

The challenges and prospects of civil service reform and good governance in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this study is to assess the challenges and prospects of good governance and civil service reform in Ethiopia. A descriptive survey method was employed to conduct the research: questionnaire, interview, document analysis and focus group discussion were used as data gathering tools. Purposive and random sampling methods were used to select the sample of respondents.

The finding of the study revealed that good governance and civil service reform in Ethiopia experience some challenges: Incompatibility of people's attitude and change requirements; unable to set a clear roadmap for the reform programme; holistic and similar approach to all sectors at the time without considering contexts; lack of expertise in the area of reform; lack of communication strategy to address all stakeholders; people's resistance to reform due to job insecurity; inability to coordinate political leadership with civil servants' roles; and a weak monitoring and evaluation system were some of the challenges observed in the civil service reform programme of Ethiopia.

Parallel to these challenges there are some prospects for good governance in Ethiopia: leadership commitment; education and training programme; customer service orientation opportunities for benchmarking; and donors' support for the programme were most important prospects for good governance and civil service reform. In the process ensuring governance and civil service reform the key learning points were: Reform should have a clear roadmap; political leadership commitment and competency communication strategy; capacity development programme; contextualisation; strong monitoring and evaluation system of its efficiency and effectiveness; and finally good governance and civil service processes play key roles for overall development of the country.

INTRODUCTION

The Ethiopian government recognised the importance of improving the performance of service delivery and the creation of accountable and responsible civil service institutions that would support the development efforts in the country. To achieve these objectives, the government framed five pillars of the civil service reform programme: the top management system; civil service ethics; expenditure management; service delivery; and human resource management. The government established the Ministry of Capacity Building in 2001 in the *Office for the Coordination of Capacity Building* (Proclamation No. 256/200:1630-1632) to co-ordinate these pillars of reform.

During the last two decades, Ethiopia has embarked on a comprehensive civil service reform programme and in many cases have received assistance from international donor institutions. However, despite the tremendous efforts and resources that have been allocated to this endeavour, progress remains inadequate. Civil service reforms are a central feature of the economic policy reform programme. The performance of such reform is handicapped by a myriad of factors. Ethiopian government, therefore, needs to increase efforts to address these challenges through effective civil service reform (Mehret 2000).

The government of Ethiopia has embarked on reforming its civil service with the objective of improving the public sector service delivery system. Both the government and international non-governmental organisations sponsored various management training and workshop programmes to enhance the capacities of the civil service officials and employees to bring better performance in all of its civil service organisations and public enterprises. Though this brought some improvements in civil service organisations, the effort required was too much as compared to the benefits obtained (Tsfaye 2009).

Civil service reform cannot be considered in isolation. It has to be undertaken along with administrative reforms for effective results. Although comprehensive reform involves good governance, the civil service, and civil society involvement will provide the ideal approach. It requires sustained commitment from political and administrative leaders to succeed. It is also too complex to implement all at once. Few countries have undertaken comprehensive reforms and there are mixed results. The challenge lies in finding and linkages among governance, civil service and civil society.

The need to undertake systematic assessment of the challenges and prospects, good governance and civil service reform in the country are critically important. The purpose of the study is to assess the challenges and prospects of civil service reform and good governance in Ethiopia.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The general goal of this research is to assess the challenges and prospects of good governance and civil service reform in Ethiopia. Its intent is to serve as an advisory tool for the government institutions that are undertaking civil service reform initiatives. In this process best practices are identified, and learning points would be provided.



It is clear that not all of the methods and tools outlined will be applicable uniformly to all ministries, institutions and commissions. Therefore, a careful and selective adaptation of some elements to selected areas is essential. In this regard, it is also important to note that civil service reform is concerned with a continuous improvement in all aspects of government work. It aims to continuously improve results by building capacity. The specific goals of this research are to assess the practice of good governance; pinpoint the major challenges of the civil service reform programme; identify the prospects of good governance in Ethiopia and identify learning points.

- It is important to assess the challenges and prospects of the civil service reform programme on good governance in Ethiopia. The finding of this study is of great significance/relevance as:
- it enhances application of civil service reform and good governance;
- the research would be helpful to address the challenges to obtain good governance and successfully introduce a civil service reform programme;
- it would be helpful to identify and use the prospects for obtaining good governance and civil service reform programme;
- the lessons to be drawn from the research can be useful to deal with similar challenges if it occurred again to transfer to other organisations as well; and finally,
- the research could serve as a valuable input for researchers to conduct further studies in the area.

Accordingly, this research attempts to answer the following basic research questions concerning Ethiopia:

- What is the practice of civil service programme and good governance?
- what are the main challenges of good governance and reform programme?
- what are the prospects of good governance and civil service reform?
- what are the key learning points in the process of the civil service reform programme?

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

The major concern of the study, as indicated earlier, is to assess the challenges and prospects of instituting good governance and achieve civil service reform in Ethiopia. To this end, the descriptive survey approach is employed as the method of the study. The researcher used a descriptive survey design that involves a priority formulation of research questions and the description of the extent of association between two or more variables. It assessed the existence of good governance and civil service reform challenges and prospects in the selected institutions in Ethiopia.

This research makes use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Data gathering techniques and tools in this research were: interviews, a questionnaire, focus group discussions and document analysis. The sampling technique and selection of respondents were both random and purposive. The data analysis and presentation were arranged on the subtopics derived from the research basic questions. The findings were discussed and interpreted in relation to the relevant and standard literature.

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

According to (Kokebe 2007), civil service reform cannot be seen in isolation and it has to be undertaken along with good governance for effective results. The concept of good governance in the literature is very broad, but it is possible to isolate three main types of governance. *Firstly*, political or public governance is considered, whose authority is located in the state, government or public sector. *Secondly*, economic governance is discussed, whose authority lies in the private sector, relating to the policies, the processes or organisational mechanisms that are necessary to produce, distribute goods and services. *Thirdly*, social governance is described, whose authority is located in civil society, including citizens and not-for-profit organisations, relating to a system of values and beliefs that are necessary for social behaviours to happen and for public decisions to be taken.

The three aspects of governance are interdependent in a society. Indeed, social governance provides a moral foundation, while economic governance provides a material foundation, and political governance guarantees the order and the cohesion of a society. Therefore, in this context governance is not only just about how a government and social organisations interact, and how they relate to citizens, but also concerns the state's ability to serve citizens and other actors. It also involves the manner in which public functions are carried out, public resources are managed and public regulatory powers are exercised (Balogun 2001).

RATIONALE FOR CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

A well-functioning civil service assists in fostering effective policy-making, effective service delivery, accountability and responsibility in utilising public resources which are the characteristics of good governance. Good governance is being used as an all-inclusive framework not only for administrative and civil service reform, but as a link between civil service reform and an all-embracing framework for making policy decisions effective within viable systems of accountability and citizen participation. Administrative reform focuses on rationalising structures of government. Civil service reform aims at strengthening administrative capacity to perform core government functions (Mesfin 2008).

Reform raises the quality of services to the citizens. These are essential for the promotion of sustainable economic and social development. Civil service reform can contribute to macroeconomic stabilisation by restoring budgetary stability, strengthening revenue collection, managing aid effectively and improving development performance through proper implementation of investment frameworks and the management of public expenditure plans and programmes. The reform can contribute to the design and implementation of an equitable programme of social development. Enhancing the capacity of civil servants and improving their morale is critical to all these functions (Satish 2004).



EVALUATING CIVIL SERVICE REFORM AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

The evaluation of good governance is important for a number of reasons. *Firstly*, donors and reformers take it into consideration when assessing the impact of policies and determining future development projects. *Secondly* good governance evaluations determine the investment climate. It is well established that aid flows have greater impacts on development in countries with good governance.

The scholarly group is composed of scholars in both think-tanks and academia who have an interest in the impact of governance on topics in political science and economics. As a result considering all the relevant factors provide a more comprehensive view of the need for good governance and civil service reform evaluation (Jamal and Amanual 2009).

INDICATORS OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

According to (Jamal and Manual 2009) there are different indicators for good governance in government structure: transparency and accountability, participation, efficient and effective service delivery to citizens and other stake holders.

Transparency

Transparency requires clear rules and procedures to ensure objectivity and impartiality and demands disclosure to facilitate public scrutiny. Due process implies fairness and impartiality among the parties concerned. Accountability refers to the extent to which decision makers, or those who exercise state authority, can be held responsible for their actions. Transparency is a necessary part of accountability, though they are two different concepts. To hold a civil servant accountable, it is necessary to obtain information about his/her decisions and actions. This leads to the urgent need for legislation such as the correct managerial practices, judicial legal commitment, professional performance, financial regularity; political public accountability; access to information; and protection for the citizens who blow the whistle.

The civil servants' actions are dictated by the rules and procedures. It is the *rule of law* rather than *rule of man* that is blamed for widespread abuse of power and corruption among public officials. Full disclosure of information is a sign for confident interactions between individuals or groups. It is also a prerequisite for an objective, systematic and timely assessment of public or private governance and its stated outcomes. Indispensable in all these issues, is strict observance and enforcement of common norms and recognised benchmarks by public officials. (Balogun 2001)

Participation

Good governance requires the equitable participation of all stakeholders in the design and formulation of policies and institutions that affect them, or at least a majority of them at any given time. In addition, there has to be a fair attribution to all stakeholders of the fruits as well as the burdens and mistakes of development. Moreover, good governance is predictable:

there exists equal protection, plus non-discriminate and non-retroactive treatment for all in the enforcement of laws and the application of regulations. Transparency is essential for accountable government.

Participation is closely associated with the democratic process, whereby all stakeholders are given equal voice in the management of affairs. It is widely argued that any process or procedure that is transparent, fair, impartial, accountable, and participatory will be efficient and equitable. Transparency and participation ensure that administrative decisions and actions are made in the interest of the public rather than a particular interest group or individual. Due process ensures that individual rights regarding fair participation is often limited to input received from representatives, well-established organisations and government-nominated experts (MocB 2007).

Efficiency, effectiveness and adaptability

According to (Tesfaye 2009) efficiency and effectiveness are indicators of good governance. The components are briefly discussed in the following paragraphs

Efficiency is defined as the degree of outputs produced per given set of inputs. Input consists of raw material, labour, technology and capital. Efficiency of a system depends on a system's internal capacity such as co-ordination of activities, motivation of employees, the way jobs are designed and the technology applied. Efficiency can be operational efficiency and managerial efficiency. Operational efficiency measures either the ratio of physical output to physical input for manufacturing organisations or the number of customers served per given time for service providing organisations. In contrast, managerial efficiency measures the speed that a manager accesses information and responds to a problem/opportunity in the form of an instruction, report, decision, or answer. This speed depends on the quality of stored information (organisational memory); the information system used to access internal/external information; the knowledge and experience of the decision maker to analyse the information; and the complexity of the subject at hand.

Effectiveness measures the ability of a system to handle the complexities in its environment. In order to survive, any system needs to cope with changes in, or to induce changes to its environment. The business environment of a system consists of other business systems and entities with which the system in question interacts. The complex external situation compels the system to balance its internal capacity with the various environments within which it operates (Tesfaye 2009). If a system's environmental varieties are higher than its internal capacity, the system overstretchers itself beyond its available resources and energy. This could lead to the deterioration of performance. If a system's environmental varieties are less than its internal capacity, the system under performs. Tersely, related effectiveness measures the outcome and impact of a strategy.

Adaptability. In measuring the effectiveness of a system, one has to consider not only the varieties but also the state of the business environment. The continuous change in the state of the business environment compels the system to change its behaviour to adapt to different situations. Hence, adaptability is the speed at which the system changes its behaviour/action in relation to the changes in its business environment (Chane 2009).



Change in mindset of civil servants and neutrality

The civil servant has always played a pivotal role in ensuring continuity and change in administration. A paradigm shift in the nature of civil servants is required to cope with the emerging demands and the changes in society and the economy. The nature of changes demanded in this esteemed service is required for better performance. The neutrality of civil servants, especially at the highest levels of policy-making and programme formulation is important to maintain, particularly in democracies where leaders change periodically. Bureaucratic continuity is a necessity, even though it may become a mechanism for creating a privileged, self-oriented group within the state.

Neutrality is worth noting as the principle of bureaucratic neutrality is an instrument for the preservation of democracy and has never been rejected outright. However, neutrality does not mean that high-ranking civil servants cannot or should not be involved in articulating public policy. Indeed, senior officials are professionally and morally obliged to provide their political leaders with policy alternatives based on sound arguments, relevant precedents, and sustainability in the context of changing political environments. It is essential that they do so, however, from a non-partisan position. Civil servants have to bring a new orientation to rules by which the everyday conduct of public affairs has to be regulated. Civil servants have much to contribute to the shaping of and not just implementation of the policy (Atkilt 1996).

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND MERITOCRACY IN PROMOTION

Building a motivated and capable civil service requires merit-based and non-discriminatory recruitment which rests on the absence of political patronage, transparent rules and procedures, open competition and selection by an independent agency. Subsequently, important elements in meritocracy and the motivation of employees are the opportunities for promotion, recognition and reward for performance, inter-sector mobility, placement in right jobs and the scope for skill upgrading and self-improvement. There are different approaches to the use of seniority and merit as criteria for promotion (MoCB 2007).

The training offered to civil service recruits is one of the most comprehensive training systems. Training can be provided right at the induction level. The urgency for reforms in civil services is dictated as much by the imperatives of global developments as by the forces of new technology and communication which are shrinking. Distance and economic developments, render conventional approaches and practices of administration obsolete and dysfunctional. Professional skills of officers may relate to three functional categories implementation, programme/project preparation and policy formulation as well as to specific themes or specialisations (Atkilt 1996).

CHALLENGE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

According to Balogun (2001), the challenge for leadership in any reform effort is doomed if the need for good governance is not addressed sufficiently. Much of the change or shift in

paradigm will depend on how well leaders perceives their role in re-engineering change. Leadership is one of those qualities that are easier to recognise than define. The nature of leadership varies according to the demands of a particular situation, as leaders themselves are driver individuals.

Characteristically, good governance requires the equitable participation of all stakeholders in the design and formulation of policies and institutions that affect them, or at least a majority of them at any given time. In addition, there has to be a fair attribution to all stakeholders of the fruits as well as the burdens and mistakes of development. Moreover, good governance is predictable. There exists equal protection, plus non-discriminate and non retroactive treatment, for all in the enforcement of laws and the application of regulations. Unfortunately, the civil service in most developing countries operates in an environment that is not conducive to good governance. Public information is rarely available, as can be easily judged by the dearth of information available on most governmental organisations' websites. Participation by non-governmental organisations, in particular civil society or consumer groups, is a new phenomenon for many civil servants (Balogun 2001).

FINDINGS

Major findings of the research based on the basic research questions are discussed accordingly.

Practice of civil service reform and good governance

The practice of good governance as a result of civil service reform in Ethiopia is at its infant stage but there are significant developments like judicial system reform, decentralisation to effectively and efficiently enforce government policies, programmes and strategies in a transparent and accountable manner. In addition, the national court administration reform programme has been implemented at the federal Supreme Court level. Furthermore, different institutions were established which can play a major role with political leaders' commitment for the realisation of good governance in the country. The Federal Ethics and Anti-corruption Commission, Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman's office have been established to strengthen good governance for the first time in the country's history.

Challenges of civil service reform and good governance

As data indicates, since good governance and reform are new concepts in Ethiopia it has encountered several challenges e.g. long time to reach a common understanding for the need for reform and its modality/tool; incompatibility of people's attitude and reform competency requirement; inability to set a clear roadmap for the reform programme; broad and similar approach to all sectors without adaptation; lack of expertise in the area of reform and good governance; lack of a communication strategy to address all stakeholders' and employees' resistance due to job insecurity and inability to identify political leaders' role and civil service role; and inconsistency and weak monitoring and evaluation system.



Prospects of civil service reform and good governance

Data from different sources revealed, that the civil service reform process in Ethiopia has limitations, but some degree of success was identified. In this case there are different prospects to take reform forward: Reform and good governance are on the national and the international agendas. Political leaders' commitment to reform is increasing. Public awareness for adhering to correction is increasing. There are more opportunities for training and development about good governance. Funds from donors are available, like Public Sector Capacity Building Programme (PSCP). Benchmarking of other countries' experience and more understanding of the need for change are attributes. Public requests for quality services and responsiveness are prospects of civil service in reform and good governance in Ethiopia.

Key learning points in the process of civil service reform and good governance

In the process of civil service reform and good governance of Ethiopia, various learning points have emerged: Political leaders' commitment and competency are critical prerequisites for the success of the reform agenda. Reform and good governance should have a clear roadmap. Attitudinal change in the reform process is the most challenging issue. The communication strategy has to address all stakeholders as this is a critical success factor. Capacity development programme depending on real need identification is important for civil service reform. Good governance and civil service reform processes are key factors for overall development. The roles of political leaders and of civil servants should clearly be separated. Good governance and civil service reform are processes, thus monitoring and evaluating have important roles to play to achieve success in a reform and good governance programme. In the reform process both efficiency and effectiveness should be measured. A system for a safety-net programme should be established. Adaptation is important for civil service reform and good governance.

CONCLUSION

The general goal of this research was to assess the challenges and prospects of good governance and civil service reform in Ethiopia. Its specific goals were to assess the practice of good governance, pinpoint the major challenges of the civil service reform programme; indicate the prospects of good governance; and identify learning points in the process of the good governance and civil service reform programme in Ethiopia. Therefore, the findings of this study are of great relevance/significance for Ethiopia because:

- it enhances application of civil service reform and good governance;
- it would be helpful to address the challenges of good governance and civil service reform programme;
- it would be helpful to identify and use the prospects for a good governance and civil service reform programme

- lessons to be drawn can be useful to address challenges and to transfer lessons to other organisations as well; and finally
- the study may serve as a valuable input for researchers to conduct further studies in the area.

Ethiopia is making significant progress in promoting good governance while facing many other challenges. Its achievement is aligned with the civil service reform programme as a result of leaders' commitment and other stakeholders' support. As a result of the civil service reform programme, citizens are receiving better services from different public institutions. Participation, transparency, accountability and efficiency have showed improvement from time to time, but this does not mean that it takes place at the expected standard.

The area of service delivery in terms of efficiency has scored significant achievements as compared to the period before the civil service reform programme as one indicator of good governance. There are considerable challenges e.g. incompatibility of people's attitude and reform competency requirement; inability to set a clear roadmap for the reform programme; holistic and similar approaches to all sectors without adaptation; lack of expertise in the area of reform and good governance; lack of communication strategy to address all stakeholders; people's resistance due to job insecurity; inability to identify political leaders' roles and the civil service's role; and an inconsistent and weak monitoring and evaluation system. Since, these challenges are taken as learning points to all stakeholders; the civil service reform and good governance process are in a promising condition to bring the intended result to the country's public service.

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