contrary to the position of successive governments, these policies were foisted on them and it is usually their burden to justify them before to the people. Hence, they have to give some plausible excuses to sell the policies to the public. Of course, the announced intentions are not the real intentions and this explains what appears as gap.

The gap between pronouncements and reality is aptly demonstrated in the provisions of the Pension Act of 2004. The pension reform is one of the major issues addressed by the Obasanjo government. The selling point of the new Act was that it would solve the problem of pensioners who do not get their benefits as, and when due. However, a scrutiny of the Act reveals that the real beneficiaries are the insurance companies and not the Nigerian workers. Again, this forms the main thrust of yet another contribution – Aborisade's, in chapter 6, with the title 'An Assessment of Nigeria's Pension Reform Act 2004'. In it, he examines the newest legislation on pension in Nigeria, identifies the weaknesses of the Act and suggests necessary improvements that should be made to the legislation. According to Aborisade, given the experience with the previous pension system in Nigeria, an irresistible conclusion that emerges from the analysis of the Pension Reform Act is that it is rooted in a neoliberal paradigm shift. Contending that the level of economic development should place limits on labour market flexibility in developing countries, the paper makes a case for a comprehensive review of the Act to make Nigerian workers its real beneficiaries.

The issue of who really benefits from the PSR or the interests of those best served by the reforms is also at the heart of Adewumi's contribution in chapter 7. Entitled, 'Victims as Sacrificial Lambs: A Critique of Public Service Reforms in Nigeria', the chapter looks at one of the components of the public service reforms which addresses what is called 'down-sizing'. He contests the argument that the public service is over bloated and inefficient, arguing that a public sector workforce of less than 2 per cent of the entire populace cannot be correctly said to be too large. As such, to have pre-maturely discharged tens of thousands of workers in the public sector amounts to passing the burden of the reforms on the lower cadres of the service who are victims, in the first place, of an unjust system. This is similar to the manner in which the masses of Nigerians have been made to bear the brunt of the wider economic reform programmes, which is the context of the public service reform itself.

The chapter also examines other components of the public service reforms such as privatisation and commercialisation of public enterprises, and the pension reform. The conclusion is that the size of the public

service workforce (which is only about 10 per cent of total employment in Nigeria) is not a problem in itself. Rather, the fundamental problem of the Nigerian economy lies in its neo-colonial character as well as in the parasitic elite, both political and bureaucratic, that manages the system.

What comes through all the contributions is that the public sector reforms in Nigeria are seriously flawed both in conception and implementation. Rather than addressing the fundamental problems of the Service, it would appear the reforms amounted to punitive measures designed to deny the majority of Nigerians the dividends, not just of democracy but also, of citizenship. Apart from loss of employment (which affects dependents of public servants), the privatisation of public enterprises and withdrawal of government from providing social services, have further imposed hardship on the people. Even the global reform agenda of the government have had the same adverse consequences on the people. The fact that previous attempts at reforms have not really achieved anything or that problems remain in spite of previous attempts really call to question whether the problems of the public service, or the Nigerian economy and polity as a whole, have been properly diagnosed. Adewumi made this point in this volume when he argues that if all the 'ills' identified against the service are true, 'it either means that the real problems of the public service have not been identified or that the wrong solutions have been applied. The contention here is that it is a combination of both. As is becoming customary of managers of the Nigerian state, the real issues are neglected while precious and allegedly scarce resources are wasted in chasing shadows'. The truth is that most of the issues and problems identified as plaguing the service can be addressed as a matter of routine only if the political will is there. There is no human system that does not need periodic review to ensure that it keeps abreast of changing developments, both within and outside. After all, it is often said that change is the most constant phenomenon in human lives

In a more fundamental sense, the contributions have also challenged the development paradigm adopted as the framework for solving the problems of the Nigerian economy and society. The capitalist model, including its prevailing variant of neo-liberalism, has never been helpful to the cause of the masses of the people, not only in Nigeria but also in the developing world as a whole. This is the import of Lempet et al's (1995:xi) argument. In their words:

The typical development plan is written by bankers and economists or by Western-educated technicians from developed countries and most privileged sectors of developing countries; these are specialists whose particular skills have been perfected but whose overall view



of development has often been limited. Often, the plans they preset are a series of measures that reduce a developing country to the level of a business enterprise rather than recognising it as an amalgam of peoples, interests, and traditions. The standard development plan, as prepared by the World Bank or a bilateral agency like the U.S. Agency for International Development or funded by government of an industrialised nation or the host government, begins with a particular worldview that drives its conclusions and, in many cases, the mistakes that have been made in the name of development.

The above is an apt summary of the development planning experience in Nigeria. Herein lies the challenge and the need to confront the crises of development in Nigeria. It demands the insistence on an approach that puts people at the centre of the development process. It means that development policy formulation, planning and implementation must involve all the people and we believe that there are existing structures at all levels of the Nigerian society that can be used for this purpose. These include CBOs, CBAs, artisanal groups and professional bodies as well as sundry interests groups. In addition, sectoral reforms should involve all stakeholders in the specific sectors and they should be encouraged to initiate reforms when necessary. The finer details of this new approach to development should challenge the readers of this volume and all those genuinely concerned about the Nigerian situation. A situation whereby reforms are imposed from outside is unwholesome and counterproductive. This is the bane of the Obasanjo reforms.

