

The Impacts of National Rebirth Programme on the Moral Character of Nigerian Civil Service Employees (1999 – 2011): Akwa Ibom State Perspective

¹Victor E. Ita, ²Lawrence I. Edet, ³Manasseh E. Bassey

Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Uyo, Nigeria

Abstract: Prior to the commencement of Obasanjo's administration in 1999 and the introduction of the National Rebirth Programme, Nigerian civil/public service was plagued by moral decadence, inefficiency and poor attitude to work. Moreover, vices such as corruption, indiscipline, and other related parochial considerations became prevalent in place of meritocracy, diligence and accountability. This study examined the National Rebirth Programme with a view to determining the effects it has had on the attitude and behaviour patterns of Nigerians with emphasis on Akwa Ibom State civil servants. The article utilized a combination of data from the primary and secondary sources, which were analyzed within the context of structural functional theory. The analysis revealed that the National Rebirth Programme have had a positive impact on the moral character, ethical behaviour and general attitude of Akwa Ibom State civil servants as it has engendered a reduction in the level of corruption, discipline and increased work commitment in the civil service. However, a greater proportion of civil servants are still influenced by certain negative forces within the larger society. Consequently, the article recommended among others, that government should make civic education compulsory to all civil servants in order to help in inculcating the right values and ideals in the citizenry, while earnest effort should be made to address the poor conditions of service thus reducing the negative tendencies towards inefficiency, ineffectiveness and moral decadence.

Keywords: Accountability, civil service, efficiency, ethics, national rebirth, service delivery.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no denying the fact that Nigeria is widely perceived and classified among the Third World Countries where various things function rather irregularly. One of the reasons for this circumstance is often traced to what is usually referred to as "corruption" and "indiscipline". There is a widespread belief that corruption and indiscipline are the bane of Nigeria's development and economic growth. Corruption is an act contrary to expectation whereas indiscipline may be seen as unacceptable pattern of behaviour or attitude. It is extremely difficult to imagine, let alone determine the extent to which these social maladies and problems have impacted negatively on the Nigerian society. Since the end of the Civil War (1967-1970), Nigeria has no doubt experienced sharp decline in public sector morality. Clearly, there have been widespread cases of corruption and moral decadence in every sector of the economy. The civil service that is supposed to be the engine room of the system has not been spared. Also, ethnicity, sentiments, nepotism, tribalism, favouritism and other related parochial considerations were underscored and enthroned in the place of meritocracy and diligence. These and myriad of other factors have worked hand-in-hand to ensure underdevelopment, corruption and poverty in the body polity.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

In Nigeria, the general perception is that a significant proportion of the population no longer pays attention to such fundamental human values such as, honesty, hard work and commitment to official duty. Indeed, the Nigerian Public Service has been seriously affected by the problem of indiscipline and corruption. In this paper, the concepts of “corruption” and “indiscipline” are used interchangeably which express themselves in a variety of ways namely bribery, kick-backs, racketeering, black-marketing and the tendency to exert some price for any service rendered. The comment of Aguda (1974:7) on Nigeria is quite instructive in this regard. In the words of the commentator:

Everyone has to pay cash to get anything done, whether it is going through customs, at the airports, getting a room in Lagos ..., hotels, or having an official paper stamped in government.

Similarly, in an assessment of the issue of moral decay in Nigeria, Achebe (1983) the iconic and popular novelist wrote that “public servants ‘helps’ themselves freely to the nation’s wealth”. From the foregoing, it could be seen that the problem of moral decadence is indeed Nigeria’s number one public enemy. It is pertinent to note that over the years, several well-meaning Nigerians have drawn public attention to the consequences of poor attitude to work, the quest for material gains and the tendency “to grab” everything at one’s disposal. Consequently, Nigeria since independence has found itself in a state of economic, social and political quagmire, predicament and dilemma. National development is hardly carried out with momentum and commitment. Projects that would have transformed the economy are abandoned and a high level of poverty is the outcome.

It is against this background that the various governments in Nigeria have initiated and formulated various policies and programmes such as MAMSER, War Against Indiscipline (WAI), National Orientation Agency (NOA), and the National Rebirth Programme to help in restoring the Nigerian public sector. The last one, which is the focus of this paper, was initiated by Olusegun Obasanjo with a view to restoring sound moral character in the Nigerian public sector. Therefore, this article sets out as an attempt to investigate and assess critically the impact of the National Rebirth Programme on Nigerians in general and the civil servants in particular with the scope restricted to Akwa Ibom State between 1999 and 2011. The paper is predicated on two basic assumptions:

- (i) There is a significant relationship between the National Rebirth Programme and the moral character of Akwa Ibom State civil service employees.
- (ii) There is a significant correlation between the National Rebirth Programme and efficiency in service delivery in the Akwa Ibom State civil service.

Statement of the Problem:

Observably, the persistence of moral vices in the country has led to the introduction of certain reform measures to re-orient the minds of Nigerian citizens by successive political regimes. As a matter of fact, there was hardly any regime that did not carry out major reforms and re-organization of the civil service or bureaucracy. Yet, the civil service remained largely corrupt and grossly inefficient and ineffective. It appeared that as bureaucratic re-organization took place during each regime, these triple characteristics continued to grow in leaps and bounds. Thus, it became clear that Nigeria actually needed some form of ethical revolution, or at least a new political culture to put the country on the part of growth and progress. Hence the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo decided to turn around the civil service by creating new values and work ethics, in order to improve effectiveness, efficiency and accountability in service delivery and thus minimize corruption by blocking the sources through which such practices occur.

Consequently, in 1999 that administration embarked on what became known as “The National Rebirth Programme”. This programme was essentially a package with emphasis on due process, civil obligations, public accountability and war against indiscipline and corruption. This therefore raises the concern and pertinent question: Has the National Rebirth Programme actually impacted on the moral character of civil service employees in Nigeria generally and particularly in Akwa Ibom State?

Flowing from this problem, the following questions become expedient:

- (i) Has the National Rebirth Programme engendered efficiency in the national and Akwa Ibom State civil service?
- (ii) Has there been improvement in the attitude and behaviour of the civil servants towards increased work commitment?

(iii) In what ways can the National Rebirth Programme be made more relevant?

Objectives of the Study:

The broad objective of this paper was to evaluate the impact of the National Rebirth Programme on the moral character of civil service employees in Nigeria generally and specifically in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives were:

- (i) To find out whether the programme has engendered efficiency in the state civil service.
- (ii) To ascertain if the programme has brought about any improvement in the attitude and behaviour of the civil servants towards increased work commitment.
- (iii) To recommend ways of making the National Rebirth Programme more responsive, effective and relevant.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is guided and analyzed within the framework of structural functional theory. Propounded by Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell (1966), the structural functional theory underscores the role of structures and functions in understanding politics and political processes and the conditions under which the structures can perform the functions. Concisely, the theory holds that in any political system there are basic political functions to be performed and there are structures to perform these functions (Johari, 2011).

According to Eminue (2005) structure refers to any human organization that can do things and have an effect on human beings and other human organizations. A structure is a pattern of interrelated roles. On the other hand Levy (1952) defined functions as condition or state of affairs resulting from the operation of a structure through time. The tenets and basic assumptions of the theory are that:

- (i) certain functional requirements of the organism (structure, institution, civil service) are established, requirements (functions), which must be satisfied if the organization is to survive or to operate with some degree of effectiveness
- (ii) There is a concrete and detailed description of the arrangement (structure and processes) through which these functions (requirements) are typically met in moral case
- (iii) If some of the typical mechanisms (structures or institutions) for meeting these functions are destroyed or are found to be functioning inadequately, there is the need for detecting compensating mechanism, which fulfill the necessary functions
- (iv) Implicit in all that precedes, there is a detailed account of the structure for which the functional requirements hold, as well as a detailed account of the arrangements through which the functions is fulfilled (Bill and Hardgrave, 1973).

In analyzing the subject matter of this paper within the context of the theory, the civil service is like an organism or institution with explicit functions. As an important institution of government, it was set up to, among other things, aid in the implementation and execution of government policies and programmes. The National Rebirth Programme suggests that the mechanism or instrument for the implementation and enforcement of government programmes is defective, deformed and in a state of disorientation and non-functionality. Thus, the third tenet and assumption of structural-functional approach recommends that if the mechanisms or structures for meeting some requirements (functions) are destroyed or are found to be functioning inadequately, there is the need for detecting compensating mechanisms which fulfill the necessary functions. In other words, the structures (in this context the civil service) require rebirth, reform, restructuring or re-orientation. Rebirth means to change and improve something by correcting faults, beliefs, remove inconsistencies and abuses. The National Rebirth Programme is indicative that all is not well with the organization. Hence, the intended rebirth was among other things, aimed at making the structure (civil service) more functional, efficient and responsive to the contemporary challenges and problems facing Akwa Ibom State and by extension Nigeria at large.

This implies that for the survival of the whole, every structure has its own function to carry out. The implication is that it is possible to specify a pattern of behaviour that satisfies a functional requirement of a system. It also means that it is possible to identify the “functional equivalents” in several different structural units the most important issue underpinning

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

the structural-functional requisites. According to Parsons (1970), functions include pattern maintenance, goal attainment, adaptation and integration. In addition, Gabriel Almond identified four functional requisites to be political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication. Against this background, suffice it to say that the bureaucracy is an important structure in the Nigerian system with specific functions assigned to it.

Obviously, bureaucracy otherwise referred to as civil service is that professional arm of government that acts as pivot and pillar in the process of governance. Its particular function is that of implementing decisions reached by political executives. Hence there is no gainsaying that through its function, the civil service helps in the processes of national integration, stability (pattern maintenance), socialization, interest articulation etc. One is therefore bound to reason that if such a prime institution were to breakdown, the society, would witness a great setback. Adebayo (2001) asserted that most of the military administrations that came to power between the period of Generals Aguyi Ironsi and Olusegun Obasanjo (1966-1979) depended heavily on the professional advice of the civil servants because they (the military administrators) were neophytes in the art and science of governance. This reveals how important the civil service is in the process of national development. Against this backdrop, it is certain that the functional approach has helped us to identify the civil service as the 'prime mover' of public or government policies and programmes in Nigeria.

A Historical Overview of the Nigerian Civil Service:

The Nigerian Civil Service dates back to 1862 when British colonial rule was established over the territory of Lagos. Thus, the Nigerian Civil Service has its antecedent in the British Colonial administration of the country from which it also derived its culture and practices. According to Coleman (1958), Nigeria was divided into three administrative units, the colony of Lagos and the protectorates of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. It was later in 1914 that Nigeria was amalgamated as a single administrative unit, to carry out British imperial policies especially those on the collection of revenue and maintenance of law and order. This early administrative system was manned by provincial and district commissioners and the police and treasury officials. The head of the public service was the Governor General who was accountable to the colonial Secretary, and the Secretary himself was accountable to the British Cabinet and the Parliament. The Structural functions of the colonial System and departmental administration covered the technical and professional functions of the colonial regime.

Anazodo (2008) noted that the colonial regime was autocratic in nature and had limited scope of colonial policies. The field administrators were assigned the responsibility of the constraints and contingencies of the wider environment. The pillars of the colonial administration were the field officers, the Lieutenant Governors, the Resident and District Officers. A single Civil Service was not immediately set up for the whole country but continued to be governed as they were before 1914. Sir Fredrick Lugard (Later Lord) resisted every attempt made at centralization and assimilation of the service. The only unifying factor was the fact that all the officers were colonial civil servants. Thus Nigeria began with a divided administration; its public service was built on foundations and structures inherited from the colonial period. The British imposed an alien Civil Service on Nigeria, without giving much thought to its effects on the Nigerian traditional communities with their conflicting values, interests, norms authority and structures.

The establishment of British administration in Nigeria was preceded and largely influenced by activities of traders and missionaries. The overriding interest appeared to have been to establish political control and protect British interest without getting involved in the affairs of the local people. Akinsanya (1988) observed that for most of the colonial periods, Nigerians were excluded virtually from senior positions in the Nigerian Civil Service, thus the call for the "Nigerianization" policy. During the Second World War era, about 14 British administrators served in the Secretariat, 70 Nigerians were support staff and there was one European Stenographer. In 1939, Southern Nigeria was split into two regions-Eastern and Western, with the River Niger as a natural dividing line. Richards Constitution formalized the division of the country into three regions in 1947. In 1951, Ministers were appointed in the regions and at the centre under Macpherson constitution and from that time the position of the Civil Service altered within the machinery of government. This alternation started with the clamour for Nigerianization of the service. Again the question of independence of the civil service became a very serious issue between politicians in the service and the authorities of the central government (Crowder, 1978).

The civil service that the colonial masters bequeathed to us was not comprehensive and it was only geared towards realizing her imperial Majesty's objective in the country. The service was essentially a peace-keeping institution pre-

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

occupied with maintenance of law and order, and the replacement of the pre-capitalist mode of production and social formation with capitalist mode and way of life. It is imperative to note here, that when the new imperialist movement in Britain reached its peak, the service began to gain more status and responsibilities. Its scope of activities extended to the collection of custom duties and taxes. Other forms of economic activities such as establishment of basic infrastructures like roads, railway lines, water ways, and communication network among others were inclusive (Ikeji, 1988). Thus the Civil Service Nigeria inherited from her colonial masters was narrow and mainly aimed at exploitation and greedy extraction of our natural resources to their home country while neglecting our developmental aspect and the social cultural circumstances of Nigerians, which would have helped in solving our developmental needs.

The Emergence of Akwa Ibom State Civil Service:

The Akwa Ibom State civil service came into existence as a result of the creation of the state with its capital in Uyo from the erstwhile Cross River State on September 23, 1987 by the then Military President and Head of State, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. The creation of the state was later given legal backing with the promulgation of Degree No. 24 of 1987. The state occupies the South-East corner of Nigeria's territorial expanse. It lays between latitudes $4^{\circ}31'$ and $5^{\circ}33'$ North and longitudes $7^{\circ}35'$ and $8^{\circ}25'$ East. The state is bounded on the East by Cross River State, on the North by Abia State and on the South by Atlantic Ocean (Akpan, 1994; Akpan, 2004). The state occupies a total landmass of 7,245.935 square kilometers with a population of about four million.

The Akwa Ibom State civil service is part of the executive branch of government. Its functions are classified into groups and assigned to ministries and extra-ministerial departments. Currently operating in Idongesit Nkanga Secretariat within the state capital, the civil service personnel strength stands at 16,643 and spread across the nineteen (19) ministries and extra-ministerial departments and Parastatals which include Ministries of Agriculture, Economic Development and Project Planning, Finance, Health, Information and Social Re-orientation, Commerce and Industry, Youth and Sports, Justice, Rural Development, Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs, Lands and Housing, Science and Technology, Transport, Women Affairs, Education and Special Duties. Extra-ministerial Departments include Departments of Budget, Special Services, Political and Legislative Affairs and Department of Establishment (AKSG, 2013).

Behavioural Pattern and Attitude to Work of the Nigerian Civil Servants:

Attitude has been defined as an individual characteristic way of responding to an object or situation. It is based on experience and often leads to certain behavior or expression of certain opinion. Attitude determines the employees approach to work. In the absence of attitudinal measurement of work behavior of Nigerian civil servants by psychologists, a cursory observation of daily experiences and behaviours can reveal some basic negative attitudes, which are not helpful to increased productivity. In this context Omolaye (1998) asserted that one of the biggest factors retarding progress in productivity in this country is attitude to work and general indiscipline in relation to work. On the other hand, there may be experiences and behaviour that are supportive of negative attitude to work. The work attitude affects the way a worker relates to, conceived and views his/her job. It shows how committed, dedicated, hardworking and performing a worker is in relation to the objectives and goals of the organization.

As a result of these beliefs and many other variables, the work attitude of the Nigerian civil servants has lately been characterized by inefficiency, poor achievement of results, shoddy handling of activities and programmes, poor rendering of services, abuse of office, lack of initiative, lack of maintenance culture, conflicts, delays, corruption, high cost of projects and services, unsatisfaction, irregularities, poor quality of work output, poor commitment, low morale and low productivity. Others include callousness, insensitivity, non-responsiveness, poor commitments to duties, poor devotion, truancy, lateness to duty, idleness, laxity, indiscipline, sleeping on duty, rudeness to superiors, insubordination, drunkenness, use of foul language, gross negligence, disobedience, dishonesty, lying, false claims and many others. Bad and unethical behaviours and misconduct now pervade the work force in the public sector and some private organizations. We must however add that some public servants are hardworking, well-dedicated and conscientious in their services to their country. These are the people that keep the machinery of the state going (Umezioke, 2006).

Closely related to work attitude is work ethics. Ethics are code of conducts by which human beings have their lives regulated for the general good of all. Ethics enable us to fudge the correctness and wrongness of an action. This is the basis of work ethics. Work ethics are the set of rules that govern the behavior of workers in their places of work. There are

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

different codes of conduct governing the different professions. However, codes such as punctuality, honesty, dedication, confidentiality and loyalty are common and highly cherished in all organizations, the civil service inclusive. The degree of adherence to these codes of conduct in Nigerian public service leaves much to be desired.

Work attitude is learned and acquired from the environment and personal experiences. Thus, how an individual conceives his job may be a product of his general perception, conception and beliefs about the particular job, the experiences of the society or the individual experiences as he makes his life's journey. For example, the status of a job in terms of the social and economic status associated with the job can generate or deplete positive work attitude. Moreover, many Nigerians in the public service precede government job as the Whiteman's job or job that belongs to no one, in particular. This conception makes the worker an alien and stranger in the workplace, with the government as the distant element. It is common to hear people say "government work is not my father's work, therefore it should not be carried on the shoulder and head". This means that, there should be less commitment and dedication to government work and that if the job suffers, nobody is hurt.

Another determinant of work attitude is the general conception of work in a society. A society might place value on hard work, honesty at the work place and individual contributions to the achievement of the organizational objectives. In such societies, hard work increases recognition, respect, status and popular acceptance. In Nigeria, social values have been changed from hard work to accumulation of money and material property and so those who have money tend to have more status and recognition in Nigerian society. As a foreign journalist once said, Nigeria is an insane nation, ill because of an overdose of materialism (Ibezute, 2003).

There are other social and cultural factors that affect the work attitude and productivity in Nigeria. The extended family system and the communistic nature of Nigerians breed favouritism, nepotism, ethnicity, tribalism and other social vices. The excessive respect for age causes distortion of authority relations between young bosses and older subordinates. The heavy burden of extended family responsibilities tends to encourage financial impropriety among public officers (Davis, 1981).

The condition of job is another factor that increases or depletes positive attitudes. For example, the low purchasing power and deplorable working conditions of service places the Nigerian civil servant in a disadvantaged position relative to his counterpart in the private sector and multinational corporations. For instance, a manager in a Shell Development Company earns more than a Permanent Secretary in government public service. This has generated frustration, disillusionment, financial impropriety and poor work attitude in the Nigerian public service. The high level of corruption, absenteeism and indiscipline may be attributed to economic pressure on the poorly paid workforce in government. The economic depression since the 1980s has aggravated this situation. It is worthy of note that the degree of financial corruption in Nigeria is not restricted to civil servants only. Recent evidence from the failed Banks has shown that Nigerians who are well paid are found to have embezzled millions of naira. Therefore, it may be reasonable to say that majority of Nigerians have propensity for materialism (Okoh, 2003).

In Nigeria, the problem of political instability and weak leadership has led to the depletion of the spirit of loyalty, patriotism and nationalism in the Nigerian public service. In its place, a high-level of selfishness, ethnic, tribal, religious and sectional loyalties have blossomed with dire consequences for negative work ethics. This degeneration of patriotism and national interest is manifested in the high level of corruption, fraud, poverty, indiscipline and looting of government property. Poor working environment is another variable, which affects performance. Where basic facilities are available and the work environment is conducive, the workers' morale and productivity may be positively affected. But unfortunately, in Nigeria, many public establishments lack basic facilities, either they are not available at all or are inadequate. For example, there are inadequate medical facilities for doctors. University lecturers do not have functional laboratories to use in teaching and carrying out research and stationery is no more available in some state ministries and parastatals across the country. A worker without enthusiasm for work, finding himself without facilities, feels frustrated, demoralized and can leave the office at any time because he has no material to work with (Jekelle, 2002).

There is also the problem of poor motivation, particularly in terms of reward for hard work. People who are known to be lazy but have connections are being promoted to the detriment of hardworking ones. Unable to trust themselves under the system of promotion by merit, these employees invoke the myth of ethnic hurdles and manipulate tribal sentiments in order to be promoted. In the process, subjectivism replaces objectivism in the performance of duties and in the appraisal system.

The National Rebirth Programme: Background and Implementation:

The National Rebirth Programme initiated by President Obasanjo administration came into existence against the background of socio-political and economic decay in Nigeria. It was obvious to the well informed and educationally initiated citizens that Nigeria was going down the drain because of pervasive corruption that had taken over all the sub-sectors of the Nigerian society. However, the idea of ethical revolution in Nigeria is not completely new. Since the end of the Civil War in 1970 Nigerian political leaders, political analysts and well-informed Nigerians have been aware and very sensitive to the problem of indiscipline. They have spoken in strong terms against it and have initiated and pursued one programme of national orientation after the other namely: the Ethical Revolution (1980) WAI Campaign (1984), MAMSER (1987), WAIC Programme (1994) and the lately, National Rebirth. There is no doubt that each of these programmes has made some significant contributions to the evolution of the Nigerian Nation.

Obviously, various political analysts have written during the past couple of years on the need to put Nigeria on the path of growth. For instance, in a discourse on political decay in the Nigerian society, Adegbite (1977) noted that the moral standard of the average Nigerian is very low indeed, our society is corrupt to the core and that is an open secret even to the outside world. This is the present state of our public morality. A few years later, Achebe (1983) concluded that corruption, negative mentality and materialism were the main problems affecting the Nigerian society. This was the situation President Obasanjo faced when he assumed office in 1999. To this end, he initiated the National Rebirth Programme with the primary objective of re-orientating the behaviour and attitude of Nigerians for a new and positive beginning.

At the launching of the Programme, the President noted that hitherto Nigeria had witnessed what he termed the country's darkest hours during the almost sixteen years of military rule which saw the breakdown of moral conscience which was also characterized by pervasive and reckless corruption which destabilized and weakened our public institutions, thereby lowering our nation to the status of one of the most corrupt countries in the world (Obasanjo, 1999). Other factors also highlighted by the President included: the capricious use of power by those in authority, leading to the widespread abuse of human and people's rights. A high level of criminality in the society, manifested in the engagement of citizens in drug trafficking, advanced fee frauds, armed robbery, cultism and prostitutions in foreign lands.

Indiscipline and a lack of patriotism which went hand in hand with the existence of deplorable work ethics in both the public and private sectors of the country have had a bad image for the country. The result was that Nigerians traveling into foreign countries were presumed to be criminals until they could prove otherwise. The above explanation by the President captured the pervasive and stagnated condition in which Nigeria as a nation found herself. It was therefore doubtful if any nation could make headway in such a socio-political and economic quagmire.

A more balanced assessment was given by the then Director-General of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) Professor Elo Amucheazi (1999) when he noted at the National launching of the National Rebirth Programme that a state that can meet its obligation easily is a balanced state. A balanced State according to him is one in which the State discharges its obligations to people and the people in turn respond positively to the demands of the State.

Amucheazi (1999:15) further noted that:

A stable State is that in which a balance is achieved between the performance of the State in its respect of human rights and distribution of tangible resources on the one hand and the discharge by the people of their own responsibilities to the State and fellow citizens on other hand.

The above observation brings to the fore the fact that moral decay in Nigeria did not come about because the people just decided to be immoral but because the ground was cleared and cultivated by leaders who made corruption a way of life and thereby forgetting their objectives towards the masses in their quest for self-aggrandizement.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

This particular line of argument re-echoed the words of Aluko (1970:11) who remarked that:

If the society is corrupt, tribalistic, nepotic, extravagant and ridden with violence, it is because its aristocrats and middle class are corrupt, sectionalistic, violent and rough. The day leadership destroys the cankerworm within itself, the rank and file of the society will be frightened to indulge in questionable and sharp practices. Therefore if we want to reform society, we must first reform the caliber of the aristocrat.

Leadership is not provided for in a vacuum rather it is established to direct and show the way forward as regards the overall goals of the society. It is obvious that the foundation of corruption in the public sector of Nigeria was because of a patrimonial and prebendal system of leadership and governance, which was instituted by the Babangida, Abacha and Abubakar administrations. These endemic systems were only interested in oiling the wheel of their network of clients.

Given this background, a nonchalant attitude to work in the bureaucracy was adopted by Nigerian workers at every level because the leadership did not show a good example in public lifestyle. The holistic nature of the National Rebirth Programme could therefore be appreciated. It aimed at changing the orientation of every person ruled in the country. Against this background, the National Rebirth Programme was therefore instituted to forestall the further decay in the annals of the country, thereby making the need for a new orientation and mental attitude of every Nigerians, especially the public bureaucrats, imminent. There is a clear picture in most of the citations made from scholars and social commentators that the public sector was adversely affected in the pervasive ethical decay witnessed in the country prior to the coming to power of the Obasanjo's administration.

This particular step was to be replicated in every state/local government of the federation to educate members of the public on the programme. In response to this directive, the Akwa Ibom State Government under the leadership of Obong Victor Attah established the Ethical and Attitudinal Re-orientation Commission (EARCOM) in April, 2000. According to the Governor, the primary aim of the body was to restore ethical and moral values, eradicate or reduce corruption to the barest minimum, build good leadership, engender the people towards self-esteem, self-reliance, courage and initiative.

In one of its mobilization efforts at a seminar organized for civil servants in Akwa Ibom State, the then EARCOM boss, Hon. Esemey Eyibo (2000) observed that the Civil/Public Service has an important stake in the management of the State. He therefore urged civil servants to shed the garment of corruption and other vices that characterized the locust years of the past military administrations. Eyibo (2000:3) passionately asserted that:

The Public Service is the central machinery of government established to support supreme political authority. It is therefore imperative that you (civil servants) should be carried along to support the determination of his Excellency to make the State a land of fulfillment.

Outside the various workshops, conferences and seminars, EARCOM has been airing different forms of jingles in English, Ibibio, Annang and Oron languages urging civil servants to develop positive working ethics in the State Public Service, and this has yielded commendable result.

The National Rebirth Programme and the Nigerian Civil Service: Impact, Constraints and Prospects:

A cursory examination of the Nigerian society before the launching of the National Rebirth Programme reveals that the Nigerian society was bedeviled by corruption and immoral vices that debased humanity and retarded progress and growth. However, at the launching of the programme President Obasanjo appealed to Nigerians to support the effort of his administration as it strived to fight corruption and re-orientate the mindset of Nigerians (especially public servants) towards a better Nigeria. As it is today, the process of National Rebirth is slow but steadily progressive. The Obasanjo's administration has established various anti-corruption agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Crimes Commission (ICPC) and also revived the Code of Conduct Bureau to expand the frontiers of anti-corruption and other vices that had become the permanent features of the Nigerian Public Service.

To keep up with the philosophy behind their establishment, the EFCC, ICPC, and the Code of Conduct Bureau have from time to time prosecuted and are still prosecuting culprits as they work towards clearing the Nigerian society of bad eggs, although critics are of the view that the prosecution undertaken by these agencies especially the vibrant EFCC is politically selective in nature and to some extent this argument seems to have some element of truth. In addition, the civil

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social SciencesVol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

servant is not left out, the then Obasanjo's administration tried as much as possible to boost the morale of the civil servants as a build up to national development. President Obasanjo while inaugurating the programme of National Rebirth had posited that the civil service has an important role to play in the process of National development. He therefore appealed to them to change their mindset positively towards their work. He also promised better pay package via the monetization of fringe benefits and other such related incentives. This move was to be replicated in the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT).

The Victor Attah led administration in Akwa Ibom State had followed suit by launching the National Rebirth Programme in Akwa Ibom State. Particularly, he appealed to the public servants to see their function as a call to duty and as patriotic sons and daughters of the State, to support the state administration. The actions at the Federal and State level are not in any way isolated when it comes to public service and its function as national development. The public service is an important institution that plays a primary role in national development. Therefore, there is the need to carry the institution along by any administration.

It has been argued over the years by scholars that a leadership that has its workers at heart by providing conducive working environment, competitive pay package, and promotion of meritocracy over sentiment is likely to have a workforce that could be easily mobilize without much stress (Naidu, 2009). Prior to now, the nation was in shambles, morality was too low while in public service corruption was the order of the day in every sector. The reason was not farfetched. There was no regard for work ethics among leaders; the issue of corruption was alarming thereby encouraging civil servants to join the bandwagon. Fortunately, with the dawn of democracy and adequate attention paid to the importance of the civil service the situation is changing for the best. The National Rebirth Programme is a viable and promising step that would help bring Nigerians back to a sense of patriotism and nationalism.

A patriotic citizen no doubt is a great asset to any nation. Unfortunately, as it looks, the programme is facing severe challenges given the bristling corruption we are witnessing in the Nigerian society in general and Akwa Ibom State in particular. Public office holders in Akwa Ibom State (especially the politicians) still see public office as a gold mine for the embezzlement of public funds. The primary objective of the National Rebirth Programme is particularly that of the mindset. It seeks to ensure that the office one is fortunate to occupy should not be treated as a patronage estate where one siphons public money to create a network of few loyal clients and consequently divert money that would have been used for public good to the benefit of the few.

Joseph (1987) had empirically proven that the fall of the Second Republic was attributed to the patrimonial and prebendal politics operated by Nigerian politicians then. This was the same political strategy used by the different military regimes to maintain their hold on power. This style is still in play today and such "dirty" political display would not help in success of the rebirth programme. In the same vein, the civil service has its own problem. Although a good number of civil servants have appreciated the good gestures and incentives given by the government to motivate them and consequently change their mindset and re-orientate them positively towards their job some civil servants are still operating with the old mindset of lethargy and lackadaisical attitude to work. It is on ground that some civil servants report for work late and close before time, while others still engage in nefarious activities such as bribery and commercialization of the place of work through trade on various wares during official hours without paying due attention to their work. There is no gainsaying that such attitude is against the philosophy and objective behind the establishment of the Rebirth programme.

Despite these challenges and constraints, it must be admitted that the Obasanjo administration since its came on board in May 29, 1999 did make an effort to change and turn around the trend for good. The launching of the National Rebirth Programme was to redirect and reoriented workers in the public sector from negative work attitude to positive end.

The Civil Service after the National Rebirth Programme: Akwa Ibom State Perspective:

In the preceding sections, various issues that bothered on the focus and preoccupation of the paper were raised ranging from conception, implementation, impacts, constraints and prospects. Hereunder attempt is made to find out whether there is a causal relationship between the various variables in our earlier stated assumptions, specifically to ascertain whether the National Rebirth Programme has had any impact on the moral character of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State, and also if the Programme has engendered efficiency in service delivery. Attempt has been made to find out whether there is a

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

causal relationship between the various variables in our earlier stated assumptions. Consequently, 10 out of the 19 ministries and parastatals were randomly selected for study. The sample size comprised of 400 respondents selected on equal proportion of 40 respondents from each of the selected ministries. The questionnaire was structured in a simple and standard form for easy understanding of the respondents with a view to eliciting meaningful responses. The Likert scale format and arrangement was adopted and the responses streamlined in the order of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). A total of four hundred questionnaires (400) were distributed, out of which three hundred and eighty-four (384) were suitable for use in the analysis and validation of the assumptions of this paper.

Thus, the summary of the responses of the 384 respondent were tabulated and presented below:

Table 1: Gender distribution of respondents

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	201	52.3
Female	183	47.7
Total	384	100

Table 1 above shows that 201 representing 52.3% out of the 384 respondents were males while 183 (47.7%) were females.

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents

Age Range	No. of Respondents	Percentage
20 – 29	25	6.5
30 – 39	122	31.8
40 – 49	168	43.8
50 – 59	65	16.9
60 – above	4	1.0
Total	384	100

Table 2 above indicates that out of the 384 respondents, 25 (6.5%) were between the ages 20 and 29, 122 (31.8%) ranged between 30 and 39 years, 168 (43.8%) were between the ages of 40 and 49, 65 (16.9%) were within the ages of 50 and 59 while 4 (1.0%) were 60 years and above.

Table 3: Marital status of respondents

Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Single	115	29.9
Married	246	64.1
Widowed	9	2.3
Divorced/separated	14	3.7
Total	384	100

Table 3 above shows that 115 (29.9%) were single while a significant number of 246 (64.1%) were married. Also, 9 (2.3%) of the respondents were widowed while 14 (3.7%) were either divorced or separated.

Table 4: Educational status of respondents

Qualification	No. of Respondents	Percentage
FSLC	31	8.1
SSCE/Equivalent	92	24.0
Diploma/OND	88	22.9
B. Sc./HND	126	32.8
M. Sc. and above	47	12.2
Total	384	100

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

Table 4 above indicates the educational levels and qualifications of the respondents. The analysis shows that 31 (8.1%) had First School Leaving Certificate, 92 (24.0%) had Senior School Certificate or its equivalent, 88 (22.9%) were holders of Diploma or OND, 126 (32.8%) obtained B. Sc. or HND while 47 (12.2%) had been educated up to M. Sc. level or higher.

Table 5: Duration of respondents in the civil service

Duration	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1 – 5 years	32	8.3
6 – 10 years	83	21.6
11 – 15 years	86	22.4
16 – 20 years	128	33.3
21 – 25 years	29	7.6
26 – 30 years	16	4.2
31 years and above	10	2.6
Total	384	100

The breakdown of Table 5 above shows that 32 (8.3%) of the 384 respondents had spent 1 – 5 years in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, 83 (21.6%) had spent between 6 – 10 years, 86 (22.4%) had been in the service between 11 and 15 years, while a considerable number of 128 (33.3%) had spent 16 to 20 years. Furthermore, 29 (7.6%) had put in 21 – 25 years, 16 (4.2%) had been in the service for years ranging from 26 to 30 while 10 (2.6%) had served for 31 years and above.

In an attempt to validate the assumptions and answer the research questions, respondents' opinions to four (4) relevant statements in the questionnaire were analyzed. However, the undecided responses were discarded in our analysis since they conveyed neither positive nor negative idea. The result revealed thus:

Statement 1: The National Rebirth Programme has impacted positively on the moral character of employees in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

Table 6: Responses to statement 1

SA	A	D	SD	Total
150	95	70	55	370

The above observation shows that a combined total of 245 or 66.2% of the respondents agreed that the National Rebirth Programme has impacted positively on the morality of employees in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service, whereas 125 (33.8%) disagreed.

Statement 2: The National Rebirth Programme has brought about efficiency in service delivery in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

Table 7: Responses to statement 2

SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL
150	140	34	30	354

The rate of responses above shows that a combined total 290 (81.9%) of the respondents asserted positively to the statement that the National Rebirth Programme has engendered efficiency in service delivery in Akwa Ibom State civil service while 63 (18.1%) asserted to it negatively.

Statement 3: The National Rebirth Programme has brought about an improvement in the attitude towards increased work commitment in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

Table 8: Responses to statement 3

SA	A	D	SD	Total
125	137	56	34	352

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

In response to statement 2, a total of 262 (74.4%) respondents positively agreed while 90 (25.6%) negatively disagreed to the statement.

Statement 4: The National Rebirth Programme has enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

Table 9: Responses to statement 4

SA	A	D	SD	Total
154	70	50	60	334

Analysis of responses to statement 4 indicates that a significant number of 224 (67.07%) agreed to the question while 110 (32.9%) disagreed.

From the analysis of both the qualitative (secondary) and quantitative (primary) data, some observations were made with regards to the National Rebirth Programme and the moral character of the civil servants and efficiency in service delivery in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service. Judging from the respondents' views and opinions, it has been ascertained that the National Rebirth Programme has had positive and significant impact on the moral character of Akwa Ibom State Civil Service employees by changing their perception and behavioural patterns towards their work as well as reducing the rate of corruption and negligence on the part of workers. More to that, the Programme has engendered efficiency in service delivery in the state civil service by re-directing the poor attitude of workers to a more result oriented and efficient service delivery, hence, a change in the attitudinal and behavioural outlook of workers in the Akwa Ibom State Civil Service.

From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the evolution and development of poor attitude to work as witnessed in public service was as a result of moral decadence. Therefore, the National Rebirth Programme has help restored morality and inculcated a positive and patriotic spirit on most Nigerians generally and a majority of the civil servants specifically. This is a welcome development in Akwa Ibom State civil service.

3. CONCLUSION

On the strength of the analysis presented in the preceding sections of paper, it is concluded that the National Rebirth Programme was a laudable initiative as it has impacted positively on the moral and ethical character of Akwa Ibom State civil service and by extension Nigerians as a whole, to the extent that the problem of poor and negative attitude to work has been reduced to the barest minimum. The generalization is that prior to the launching of the National Rebirth Programme, there was a widespread poor, bad and negative attitude to work by the Nigerian workers (civil servants) even as they resorted to bribery and corruption in the cause of their official assignment.

The positive impacts of the National Rebirth Programme on the moral attitude and behaviour of public/civil servants in Akwa Ibom State and Nigerians generally is a clear indication that Nigeria is fighting hard to come out of the socio-political and economic dungeon she was pushed into by the various military administrations witnessed hitherto the dawn of the Fourth Republic. Also, in view of the positive impact it has had on ethical character and service delivery in the Akwa Ibom State civil service, the programme should be made to penetrate the nooks and crannies of the Nigerian society so as to ensure a total rehabilitation of the mindset of Nigerians as we march towards the manifestation of human capital development and empowerment.

On the whole, the conclusion is that the National Rebirth Programme has succeeded in effecting some changes in the Public Service in Akwa Ibom State with regards to moral character and service delivery.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Consequent upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered towards the sustenance of the rebirth programme at the national and state levels:

- (i) Government should make civic education compulsory to all public servants in order to help in inculcating the right values and ideals in the citizenry.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

- (ii) The managers of the National Rebirth Programme particularly the National Orientation Agency and Ethical and Attitudinal Re-orientation Commission (EARCOM), the state government and media outfits should package orientation programmes that would help in promoting a progressive civic culture in the country.
- (iii) Public enlightenment, and awareness programme should be embarked on in order to draw the attention of workers to this initiative and the aims and objectives made as code of conduct for public officers.
- (iv) The problem associated with poor conditions of service should be addressed in order to prevent the prevalence of bribery and corruption.
- (v) Embezzlement, fraud, bribery and corruption should be made life imprisonment offences in the country.
- (vi) Religious organizations should strive to inculcate and strengthen moral values on their members as a way of life rather than emphasizing on prosperity and materialism.
- (vii) Accountability should be the watch word for all public office holders.
- (viii) Efficiency and effectiveness as management and administrative principles should be applied in resource allocation and utilization in Akwa Ibom State Civil Service in order to achieve maximum result.
- (ix) Efforts which the federal government is currently making to fight corruption are commendable and should be sustained. All public officials who at one time or the other siphoned (or are siphoning) out or embezzled (or are embezzling) public funds should be brought to book without fear or favour. Furthermore, tough actions in form of severe penalty such as long jail term without an option of fine should be put in place to deter future offenders. In addition, since money has been rated as the most potent extrinsic factor of motivation, it is hereby recommended that a living wage capable of sustaining employees should be put in place as monthly pay. This will enable staff to meet their unforeseen financial demands.
- (x) The situation in the civil service as it affects the enforcement of discipline needs a radical change. The power to discipline junior civil servants should be given to the line managers (Head of service, Heads of department and others of appropriate status) in the ministries that supervise subordinate employees. If this is not done, the junior officers can flout the authority of their superior officers since they know that the ultimate power to discipline lies elsewhere other than with their superiors.

REFERENCES

- [1] Achebe, C. (1983). *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- [2] Adebayo, A. (2001). *Principles and Practice of Public Administration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- [3] Adegbite, S. (1977). *Corruption and Underdevelopment in Nigeria*. Ibadan: McMillan Publishers.
- [4] Aguda, T. A. (1994). *Indiscipline, Corruption: Which Way Out?* Lagos: Daily Times Publications.
- [5] Akinsanya, A. (1988). The Development of the Nigerian Civil Service. *A Paper Presented at the University of Ilorin's Faculty of Social Sciences Seminar Series, 12 August*.
- [6] Akpan, N. U. (1994). *The Journey to Statehood in Akwa Ibom State – The Land of Promise: A Compendium*. Lagos: Gabumu Publishing Company Limited.
- [7] Akpan, O. (2004). *First Among Equals: A Chronicle of Pioneering Efforts of Akwa Ibom in National Development*. Calabar: Saesprint Publishers.
- [8] Akwa Ibom State Government (2013). *Akwa Ibom State Civil Service Handbook 2013*. Uyo. Government House Press.
- [9] Almond, G. and Powell, B. (1966). *Comparative Politics: A Developmental Approach*. Boston: Little Brown and Company.
- [10] Aluko, G. (1970). *Africa Contemporary Record*. Lagos: Daily Times Publishers.

International Journal of Novel Research in Humanity and Social Sciences

 Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp: (6-19), Month: March – April 2017, Available at: www.noveltyjournals.com

- [11] Amucheazi, E. (1995). National Orientation and National Development in Nigeria. In: Ogunna, E. (Ed.), *National Orientation and National Development*. Owerri: Ark Publishers.
- [12] Amucheazi, E. (1999). *An Address of Welcome by Prof. Elo Amucheazi, Director-General, National Orientation Agency (NOA) on the Occasion of the Launching of the Campaign for National Rebirth held at Eagle Square, Abuja, 10 September*.
- [13] Anazodo, R. O. (2008). The Nigerian Civil Service. In: Obi, E. A., Obikeze, O. S., Nwachukwu, L. C. and Abada, I. (Eds.), *Readings on Comparative Public Administration: Theory and Select Country Studies*. Onitsha: Bookpoint Educational Limited.
- [14] Bill, J. A. and Hardgrave, R. L. (1973). *Comparative Politics: The Quest for Theory*. Ohio: Columbus Press.
- [15] Coleman, J. S. (1958). *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- [16] Crowder, M. (1978). *The Story of Nigeria*. London: Faber and Faber.
- [17] Davis, T. (1981). *Organizational Theory*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- [18] Eminue, O. (2005). *Introduction to Political Science*. Calabar: Clear Lines Publications.
- [19] Eyibo, E. (2000). Embracing Positive Work Ethics: The Role of the Public Service. *A Paper Presented at a Seminar on Positive Work Ethics for Civil Servants in Akwa Ibom State held at Civil Service Auditorium, State Secretariat, Uyo, 13-14 April*.
- [20] Ibuzute, C. C. (2003). *Nigeria: Leadership, Political Development and Democracy*. Owerri: Cel-Bez and Company Publishers.
- [21] Ikeji, C. C. (1998). Bureaucracy and Development in the Third World. In: Okereke, O. O. (Ed.), *Development Administration in Nigeria: Issues and Strategies*. Owerri: Concave Publishers.
- [22] Jekelle, M. (2002). Employment and Public Service Productivity in Nigeria. *Proceedings of First National Conference on Employment and Public Service Productivity in Nigeria held in Owerri, 1 – 3 December*.
- [23] Johari, J. C. (2011). *Comparative Politics*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Limited.
- [24] Joseph, R. (1987). *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- [25] Levy, M. (1952). *The Structure of Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [26] Naidu, S. P. (2009). *Public Administration: Concepts and Theories*. New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.
- [27] Obasanjo, O. (1999). *Text of Address by His Excellency President Olusegun Obasanjo on the Occasion of the Formal Launching of the Campaign for National Rebirth held at Eagle Square, Abuja, 10 September*.
- [28] Okoh, A. O. (2003). *Personnel and Human Resource Management in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Ammfitop Books.
- [29] Omolaye, M. (1998). Managing to Achieve High Productivity in Industry and Government. In: *Management in Nigeria*. Lagos: IPM Publication.
- [30] Parsons, T. (1970). *Structure and Process in Modern Societies*. New York: The Free Press.
- [31] Umezio, K. (2006). *Civil Service, Attitudinal Change and National Development*. Ikeja: Uri Publishers.