

# **NIGERIAN INSTITUTE OF ADVANCED LEGAL STUDIES LAGOS**

## **ROUNDTABLE ON DEVELOPING APPROPRIATE WORK ETHICS FOR THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SERVANT**

**29<sup>th</sup> September, 2011**

### **COMMUNIQUE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian Civil Service is the machinery through which the government of Nigeria, at all levels, implements its policies, designed to meet political aims and provide social services. The performance of the Nigerian Civil Service is critical to the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria given the dominance of Government in Nigeria. Civil Servants regardless of seniority, translate visions, policies, etc established by the political leadership into concrete actions that impact on all of us.

The Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as amended, though not justifiable, were intended to play significant role in the ethical direction of the Nigerian State. Specifically, section 23 provides: “The national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self-reliance and Patriotism”. This is complemented and reinforced by other provisions of the Constitution as well as other national institutions whose mandates have profound implications for the national ethical drive. In order to instil discipline and integrity as fundamental ethics for public service the Constitution has also provided in the Fifth Schedule, the Code of Conduct for Public Officers. The Code of Conduct Tribunal is set up to adjudicate on matters bordering on the breach of the Code of Conduct for Public Officers. Both the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC) are also

Strangely, it was the military that institutionalized the national ethical drive with the establishment of Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). Before then, War against Indiscipline (WAI) with its WAI Brigade, which was short lived. Since May 29, 1999 after decades of military rule the Civil Service has been undergoing gradual and systematic reforms and restructuring. However, the Civil Service is still considered stagnant and inefficient, and the attempts made in the past by panels have had little effect.

It is therefore not difficult to have a consensus that the current work ethics of the public servant is less than satisfactory and has led to underperformance of the government sector in practically all phase of engagement. Competition and sharp practices have become common occurrence and responses from appropriate authority and agencies have been weak, delayed or even absent.

In realization of the need for a persistent and consistent ethical drive to reposition Nigeria as a most populous Black nation in the world, the *Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies*, in performing its leadership role in charting the right course for good governance and policy formulation in the country, held a one day Roundtable on **Developing Appropriate Work Ethics For The Nigerian Public Servant** to discuss these issues with a view to finding solutions that will strengthen our democracy. Perspectives for the Roundtable include:

- Leadership, Social Contract and Work Ethics;
- The Challenge of Enthroning Proper Work Ethics in Public Service;
- Fixing the Disconnect Between the People and Public Service;
- Reward System and Work Ethics;
- Revising the Philosophy of “Na My Papa Job;

- The Concept of Wage Earning and Work Ethics;
- Punctuality and Discipline in Public Service;
- Work Ethics: The Private Sector Experience;
- Work Ethics in Public SERVICE: a Comparative Analysis;
- Work Ethics, the New Generation and Prospects of Change.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

The Roundtable made the following observations:

1. The Nigerian Civil Service consists of employees in Nigerian government agencies other than the military”. Hence, it is composed of:
  - Federal Civil Service– Ministries, Departments,
  - The 36 autonomous States’ Civil Services,
  - The unified Local Government Service,
  - The several Federal and State government Agencies, including parastatals and corporations;
  - Government Universities, Schools, Hospitals *et cetera*.
  - Includes the Police Force, Customs, Immigrations and other uniformed services.
2. Ethics refer to principles by which behavior is evaluated as right or wrong, good or bad. It is a well based standards of right and wrong, and prescribe what humans ought to do. Ethics are continuous efforts of striving to ensure that people, and the institutions they shape, live up to the standards that are reasonable and solidly based. Work ethics include not only how one feels about his or her job but also how he or she handles the allocated responsibilities. It involves attitude, behavior, respect, communication, and interaction; how one gets along with others. Work ethics demonstrate many things about whom and how a person is.
3. A good work ethics also involves the following characteristics: Honesty, Accountability, Doing a Good Job, Being Part of the Greater Vision, Humility, Valuing What One Does, Hard Work, Fairness, Punctuality, Following Process, Dependability, Efficiency, Positive Work Habits, Initiative, Positive Attitude and Teamwork.
4. At independence, the British Colonial Government did hand over to Nigeria a competent, capable and highly motivated civil service. It is out of these corps that the much admired super permanent secretaries and civil service leaders emerged.
5. Following the unfortunate incursion of the military into governance in 1966, Nigeria commenced the path towards the degradation of Public Service. The government of Gen. Yakubu Gowon substantially maintained the civil service infrastructures inherited from the British colonial government at both Federal and State levels up until 1975 when it was overthrown by the Gen. Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo administration.
6. The unprecedented and massive purge in the civil service particularly at the top carried out in 1975 had a negative effect on the Nigerian Public Service and introduced significant elements of insecurity, poor work ethics, indiscipline, and diminished loyalty. A generation of Permanent Secretaries often referred to as Super Permanent Secretaries and their very well trained subordinates were summarily thrown into retirement most of them less than 45 years old then.

7. The Nigerian Public Service has not recovered from the trauma generated by this action 36 years later. Subsequent military administrations did not help matters as it would appear that a competent and motivated Public Service was perceived as threatening to the agenda of the political leadership.
8. Until the 1988 reforms, following the British tradition, the Civil Service was characterized by permanence, anonymity and neutrality;
  - **Permanence**– As career officers civil servants are ordinarily expected to remain in the service for their entire working lives while governments come and go. This permanence ensures continuity.
  - **Anonymity**- Civil servants are expected to work behind the scenes; they place their skills and energies at the disposal of their political masters, who make the final decisions and who receive applause for good work and jeers for bad work
  - **Neutrality**-Civil servants are prohibited from having political affiliations; they are expected faithfully and impartially to serve any government in power.
9. Highlights of the 1988 reforms include:
  - a) Merging of ministerial responsibilities and administrative controls and their investment in the Minister as Chief Executive and Accounting Officers;
  - b) Replacement of the designation of Permanent Secretary with “Director-General”, whose tenure will terminate with the Government that appointed him/her and who will serve as Deputy Minister;
  - c) Greater ministerial responsibility in the appointment, promotion, training and discipline of staff;
  - d) Vertical and horizontal restructuring of ministries to “ensure overall management efficiency and effectiveness ...”
  - e) Permanency of appointment, as every officer, is to make his/her career entirely in one Ministry;
  - f) Abolition of the Office of the Head of Civil Service; and
  - g) Abolition of the pool system.
10. In reality, however, the 1988 Civil Service Reforms led to the:
  - (a) Conscious and deliberate politicization of the civil service;
  - (b) Misuse and abuse of power by Ministers and Directors-Generals who saw their Ministries as a separate entity and run them as personal properties;
  - (c) Increase in the cost of running the civil service due to:
    - (i) the imposition of uniform structures on ministries;
    - (ii) the proliferation of parastatals;
    - (iii) increase in human personnel without a corresponding increase in productivity;
  - (d) Absence of a coherent and systematic training policy throughout the Civil Service;
  - (e) Glaring shortage of skilled manpower, especially in the technical and professional cadres in virtually all the ministries;
11. It is of great concern that after 12 years of democratic governance, the very important job of rebuilding the competence of the public sector is yet to commence in earnest.
12. Some other problems of the Civil Service are:
  - Corruption,
  - Uncooperative behaviour among civil servants,
  - Ineptitude,

- Tardiness,
  - Lack of motivation,
  - Lack of Passion for the job,
  - Nepotism,
  - Low productivity and delays,
  - Moon Lighting and Divided Attention
  - Inefficiency Bordering on Laziness, etc.
13. Other factors that led to the current poor work ethics include:
- a. Lack of will by the political leadership to maintain and sustain a competent and motivated public service
  - b. Job security
  - c. General decline in the Nigerian Economy
  - d. Lack of objectivity in recruitment, rewards and terminations
  - e. Poor compensation that did not keep pace with performance in other sectors of the economy, etc.
14. Matters of ethical drive are not limited to the Constitution and other laws only, but there are also strong complementary role played by religious organizations, civil society organizations and the various communities. Both the Church and Mosque drive their ethical disposition with a lot of passion, believing that conformity is sine qua non for eternity. Civil Society organizations are equally passionate about decent and disciplined society that offers hope for progress and development.
15. For the corporate and harmonious existence of the society, communities have developed appropriate norms and values. These norms and values comprise some core ethical values, below which no member of the community is expected to descend. Such anti-social behaviour will be met with reprobation of varying measure and proportion.
16. Poor work ethics is not a monopoly of the public sector, as the private sector also encounter the same issues. The aim of the private corporation or business is, in general, to make money, whereas the public sector is meant to perform functions for the society as a whole. The major difference is that in the private sector, issues relating to poor work ethic and employee performance are usually dealt with summarily. Similarly, issues related to good performance are rewarded appropriately.
17. Another difference between private and public sector is that the private sector is not usually constrained by often mis-applied policies/considerations relating to party affiliations, zoning, quota systems, etc.
18. Furthermore, unlike the public sector that is funded from national resources (oil & gas revenues, taxations, etc), the private sector only survive on the basis of delivering competent services and goods to the market place. This pressure to perform or perish compels the private sector to be more objective in dealing with the issues listed above.
19. Reform attempts in the public service include:
- a. The Adebo Commission (1970) and the Udoji Commission (1972) -reviewed the structure and orientations of the civil service to make it more efficient. Although these commissions recommended ways of rationalizing the civil service, the greatest problems of the service remained inefficiency and red tape.

- b. In 1976, the then Head of State undertook a purge of the civil service, retiring several top ranking and other civil servants – the effect of which further decimated the civil service and the ‘esprit de corps’.
  - c. In 1985, a study group headed by Dotun Phillips looked into the problems. It was believed that the reforms of 1988 were based on this report and resulted in the 1988 Civil Service Reorganization Decree promulgated by General Ibrahim Babangida.
  - d. The later report of the Ayida Panel made recommendations to reverse some of the past innovations and to return to the more efficient Civil Service of earlier years.
20. Since the advent of democratic rule from May 29, 1999 the Government has adopted some measures, including the following, to restore the dignity and glory of the Civil Service:
- a. de-militarization of the Civil Service by:
    - (i) ensuring that the system is guided by the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Public Service Rules, the Financial Regulations and Circulars;
    - (ii) Revising the Rules, Regulations and Procedures in the Civil Service to underscore the concern of Government for discipline as well as proper conduct and practices by public officers.
  - b. Correction of the various distortions introduced by the 1988 Reforms and implementation of most of the recommendations of the AYIDA Review Panel on the Civil Service Reforms with qualitative improvements.
  - c. Setting up the Service Compact (SERVICOM) initiative. Former President Obasanjo’s administration conceived that the SERVICOM Desk Office was to be set up in every Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies with a Desk Officer to receive complaints and ensure good service delivery.
  - d. The restoration of the Office of the Head of Civil Service of the Federation; which has the positive impact of:
    - maintaining the Civil Service political neutrality and cohesiveness;
    - promoting high morale and esprit-de-corps amongst civil servants;
    - coordinating training policies and programmes;
    - improving staff welfare and development;
    - managing common establishment matters;
    - fostering professionalism; and
    - promoting cordial and mutual relationship between the political officers and civil servants.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

At the end of the Roundtable, the following recommendations were made:

1. An Executive perspective of the ethical standards of the public service must be such that exudes extant commitment. A dedicated and committed public service will certainly enhance desirable work ethics that will assist the Executive in the performance of its functions.
2. The Executive is entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the public Service works efficiently and in accordance of the law. Hence, the Executive must ensure compliance with the Code of Conduct for Public Officers.
3. The Executive also has the responsibility to carefully position the service for effective performance. In this regard, confidence building mechanism must be put in place.

4. Public Officers are expected to be diligent, transparent and fair in the conduct of their service. It is in this regard that public officers must not put themselves in any situation that is likely to engender conflict of interest.
5. The Nigerian Civil Service work ethics must be aligned with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD Council's recommendations on improving ethics in the public service adopted in 1989, are that:
  - a. Ethical standards for public service should be clear
  - b. Ethical standards should be reflected in the legal framework
  - c. Ethical guidance should be available to public servants
  - d. Public servants should know their rights and obligations when exposing wrongdoing
  - e. Political commitment to ethics should reinforce the ethical conduct of public servants
  - f. The decision-making process should be transparent and open to scrutiny
  - g. There should be clear guidelines for interaction between the public and private sectors
  - h. Managers should demonstrate and promote ethical conduct
  - i. Managers should demonstrate and promote ethical conduct
  - j. Public service conditions and management of human resources should promote ethical conduct
  - k. Adequate accountability mechanisms should be in place within the public service
  - l. Appropriate procedures and sanctions should exist to deal with misconduct.
6. Government should institute a reward system to encourage and sustain a good work ethic among civil servants and academics. Such reward systems helps shape, bolster and foster an ethical work culture
7. Promotions should not be handed down periodically or as long service awards: you apply whenever you think you have met the set criteria; and this could be after two years for some, four or ten for others, or never for some. This brings a sense in which you choose how fast you want to rise; within broad expectations re the normal time frames. For instance, not every lecturer, research fellow, or professor hired the same day with the same degrees/qualifications should make the same amount of money as salary/compensation after a number of years.
8. Every Ministry Department and Agency must ensure that a SERVICOM desk is set up to receive complaints and act as a link between the public being served and the management.
9. The Public Complaints Commission needs to be strengthened to address the disconnect in the work ethics in the public service.
10. There should be a public service disciplinary Committee in order to reduce the level of impunity and restore integrity in the Civil Service.
11. Workers who fail to exhibit a good work ethic should be regarded as failing to provide fair value for the wage the employer is paying them and should not be promoted or placed in positions of greater responsibility.

12. Civil servants should also:

- Realize that “Na my papa job and na we pikin hope”
- Re-orient self with personal vision and mission
- Lift society and societal obligations above self (What is for the common good and best interest of civil society?)
- Align their vision and mission with that of the office
- Be committed to productivity and adding value
- Be loyal to Nation and Creed
- Deliver on the civil service contract with society
- Grade self in communication, integrity, attitude, behavior, efficiency/performance on job and interaction.
- Focus on achievement and success
- Workers exhibiting a good work ethic in theory should be selected for better positions, more responsibility and ultimately promotion.

13. For the Government, discipline should include:

- Putting the welfare of the Civil Servants as a top priority;
- Helping the CS to develop new skills that will improve their competitive value
- Effectively Evaluating performance, and doing the best to motivate staff for optimal performance

For the Civil Servant, discipline should include:

- Following Orders
- Efficiency
- Punctuality and Promptness
- Self Respect & Respect for Others
- Hard Work, Team Work, Organising work
- Giving a Good Impression to the Public
- Good Manners
- Professionalism
- Working to improve your understanding of the job
- Always Giving Your Best (100%)

Lagos, Nigeria  
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**Signed:**

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