

## Lessons from a Survey of Civil Servants



### In brief

- Although a nation's bureaucracy is fundamental to state capacity, bureaucracies in the developing world often fail to fulfil their duties.
- Data from Nigeria indicates half of all projects and programs budgeted for by the National Assembly are never initiated. Another fifth are not completed. Corruption, misaligned incentives and capacity issues hinder effective delivery of public goods.
- Little data exists on the characteristics, relationships and beliefs of bureaucrats in the developing world.
- This study is based on the findings from interviews with over 6000 civil servants from 100 organizations across Nigeria at all three tiers of government. The discussion process was the largest consultation with Nigeria's officials ever undertaken.
- The result of the study has led to 168 individual policy recommendations. Key recommendations include:
  - Generating greater political will
  - Enhancing capacity building through tracking individual training profiles
  - Introducing competition into the structure of the welfare package
  - Engage in low-tech mass communication with interactive assemblies
  - Expand the incentive reward system to recognise outstanding practice
  - Stagger the introduction of a performance management system
  - Local government staff should be provided with a minimum quality of work environment

## Motivation

*“Half of all projects and programs budgeted for by the National Assembly are never initiated”*

A nation’s bureaucracy is fundamental to the state’s capacity to protect its people, regulate the economy, and deliver public goods and services. Each of these channels has direct implications for a country’s growth. For example, social sector investments managed by bureaucrats provide critical services that support the capabilities of its people.

However, bureaucracies in the developing world often fail to fulfil this duty. Data from Nigeria indicates that half of all projects and programs budgeted for by the National Assembly are never initiated. Another fifth are not completed. Corruption, misaligned incentives, and capacity issues hinder the effective delivery of public goods by civil servants. The inefficiencies of the public sector are seen as one of the key constraints on growth in many bottom billion countries.

A host of questions arise from this discussion: Why do bureaucracies in the developing world fail to implement public projects so much of the time? What are the key bottlenecks to effective service delivery? What is the experience of a civil servant working in a developing country bureaucracy? Despite the significance of these questions, little data exists on the characteristics, relationships, and beliefs of bureaucrats in the developing world. This is mainly due to the limited access researchers have had to civil servants in developing countries.

In partnership with the Nigerian Government, a research team has visited institutions across the country to interview civil servants to try to get answers to the above questions in that setting. The resultant report, the Civil Servants Survey Report, details the findings of interviews with over 6000 civil servants from 100 organisations across Nigeria at all three tiers of government. The survey was split into a quantitative questionnaire (on which the research for this project is based) and a qualitative discussion process (on which the policy report ‘The Civil Servants Survey Report’ is based, and on which this briefing focuses).

The discussion process was the largest consultation with Nigeria’s officials ever undertaken. It provides ideas for public sector reform across all aspects of service life. The hope is that ideas in the Civil Servants Survey Report will be implemented to improve the capacities of Nigerian civil servants.

## Audience

*“The discussion process was the largest consultation with Nigeria’s officials ever undertaken”*

- Officials of the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation (providing an improved understanding of the problems faced by civil servants in implementing public services)
- Managers in the ministries, departments, and agencies of the Nigerian Government (more general dissemination of the messages of the report)
- Academics working on public organisational design

## Policy Implications

The Civil Servants Survey Report (submitted to the International Growth Centre previously and again with this briefing) contains 168 separate policy recommendations. To provide a flavour, I quote a number of the recommendations here:

### **Generate Greater Political Will**

Create a series of ‘service delivery champions’ within the political class who will lead the debate on the political class defining their own plan for public sector reform (which may be a confirmation of the National Strategy for Public Sector Reform).

*“The sector ministries should set up interactive assemblies with all their frontline workers”*

### **Enhance Capacity Building Through Tracking Individual Training Profiles**

The Office of the Head of the Civil Service should set up a training database that tracks the training program of each officer in the service. The system should be service-wide, cover each officer from entry to exit, and be integrated into the overall Human Resource Management System. The training programme specified in the database should be defined by the needs and demands of the individual officer.

### **Introduce Competition into the Structure of the Welfare Package**

The service pension schemes should be restructured to allow officers to change their pension fund administrators when they don’t get the expected services. Each pensions administrator should publish their own charter of service with penalties for breaking its commitments.

### **Go for Low-Tech Mass Communication**

The sector ministries should set up interactive assemblies with all their frontline workers. For example, the Ministry of Education should make provision for regular interaction between teachers in local communities and states. All major policy decisions should be fed through these interactive assemblies.

### **Expand the Incentive Reward System to Recognise Outstanding Practice**

A new series of minor awards should be given out during Civil Service Week to honour ‘life-long service of excellence’, ‘innovative service’, and the like. The stories behind these contributions should also be publicised widely as best practice.

### **Stagger the Introduction of a Performance Management System**

The first step in implementing a performance management system should be the instigation of a confidential evaluation system based on peer review. Until such a system is in place and believed to be credible by a majority of staff, performance pay will not work.

## Local Governments Staff Should be Provided with a Minimum Quality of Work Environment

The Governor's Forum should develop an agreement amongst states as to a minimum basic package for local government staffs. The implementation of this package should be monitored by the Association of Local Governments of Nigeria and the proposed central welfare committee.

## Implementation

The Civil Servants Survey Report contains discussion and background to every recommendation provided. I will discuss a single example as an illustrative case.

*“The first step in implementing a performance management system should be the instigation of a confidential evaluation system based on peer review”*

There is currently an initiative driven by the Head of the Civil Service to enhance the performance-based pay system in Nigeria's civil service. The Civil Servants Survey provides a roadmap for how officials believe such a system should be implemented.

Officers need to have confidence that their performance will be recognized and rewarded. Many officials believe that current processes of reward and sanction are inadequate and subjective. There is broad feeling amongst civil servants that improved performance management system would both motivate civil servants and offer a more credible system of reward. Thus, there is demand for performance management within the service.

The first step in measuring performance should be to create a confidential evaluation system based on peer review. This will require that each officer is made clear on their duties and responsibilities, which at the moment, many are not. There should then be a centralised system of peer review that allows an officer's customers, colleagues, and management to assess them. Only when staff have gained respect for a robust system of peer review, officials argued, will there be scope for performance management.

The next step is to provide incentives to the organisation, department, and individual at the same time. Officials argued that Nigeria has a service rooted in collegiate relations. Thus, it was important that group incentives were provided as well as individual. Beyond this, we heard many calls for incentives to take a variety of forms and not just financial, from greater responsibility to training.

Thus, the service has voiced the way that it sees performance management being introduced in an effective way. First, it must be staggered appropriately. Second, it must take the appropriate form.

## Dissemination

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## Further Readings

There is a substantial amount written on public service reform. For excellent overviews of the critical issues, see ‘World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People’ and Besley and Ghatak’s 2007 ‘Reforming Public Service Delivery’.

An accessible overview of the relevant literature is available at the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre ([www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/civil-service-reform](http://www.gsdr.org/go/topic-guides/civil-service-reform)).

The World Bank have just released their ‘World Bank Approach to Public Sector Management (2011-2020)’ and it provides a solid introduction to issues of public sector reform in practice (available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/0,,contentMDK:22716210~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:286305,00.html>).

## **About the authors**

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