Implementation of the Civil Service Reform Programs; the Case of Gambella People's National Regional State

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Abstract: *Structuring the civil service has been vital to adapt to the social, political, economic and technological changes taking at the international and at national level. The most recent reform phase began in September 2001, with the launch of the Public Sector Capacity Building Support Program was introduced to revive the CSRP. However, in Gambella People's National Regional State, civil reform program (CSRP) was started in 2002 with minor quick fixes like adjusting the administrative structure of the public service according to civil servants' relevant qualifications and experience. This study was conducted in the year 2019 with the purpose of exploring the challenges and prospects of the civil service reform programs in Gambella Peoples' National Regional State by looking into the implementation of the specific reform package. The study revealed that, lack of committed and well-informed leadership, poor preparation, improper personnel placement, lack of commitment from civil servants to their work and responsibility which is coupled with attitude to conform and accept the necessary changes required, lack of awareness and general understanding of the objective of the reforms coupled with poor and outdated employee handling and improper implementation of the human resources management practices and principles resulted in low or inexistence of the reforms in the region. Hence the study shows that little if at all has been achieved in terms service delivery and its effect on development at large, and inefficiency and ineffectiveness of civil servants seems to be almost the same like what it has been before the introduction of the reforms.*

Keywords: *Civil Service, Reform, civil servants', Implementation, Leadership.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1. Background

Robust and effective Civil Service Reform Program (CSRP) in Ethiopia as a whole, was initiated in 1997 as National Capacity Building in response to weak administrative system prevailing in the country, MOCS (2013). Structuring the civil service has been vital to adapt to the social, political, economic and technological changes taking at the international and at national level. Reforming the civil service constitutes an integral part of any government which is in dire need to transform its economy and ensure that public receives the services it deserves best (Zheng Zhou: 2012). For this reason, the government has been implementing the Civil Service Reform Program (CSRP) as a part of the package of Structural Adjustment Program.

However, in Gambella People's National Regional State as a part of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the civil reform program (CSRP) was started in 2002 with minor quick fixes like adjusting the administrative structure of the public service according to civil servants' relevant qualifications and experience (Gameblla Civil and Good Governance Bureau: 20015).

According to Mengesha and Common (2006) the CSRP is sought to build a fair, transparent, efficient, effective, and ethical civil service, primarily by creating enabling legislation, developing operating systems, and training staff in five key area which are major components of the reforms. They are: (i) Expenditure Control and Management, (ii) Human Resource Management, (iii) Service Delivery, (iv) Top Management Systems, and (v) Ethics. These sub-programs were implemented through successive and aligned tools which include Business Process Reengineering (BPR), Balanced Scored Card (BSC), Citizen Charter and Civil Service Change Army, (Ministry of Civil Service, 2013).

Since the introduction of the civil service reforms in Ethiopia a lot of progress has been achieved though the level of success and achievements varied according to regional state pending on capacity and resources a regional state has at its disposal to implement the reforms.

However, in Gambella National Regional State (GPNRS) there seems to be little success scored in civil service reform program (CSRP) in most of the regional state government bureaus. The only achievement that seems to be very visible from observation is the adjustment and the reform in the administrative structures of civil service. The challenges in Gameblla civil service are huge. For example, there is lack of commitment from civil servants to their work and responsibility which is coupled with attitude to conform and accept the necessary changes required. Second,

management system is outdated to response to the changing environment in which civil service operates. Third, is that under-development seems so rampant in the region and that shows little has been achieved in terms service delivery and its effect on development at large. Fourth, inefficiency and ineffectiveness of civil servants seems to be almost the same like what it has been before the introduction of the reforms. And, finally there is a lack of commitment of the top political leadership to effectively lead the reforms programs to the level required.

In fact, research studies on such post-implementation effectiveness analyses have always been very scant. In addition, existing studies were not able to portray the overall process, generally the case in all the reform interventions in general terms. Instead the studies separately shown the outcome of change interventions. One can, therefore, consider the fact that there has been no reasonable level of post-implementation analysis and no study that has managed to evaluate the reform implementation and management capability of Ethiopian public services in aggregate terms as gaps to be filled.

Therefore, the present study aimed to evaluate the implementation of the change efforts for informed decisions by purposively sampling informants who play key roles in government institutions in Ethiopia.

1.2. Research Objectives :
The purpose of this research was to explore the challenges and prospects of the civil service reform programs in Gambella Peoples' National Regional State by looking into the implementation of the specific reform package. Based on the overall objective, the following specific objectives are provided:
- To explores challenges and prospects of the civil service reforms programs implementation in the Gambella Peoples' National Regional state.
- To identify the gaps in levels of commitment in terms of resources, knowledge, skills and attitude in the implementation of the reforms and enhance employees empowerment to government's policies effectively.
- To assesses the factors affecting the proper implementation of the service reforms programs in the Gambella Peoples' National Regional state.

1.3 Research Methodology and Design of Study :
A qualitative research approach and exploratory design were used to achieve this objective. Qualitative research captures the *how* and *what* of the collective experience (Creswell 2009).
Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were used from published books, journal articles, reports from the regional bureaus. The main data collection techniques were focused group discussion, and interviews conducted with employees currently working as reform officers as well as other senior government officials from the selected Bureaus, Agencies and offices. A total of 132 individuals where interviewed from various Bureaus, Agencies and offices that were willing to participate as respondents to this study and 13 focused group discussions were conducted as well.

The respondents were chosen using a multi stage sampling method. Specifically speaking, they were chosen for their exposure of how the reform efforts have been executed and also of how the reform endeavors have unfolded in terms of meeting the envisaged objectives. Their knowledge of these issues was established as they had been taking part in the implementation of the change tools, as well as playing a change officer role by the time they were asked to take part in the focus group discussion.

The participants were drawn from various Bureaus, Agencies and offices including, namely the Civil Service and Good Governance Bureau, the Bureau of Health, Bureau of Agriculture Development, Bureau of Education, Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, The Regional Revenue Authority, Bureau of Mine, water and energy, Regional Administrative council, as well as the Bureau of Peace and Security to mention few of them.

2. LITERATURE OF REVIEW:
2.1. Meaning, Scope and Functions of Civil Service
According to Siddiquee (2006), civil service is defined as something that refers to the body of appointed officials who carry out the functions of government under the direction of the Head of Government. The study further argues that this definition is true in democracies, dictatorships, monarchies and republics alike. Similarly Maikudi (2007) defines civil service as it to a well-organized body of permanent paid officials of ministries and departments under the executive army of government charged with responsibilities of implementing government policies and programs in accordance with the laid down rule and procedures. UNDP (2006) also defines civil service as a well-organized body appointed officials who carry the functions of government under direction of head of government. The scope of civil service then includes carrying out and implementing government policies with ultimate objective of serving the public.

2.2. Civil Service Reforms Program: An Ethiopian Experience

According to Miruts & Asfaw (2008) the current Ethiopian Government has embarked on taking serious initiative of reforming the civil service since it came to power in 1991. The purpose of reforming the old civil service system was to avoid the undesired practices that hindered public service delivery and socio-economic development of the country.

Ethiopian Government though has been continuously conducting reforms to restructure civil service with the intention of strengthening multi-party democracy and market driven economy, (Tilaye 2007) in Miruts and Asafaw (2008). Therefore,   the ultimate role of civil change, and thus civil service begun to serve on merit principles and autonomous institutions with greater empowerment of employees flourished, Miruts and Asfaw (2008). It with this notion of providing speedy and quality service delivery to the public that developed nations of the world started their reforming civil service in 1980s as a response to the realization of poor performance and that result in expanding government size over expenditure in wage bill and thus develop a civil service that is competent ,merit based, well structured ,right-sized well paid accountable , professionals and generally corruption free civil service . Furthermore, the objective of the reforms was also meant to develop a relatively autonomous and public needs responsive civil service institutions, (Miruts and Asfaw, 2008).

2.2. Components of Civil Reform Program from Ethiopian Perspective

Civil service reforms is of the most visible and comprehensive areas of administrative reform, Miruts and Asfaw (2014). The need for reforms arises when parts or the whole system fails to function to the expected standards, and hence the need for modifications or to repair the whole system (Natukamanzina, 1998) in Miruts and Asfaw (2014). Major reasons leading to reforms in Ethiopia include the fact that core public management systems at the federal and regional levels were hampered by outdated civil service legislation and working system , (Mengesha .G and R. Common, 2006). The other problems include the absence of medium term planning , and budgeting framework, ineffective financial and personnel management control , inadequate civil wages and inappropriate grading , poor capacity for strategic and cabinet-level decision- making and inefficient focus on modern managerial approaches to service delivery, (Mengesha and R. Common , 2006).

In recognition of the constraints above, the Government has embarked on a comprehensive *Civil Service Reform Program* (CSRP) which include many components or sub-programs according to   (UNDP 2006) ; Mengesha & Common ,2006 ; 7 Miruts & Asfaw ,2014)

2.3. Reasons for Failure of Effective Implementation of Civil Service Reform Programs

It is quite a normal phenomenon in any process reforms to encounter some challenges before or after the implementation stage. For example, Polidano (2001) argues that most reforms in government fail. In his argument, they do not fail because once implemented, rather they failed because they yield unsatisfactory results. The reform fail because they never get past the implementation stage at all. In light of this, Ethiopia like any country implementing or has already implemented civil service reforms. Some of these challenges may be have at the country, regional l or local levels. Some of these challenges are identified here below by some authors:

2.3.1. The Attitude of the People: One of the basic requirements for the effective implementation of the civil reform measures is an attitudinal change among the members of the civil service (Chanie, 2001). According to (MOCS, 2014), is wide spread historical and distrust of the public institutions by the public and removal of such a distrust demands great commitment and efforts. Thus, the framework for civil service reform emphasizes the need for more attitudinal changes rather than reinforcing or strengthening existing organizations, structures and methods. People, according to MOCS (2014) require tangible and sustainable evidence for their attitude to change from old thinking to an open mind that views the world with different lenses.

2.3.2. Absence of Strong Institutional Framework: The reform measures basically comprise a large number of activities whose implementation involves many parties – individuals, groups, institutions, ministries and divisions (Miruts and Asfaw, 2006). They also call for new initiatives, collaboration and high-level coordination and tremendous amount of work. In this type of project, therefore, performance depends largely on the established institutional framework. As stated by Hibault (1996) in Chanie (2001) this framework must include a structure that enjoys considerable prestige and has the necessary authority to ensure good co-ordination between the parties involved in the reforms .As stated by Chaine (2001) In Ethiopia during the beginning of the reforms, most of the human resource management reform components are being carried out by committees. The members of the committees have their regular duties and take their work in the committees as an additional assignment. This goes against the success stories of civil service reforms, which demand adequate technical capacity with the required skills, resources and especially adequate time to achieve set target.

2.3.3. The Skills, Resources and Knowledge Gaps: As explained by (MOCS: 2014), this was one of the setbacks despite the fact that country achieves remarkable socioeconomic development. There is also a huge international

pressure to cope up with the ever changing global situations .With this situation, it is quite difficult to cope up adequately with the demand of the public. The civil service is in greater demand to upgrade knowledge and skills of the civil servant, (MOCS: 2014).   In relation to this (UNDP ,2006) states that ,   where there is a minimal understanding and acceptance, citizens are given no means of understanding the role and significance of CSR in their everyday lives, and what changes its achievements will bring in the relationship between citizens and the government.

2.3.4. Absence of Monitoring and Coordination of Civil Service Reform: When there is a little coordinating or indeed no leadership commitment from a country's political and administrative structure, the success of CSR becomes less or ends up in a failure because the success of CRS is derived from the level of political commitment behind it (UNDP,2006).Civil Service Reform requires command, sufficient respect and clout in the system to ensure effective monitoring and coordination. Similarly, as Polidano (2001) states in the absence of top-level political commitment to reform, no structure of committees is likely to function effectively for long. Acceding to Polidano (2001) It would soon degenerate to a forum for recording events rather than taking decisions. Participants he argues may eventually lose interest, skipping meetings or sending ineffectual lower-level officials in their stead.

For example according to   UNDP (2006) high-level political commitment and support is a prerequisite for successful CSR, but not sufficient by itself. Ownership of the reform must be broad-based. This requires support from the administrative elite and from the rank and file of civil service. Strong advocacy is needed at the ministerial and high managerial levels.

In case of Ethiopia however, there has been and still there is a tremendous political commitment at the top leadership level that drive the success of CSR.   For example, according to Chanine (2001) the whole civil service program in the country is managed by a high level committee led by the Prime Minister of the country and the members include: the Deputy Prime-Minister and the Ministry of Defense of the country; the head of Social and Administrative Division in the Prime Minister's Office. That resulted in successful of the program general in the country, although there are wider gaps and disparities between regional states among themselves in one hand, and between the federal government institutions, on the other.

2.4. Civil Service Reforms in Gambella People's National Regional State
Civil service reform in Gambella People's National Regional State, unlike in the rest of the country was started in 20002 with structure adjustment or entrenchment program (Bureau of Civil Service and Good Governance, 2002). That was when the rest of country particularly the federal government was finishing the implementation of the second phase. As stated by Miruts G. & Asfaw M. (2014) and Chanie (2001) the second phase of the civil reform program includes five sub-programs that is : top management systems-reorient the civil servants about the strategic planning and, countablibilty, delegation and necessary .Second is human resource management sub-program –with the aim to promote the human resources management in the civil service so as to develop an effective and efficient service. Third is expenditure management control program -to develop a comprehensive legal framework for the entire financial management of the civil service; forth is service delivery sub-program to improve the quality of service

Provided by public sector employees and fifth is ethics and judicial reforms to eradicates corruption and embezzlement and create an awareness in civil servants that government or public resources are meant for development.

The level and effective of implementation of all these sub programs civil service in Gambella is quite in question . For example, the sub-program which is judicial service is yet to begin its implementation. In the same token,   other sub-programs which are already put to implementation seem to be not yielding good and effective results. For example, in area of service delivery, much is lacking to meeting needs of the public. The very reason for civil service program implementation to lag behind from the rest of the country in Gambella, could be the reason for the reforms to yield effective result in entire region.

2.5. Features of Effective Civil Service Systems
The following features of effective system reforms have been identified by UNDP (2006):
- *Merit –based neutral civil service :* Objective criteria in selection and promotion of civil servants should allow them to function without fear or favor, and keeping with the public interest within the framework of laws and regulations.
- *Well-structured, "right"-sized and well-paid civil service*. A minimal number of levels and categories of civil servants fosters movements and career opportunities without creating internal tensions and stresses and promotes an ethos of unity and oneness among civil servants.
- *Accountable, professional and relatively corruption-free civil service.* Transparent accountability systems for the proper functioning of the civil servants should be clearly established within the legal and administrative framework and be overseen in strict conformity to laws and regulations.

- ***Well-trained, performance-oriented and relatively open civil service:*** Purposeful training for updating and acquiring skills, and proper orientation for changing needs in the administration and for purposes of promotion and for carrying out public services is very important and critical to the success the reforms.
- ***Relatively autonomous, responsive and representative civil service.*** To be efficient and effective, a civil service system needs to have internal autonomy of operations, especially with respect to personnel recruitment and advancement within the legal and administrative framework

3.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Gambella Peoples' National Regional State government has been engaged in several civil service related reform programmes introduced by the Federal Government with general vision of improving the delivery of services within the public sector. The reform programmes were initiated in line with the introduction of a market-led economic system and as a part of a structural adjustment programme in 1991.

In this section the process and outcome of the civil service reforms were analyzed and presented based on the data obtained as well as from the secondary documents as follows. Based on the analysis of secondary data and unpublished reports of the regional government sector bureaus, the overall implementation performance of the civil service report programs can summarized as follows.

3.1. Profiles of the Respondents

The information gathered from the focus group discussions, several key informant interviews especially from the civil services bureau were held through purposeful selection, considering their knowledge of the civil service reform implementation processes. They have been participating in reform programmes for as much as they have served in the sector. Majority of the respondent are Bachelor degree holder except very few junior level experts. Following extensive data gathering efforts and analysis of the secondary information, the finding of the study is presented as follow.

3.2. Challenges and Prospects of the Civil Service Reforms Programs Implementation
3.2.1. Attitude of Public Servants towards Public Service Reform

This is very much explained by Bersisa et al. (2016) who stated that some of the weaknesses in the implementation of the reform programme in Ethiopia includes attitudinal problems on the side of the public servants, shortage of competent public servants, lack of clear direction and commitment among organisational leaders, a limited level of public participation, problems of accountability and partisanship on the part of the public servants.

In line with this problem the participants identified the following points regarding the attitudes of employees to public service reform attempts in their respective organisations. The employees in the public sector views the reforms as politically motivated rather than as a means of improving organizational service delivery systems, making the employees to be more suspicion that the objective of reform programmes is basically politically motivated with the undesirable outcome of misallocating employees or downsizing employment. There is a clear lack of clarity about the reforms due to absence of clear communicating strategies.

While initiatives for improving and reforming human resource management and development are necessary for internal conditions, the public service reform process requires a committed workforce to meet its objectives. Regarding the level of awareness of employees about the envisaged reform agenda, the participants stated the following points:

 In addition to the aforementioned reasons the employees seem to be ill equipped with systematic knowledge of reform programmes because the reform process were simply imposed to be implemented through a top–down approach, and the employees, as well as organisational leaders have less knowledge about the reform agenda.

3.2.2. Leadership Assignment and their Leadership competency with respect to public service reforms

Bennis and Nanus (1995) stated that leadership styles have a strong relationship with the development of change. Hence, the public service requires highly qualified professionals who can plan, organize, lead and control the strategies of the government and provide citizens with fair and equitable services. Looking in to the competency of the organizational leaders who were participating in implementing public service reforms the study reviled that;

The role of leaders and leadership is one of the very important pre requisite for developing and managing change in any organisation by creating a suitable atmosphere to adopt change within the organisation. The success of public service reform involves aligning senior leadership teams around a common plan and set of deliverables. In relation to the assignment of organisational leaders in their respective organisations, the study reveals the following points:

The study indicates that leaders were not recruited on a merit basis. More emphasis was given to the political background of the leaders than their achievements in leading organisations making them to be pure political assignees.

There seem to be little if any effort at all to balance the technical skill requirements and the leadership skill requirements in managing the reform initiatives. Another problem identified is related to the tendency of changing leaders more frequently creating high leaders turnover, so much that the reforms suffers from a flatter experience curve and, at times, even worse.

Other than the problem associated with leadership assignment strategy, among the fundamental shortcomings in the public service were that top leaders in the public service were not supportive and competent, leading to the public servants poor performance and low morale levels, resulting in inefficient service delivery, inappropriately utilization of public resources were, and unethical practices in service delivery especially when it comes to recruitment, promotion and rewarding of employees. Therefore, the study revealed that, politicization, lack of proper human resources management   might have undermine merit-based employment and jeopardize bureaucratic integrity, and then harmfully affect the decision-making processes of public servants, which in turn seriously affect the effectiveness of the civil service reforms in term of delivering the expected outcome.

Therefore, to enhance the efficiency and fairness of the public service, there is a need to protect the institution from direct forms of partisanship. In the case of Ethiopia, any reform measure creates, more often than not, fear of job losses, more paperwork and workload. This has caused public service organisations to waste their limited human resources and financial resources, as well as their organizational memory. The respondents' views with regard to organizational leaderships are summarized in the following.

3.3 .Levels of commitment and political support in allocating the appropriate Resources

Although using modern technology requires a country to have huge funds, resources and satellite capabilities, the government made an effort to modernize the public service operation through the use of modern technology like computers and various means of information technology. The participants' views regarding the application of modern technology to public service reform are shown as follows:

Reform programmes were not supported with appropriate technology. Organisations are always in a hurry to implement the reform programmes with no software that supports the change programmes. Usually a technological setting to support reform programmes would not be considered. It was underscored that insufficient budget was allocated to implement the reform programmes.

The reform is not supplemented with the required incentives that go along with the reform agenda. The change army is not properly structured. They tried to implement changes without change implementers, i.e. a change army. More emphasis would be given to minor achievements, while tending to miss the whole picture of the organisational change agenda.

Higher educational institutions as well as training institutions in the country would not make an effort to come up with tools that support reform agenda. Also, there was no appropriate link made between training institutions and public service institutions. Required facilities, materials and human power for implementing reforms were not provided at lower organisational hierarchical levels. Employees would be assigned to different positions without the benefits that go along with the said position.

Salaries and other emoluments of the public service should be improved to a level deemed conducive to increasing morale and productivity. Poorly paid and poorly motivated workers tend to pursue their own needs, including opportunities for rent seeking, completely neglecting the goals of the government. To make ends meet, public servants are forced to engage in other income-generating activities, often using government offices as their base. Corruption in the procurement and delivery of goods and services has become a serious problem. All these factors imply that the effort dedicated to government work diminishes remarkably. Without sufficient resources to work with, public servants feel that they are challenged to complete tasks effectively.

The experience over the past years with the introduction of performance related systems, BPR and BSC points to the need for a coherent and consistent plan to avoid confusion and conflicting priorities during implementation.

3.4. Reform tools and its implementation

As part of its effort to improve the performance of the public service, the government has introduced initiatives aimed to radically transform the public service system into a modern, objective and efficient system that allows government to attain its vision and policy strategies. The participants stated their opinion regarding the reform tools and their implementation as follows:

Public reform practices were usually benchmarked from different countries, and change management tools were taken as a whole package. Related documents were also copied based on the knowledge area of change management sciences. Change management tools were not customized and contextualized as per the nature and reality of the organisation; rather, they were used as is. Hence the society is never satisfied with the reform outcomes. There is a mismatch between the theoretical requirements of the reform tools and their implementation. The reform initiatives were not based on justified theoretical foundations.

Organizations failed to create a sequential link among the change implementation tools. There is lack of awareness of which reform programmes should come first and which would follow. The reform agenda sounds like a management fad with little hope of being able to improve public service on a sustainable basis. BSC followed BPR with no adequate evaluation of the successes and failures as well as gaps of the former.

It has become the modus operandi that the latter comes negating the former, failing to take advantage of the possibility of supplementing one with the other. Those organisations that reformed their activities through the process of business process reengineering as well as those that have never exercised BPR are equally executing their tasks in the same manner. Even BPR created an obstacle in the activity of institutions. It is a group-based activity. No documents referring to BPR were kept for further reference purposes.

Even though the government has tried to implement different management tools to improve the service provision practices of the public sectors, the respondents indicated that the result was not as expected.

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