

## WORK CONTENT IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE AND ITS IMPLICATION ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

*Civil service is the major instrument through which government; federal, state or local manage development. However, Nigerian civil service has for long been engulfed with poor performance and service delivery. Reforms in the civil service have often centered on structure and deemphasized work content. Specifically, attention is paid to the powers of officials, inter-unit conflict, and delegation of authority, training and accountability. Regardless of emphasis on these factors, work in the civil service remains dull, slow, and monotonous, and a high degree of employee idleness is nothing to write home about. Within the framework of labour productivity theory and using primary data collected from highly-skilled professionals in three states of South-East Nigeria. The paper concludes that the conspicuous lack of activity among many civil service employees' is primarily a function of low work content in service occasioned by overstaffing. To achieve sustainable development in Nigeria, job enrichment and decongestion of the civil service by alternative employment (DAE) is therefore recommended.*

**Keywords:** Design, Job, Responsibility, Task, National Development

### **Introduction**

Civil service is a feature of all nations practiced at federal, state and local levels. Indeed, whether the chief executive of a government is president, prime minister, an emperor, king, duke governor or mayor, that government functions within the ambit of civil service. Nigerian civil service is the greatest asset of the country in its quest for sustainable development. Civil service as an organization lies at the centre of Public Administration structure. It is the major instrument through which government; federal, state or local manage development (Olu-Adeyemi, 2009). For long, scholars and policy makers have interested themselves in the role of the civil service bureaucracy in national development in general and Nigeria's development in particular. Most often this interest has centered on the civil service as a modernizing institution, an agent of policy implementation, the mind of civilian politicians in the articulation of public policy and a

tutor of the military on the intricacies of governance during the military incursion in politics (Nwosu in Ukaegbu, 1995). However, much of development literature on Nigeria and the Third World in general tends to show that these roles and expectations have not been fulfilled by the civil service because they are pervaded by such pathologies as excessive centralism, red-tapism, defiance of meritocracy through nepotism and favoritism (Akhakpe, 2014; Igbokwe-Ibeto, Chukwuemeka & Okechukwu, 2014).

According to Ukaegbu (1995), the problems of the Nigerian civil service came into prominence following the 1988 panel report of the Dotun Philips on the civil service and the consequent restructuring exercise by the Federal Military Government. Much of the discussion and analyses of civil service pathologies have consistently centered on the powers of permanent secretaries, accountability, status conflict between technical professionals and generalist administrators, delegation of authority, physical conditions of work, upgrading of skills through training and retraining of civil servants, the professionalization of the civil service and the new role of the Civil Service Commission (see Akhakpe, 2014; Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012; Olisa in Ukaegbu, 1995; Balogun, 1988). Not much has been said about the work-content of the Nigerian civil service and its implication on sustainable development.

One question that may be asked is, why emphasis on work-content instead of emphasizing the conventional and popularly known pathologies of the civil service as well as the findings of the Dotun Philips and similar other Panels there after? In response, it is the view of these authors that any attempt to construct a virile and strong civil service without a clear articulation of the work content of employees through effective job analysis will not yield the desired result. This is because creation of job positions without corresponding tasks and functions will render incumbents of such position redundant and useless. Work content, task or responsibility is at the root of the matter because it is only when individuals put their mental and physical energies to use that results, tangible or intangible can be achieved. In fact, whether one invokes the Smithian Social Philosophy which extols private enterprise or the Marxian opposite which advocates collective ownership of means of production, expenditure of physical and mental energies is central. However, the Nigerian civil service does not seem to have the capacity to put most of its employees to effective and productive use because its work content is low. Consequently, it is proposed that an effective civil service with high work content, for a durable polity and sustainable development requires not only a reorganization of tasks and responsibilities but also a redistribution of the sector's workforce.

To address the issues germane to the paper, it is structured into the following five compartments. The first compartment, apart from introduction, explores conceptual and theoretical insights central to the subject matter of the paper. The second chronicles the interface between work content and sustainable development. The third examines the work content in the context of Nigerian civil service. The fourth is the methodology, data presentation, analysis and interpretation. The fifth x-rayed the way forward in the quest for efficient civil service in Nigeria, then the sixth is conclusion and implications. Before we expand these propositions, it is imperative to first examine the meaning of work and its possible relationship with sustainable development which is the goal of any given society.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Statements**

It is customary to begin an academic investigation of this nature by combing the conceptual and theoretical contours of the subject matter of analysis. Though, consensus may not be achieved on the validity or otherwise of such enterprise. Nonetheless, it is an exercise worth pursuing if only to sketch the parameters of the subject matter. Work belongs to the tribe of disputed concept in social and management sciences as it has a variety of meanings in contemporary society. Many people conceptualize work mainly as paid employment, the exchange of services for money. But this definition does not adequately describe why work is necessary. Others define work as activity that produces something of value for others. This definition though ignores the fact that work can produce something of value to it self, it is broader in scope than the wage-effort conception because it recognizes that work has purpose, it is productive and it is a social activity (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012). That work is an activity that produces something of value to others does not mean that it is necessarily interesting, rewarding or satisfying (Steers in Ukaegbu, 1995). It is a common knowledge that certain jobs are dull, repetitive boring, alienative and stressful yet the activities performed do have social utility (Ukaegbu, 1995). Work content in the context of this paper is defined as the task, duties and responsibilities assigned to a job and the job holder through job description and specification for attainment of organizational goals and sustainable development.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2009), conceive sustainable development as development that meets our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The UNDP identified three elements which should work together to ensure sustainable development. These include economic development, social development and environmental protection. These three elements must be conceptualized together, planned together and implemented together to achieve sustainable development (Ayeni, 2010).

Collaborating Ayeni's (2010) submission, Anazodo, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Osawe & Nkah (2014), contend that sustainable development can only make sense to people when they are involved in the process of decision making through a Bottom-top approach. Popular participation is crucial to sustainable development and is seen here as the active involvement of all categories of civil servants in the process of setting goals and making decisions about involvement in the process not just the acceptability of end results which satisfies the need to participate (Ake, 2001). Yet, for sustainable development to be achieved there is need for human capacity building.

The definition of capacity building as a means to promoting sustainable development is broad and can encompass a multitude of activities (UNEP, 2005). Capacity building is a process of change and the systematic management of transformation. It involves the transformation of peoples, institutional and society's capacity (World Bank, 2012). To Azikiwe (2008), capacity building entails the process by which an individual, irrespective of sex, is equipped with skills and knowledge they need to perform effectively and efficiently in their different callings. Capacity building accordingly requires commitment, visionary leadership, viable institution and respective organizations, material, financial and skilled human resources (Chambers, 2005). According to Dibia and Dibia (2014), capacity building in the context of sustainable development implies a dynamic process which enables individuals and agencies to develop the critical social and technical capacities to identify and analyze problems as well as provide solutions to them.

There are several theoretical windows through which a phenomenon can be investigated. While other theories may be right on their own, we anchor this paper on labour productivity theory with its three sub-theories of efficiency, effectiveness, and performance, an eclectic approach. Efficiency theory refers to the relationship between goods and services produced; and the resources used to produce them. According to Galbraith (in Eneanya, 2009), the ratio between input and output determines the efficiency of the employees. An efficient operation produces maximum output as well as having minimum input for any given quantity and quality of product.

Effectiveness here refers to how well the Nigeria civil service organization is achieving its policy objective or other intended effects. According to Spreight (in Eneanya, 2009), an organization is technically effective if it is adequate to the demand placed on it by the society. Adequacy here implies the competence and the capacity to deliver the expected goods and services. Effectiveness measures the extent to which goals and objectives of an organization have been achieved.

Performance theory evolves from the modern concept of result oriented management. Under performance or target theory, achievement of result or fulfillment of objectives and target within stipulated time frame is the central motivation. The emphasis here is time rather than men and materials. Therefore, the adoption of Management by Objectives (MBO), Programme and Performance Budgeting System (PPBS) becomes imperative. This sub-theory will go a long way in checkmating the issue of overstaffing and ghost workers syndrome inherent in the Nigerian civil service. This school of thought had earlier been advocated by Udoji reform Commission in 1972 as a solution to the problems of ineffectiveness and poor service delivery in the Nigerian civil service. However, Udoji Report failed to examine the work content in the service as a critical issue towards healing the sick and inefficient civil service. It was only concern with the achievement of objectives without interrogating the means of achieving the objectives.

### **The Nexus between Work Content and Sustainable Development**

An elaboration of the two definitions of work above shows that it has both social and individual functions. Without work, there is no product or service to provide. Work serves an economic function. In exchange for labour individuals receive necessary income with which to support themselves and their families. The work place provides opportunities for meeting new people and developing friendship. Furthermore, according to Steers (in Ukaegbu, 1995), work is an important source of identity, self-esteem and self-actualization by providing individuals with the opportunity to demonstrate competence or mastery over both themselves and their environment.

If one function of work is the production of something of value to society, it then means that the progress of any society, depends on the extent to which the mental and physical energies of people are put to work regardless of the sector in which they are employed and the type of work done. Thus, following Chodak (1973), man has a natural propensity for improving his living condition through his own creativity; hence man is viewed as a resource and consequently the concept of human resource. Indeed, it is through work that advanced nations have transformed and controlled their environments. It is also through work that the huge surplus is produced in these societies, a condition which contributed to their recognition as developed nations.

The numerous inventions, innovations, planning, policy implementation, management, assembly line production, services, farming, etc. all of which are aspects of work are said to be efficient in these countries. Therefore, a theory of work is eventually a theory of sustainable development. If according to Seers (in Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2003) development is conceptualized as the realization of the potential human personality, the relationship between work and sustainable development becomes evident. The Nigeria civil service which is expected to contribute significantly to societal development through work does not seem to have the capability to fulfill these expectations. In other words, the potential human personalities of its participants may not be realized as a result of low work content and the resultant lackadaisical work attitude.

### **Work Content in the Context of Nigeria Civil Service**

The image presented by Nigerian civil service organization is that of a place where individuals cannot perform their best; an entity where human beings spend long segments of their life time without realizing their full potential or experiencing self-actualization. Furthermore, the Nigerian civil service portray an environment where work is dull, disliked, unchallenging, monotonous, frustrating, tasks and responsibilities are non-existent for many employees.

One of the most popular and conventional explanation for these negative characterizations is that authority is so highly centralized at the top that work activities and job responsibilities seldom trickle down to the numerous subordinates down the organizational hierarchy. Another explanation according to Briggs (2007), Nwosu (1985) is that senior civil servants tend to believe that their subordinates are lazy, uncommitted to the attainment of government goals, lack initiative and cannot produce without detailed supervision. That is, subordinates are viewed by top officials from the classical organizational conception of man or what McGregor (1960) calls Theory X.

Even though over-centralization of authority and responsibility at the top level of the civil service hierarchy reduces the amount of activity performed by lower organizational employees', it would appear a more fundamental problem is that work activities or volume of tasks are low relative to the number of employees therein. Put somewhat differently, many Nigerian civil service organizations tend to be over-staffed relative to quantity of work. Although, statistics to verify this contention is not available, the 2012 Orosanye Report, a study by Briggs (2007) and other documentaries on civil service establishment pointed at the problem of over-staffing. This apparent overstaffing tends to stem from overwhelming tendency for political and nepotistic considerations in recruitment and the consequent defiance of the universalistic ideal of bureaucracy. Some critics of the civil service such as Ogbuagu (in Ukaegbu, 1995) agree with the overstaffing hypothesis by stating that the service is faced with too many hands but too few talents to efficiently do the job for which it is established. However, the issue of few talents is doubtful because it is still the same civil servants who when they move into the private sector or multi-national corporations perform efficiently.

In organization literature, work content refers to the factors that describe work itself. Such factors as the opportunity for employees to use their skills and capabilities, the challenges of a job, opportunity for one to use his creativity and initiative and the amount of freedom the worker exercises in deciding his work procedures are prominent. Where these factors are significantly present, work content is high where absent, or minimal, work content is low. The contention that

civil service work content is low derives from a study of the work experience of indigenous scientific/technological professionals by Ukaegbu (1995) which the current researchers have consistently follow-up observation till date.

### **Methodology**

The study utilizes the qualitative and quantitative approach to gain an insight into the nature and character of work content in the Nigerian civil service and its implication on sustainable development. In order to investigate work content in the Nigerian civil service and its implication on sustainable development, the study employed the descriptive survey method, with the researcher setting out to illustrate the association that exists between the dependent and independent variables. The researcher's main goal in a descriptive study is to describe accurately the relationship between two phenomena (work content and sustainable development). This method is useful because the study is interested in finding the meaning and to obtain an understanding of the issues under investigation.

The study relied heavily on primary and secondary data. The primary sources of data were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. They were based on observations as well as through the use of questionnaires. Typically, a combination of questionnaires and observations can provide more powerful data than other methods. In this regard, questionnaire was used as an instrument for collecting primary data. Respondents were requested to indicate the level of fulfillment of their pre-employment intrinsic and extrinsic job expectations with the underlying attributes under measurement. To supplement the data from primary source, secondary materials were sourced from academic literature on the subject matter.

The target population of the study consists of all staff of Nigerian civil service. Because the researcher cannot cover the entire population within limit, Walpol formula for determining sample size was employed. Thus, at a standard score corresponding to 5% significance level and at a sample of 0.04 errors, a sample of 600 was obtained.

In order to elicit respondents' opinion on work content in the Nigerian civil service and its implication on sustainable development, a total of one hundred and twenty (120) civil servants were randomly surveyed. The field survey made use of cluster random sampling which grouped the targeted population into three states of the South East Nigeria namely, Anambra, Enugu and Imo State. The survey employed simple random sampling technique to select two ministries from each state. To this end, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare and Ministry of Agriculture (Anambra State); Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs and Ministry of Information (Imo Stat) and Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Works (Enugu State).

A total of twenty (20) staff was chosen from each ministry given a total of one hundred and twenty (120). Cluster sampling technique was adopted in the states in order to collect a balanced view and ensure representativeness of the sampled survey. Yet, equal numbers of respondents were selected in order to ensure equitable representation and reduce bias.

The decision to limit the study to six ministries was based on the need to have a manageable sample. This is in line with the law of small and large numbers as noted by Best and Khan (2006). Thus, it was deemed a representative sample with regards to the research purpose and considering the fact that the problem under investigation manifests the same way in all the Nigerian public sector organizations. Therefore, the findings can be used to make inferential judgment on the entire tertiary education system in Nigeria.

Accordingly, a total of one hundred and twenty (120) questionnaires of ten (10) items each were administered to the respondents. The rationale for using questionnaire was to allow the respondents to answer at their own pace without taking them away from their work place.

### **Analysis of Surveyed Data**

The study employed the quantitative technique using table and simple percentage in the analysis of information collated. The analysis involved the use of percentages to generate insights, make inferences and draw conclusions about work content in the Nigerian civil service and its implication on sustainable development.

### **Preliminary Analysis**

A total of 120 questionnaires of 10 items each were administered to the sample population and interviews also conducted. Out of the one hundred and twenty (120) distributed questionnaires, the researcher was able to achieve questionnaire return of one hundred and twenty (120) usable responses representing 100 percent response rate. The researcher proceeded with the analysis of the data as 100 percent response rate is regarded as satisfactory for this study. Some rules of thumb about the response rate is that a response rate of 50 percent is adequate for analysis and reporting, 60 percent is good while 70 percent is very good (Babbie and Mouton, 2001).

### **Respondents' Characteristics' and Classification**

This section is divided into **A** and **B**. Section **A** consists of the socio-demographical data of the respondents such as sex, education background, official status and length of service, it contains four (4) questions while section **B** covers the research questions based on the research objective. It also contains two (2) questions with a number of variables making a total of six (6) questions in all.

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Male	72	60.0	60.0	60.0
Female	48	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Field Survey March, 2015*

The sex distribution on table 1 reveals that 60percent of the respondents were male while 40percent were female. This result shows that there were more male than female in the surveyed respondents.

Table 2: Educational Background of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Postgraduate Degree	29	24.2	24.2	24.2
1st Degree/HND	41	34.2	34.2	63.5
NCE/ND	32	26.6	26.6	89.2
WASC/SSCE/NECO	18	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Field Survey March, 2015*

The table on educational qualification reveals that 24.2percent of the respondents had postgraduate degree while 34.2percent had first degree/HND, with another 26.6percent who had NCE/ND. 15percent of the respondents had WASC/SSC/NECO. From the above analysis, one can see that 85percent of the respondents had acquired one skill or the other.

Table 3: Respondents Length of Service

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 5yrs & below	17	14.2	14.2	14.2
6-10yrs	43	35.8	35.8	55.4
11-15yrs	32	26.7	26.7	85.1
16-20yrs	19	15.9	15.9	95.9
21yrs & above	9	4.1	4.1	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Field Survey March, 2015*

Table 3 on length of service shows that 50percent had put in between 5-10 years in the service; 42.6percent had put in between 11-20 years while 4.1percent had served for between 21 years and above. This shows that majority of the surveyed respondents has put in between 5-15 years of service, the implication is that majority of them still have more years before retiring because of the present policy which sets retirement age for civil servants at 35 years of service or 60 years of chronological age whichever comes first. The essence of securing information on the respondents' length of service was to be sure that they relatively understand what the survey was about and thereby, to some extent, be able to contribute to the issues under investigation.

Table 4: Official Status of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Permanent Secretaries	4	3.3	3.3	3.3
Directors/Deputies & Assistants	7	5.8	5.8	8.1
Principal Managers	10	8.3	8.3	16.2
Senior Managers & Managers	15	12.5	12.5	23.0
Deputy & Assistant Managers	21	17.5	17.5	37.8
Admin Officers 1,2 & 3	33	27.5	27.5	63.5
Secretaries	11	9.2	9.2	73.0
Executive Clerical Officers	19	15.8	15.8	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Field Survey March, 2015*

On the official status table 4 above indicates that 3.3percent were permanent secretaries, directors/deputies and assistant's respondents were 5.8percent. Principal Managers were 8.3percent, senior managers and managers were 12.5percent while deputy and assistant managers were 17.5percent. The Administrative Officers 1, 2 and 3 were 27.5percent. Secretary cadre respondents were 9.2percent while executive clerical officer were 15.8percent.

Table 5: Portrays the frequency and percentage of civil Service professionals finding high fulfillment of intrinsic and extrinsic job expectations

	Job Expectation	Frequency	Percent	Fulfillment Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Use of skills and capabilities	30	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Job is challenging	15	12.5	12.5	8.1
	Application of creative energies	9	7.5	7.5	16.2
	Freedom to use initiatives	4	3.3	3.3	23.0
	Have a good salary	10	8.3	8.3	37.8
	Have job security	33	27.5	27.5	63.5
	Experience fast promotion	3	2.5	2.5	73.0

Sense of prestige from job	16	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	120	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Field Survey March, 2015*

Respondents were requested to indicate the level of fulfillment of their pre-employment intrinsic and extrinsic job expectations. Table 5 above shows that the perceptions of fulfillment of both intrinsic and extrinsic job expectations of civil servants is generally low. However, since we are concerned with work content, we shall concentrate on the intrinsic aspect. Only 30 or 25percent of the respondents expressed high fulfillment of their expectation to use their skills and capabilities, while 9 or 7.5percent experience opportunity to apply their creative potentialities. Respondents' experiences on both job challenges 15 or 12.5percent and use of initiatives 4 or 3.3percent are also very low. These go to justify the proposition that work content in Nigerian civil service is low. This is surprising considering the enormous development challenges confronting the country. The civil service as an instrument of policy and programme implementation required that incumbents of job positions experience great challenges. Instead, the data in table 1 portray the civil service as a string of organizations where not much takes place in the lives of employees. The experience of a young British trained engineer employed in a state ministry of works further justifies this position. He said;

*I trained in industrial engineering in Britain but here I am in an air-conditioned room doing nothing. I have applied for secondment to a number of places which are busier, but they (his employers) refused. Government wastes money training people but not utilizing them.*

The above response demonstrates lack of challenge from one's job. To further probe respondents' perceptions of their work, who expressed that their skills and capabilities were ineffectively utilized were asked to state why they experienced ineffective utilization. Apart from the usual lack of resources, lack of challenges and routine nature of jobs, vocabularies like 'dull', 'redundant', 'humdrum assignments', 'low activity' and 'office-ridden' were used to describe jobs. This pejorative description of work tended to be the same among all the ministry employees. A critical but impartial observer of work in ministries may not hesitate to confirm that those descriptions are in most cases appropriate hence they are further evidence of low work content which could bring about indiscipline among workers.

The War Against Indiscipline (WAI) which was initiated by Government in 1984 aimed at effecting positive changes in all aspects of behaviour of Nigerians including inculcation of positive work ethic. Cases of indiscipline at workplace abound. But discipline or indiscipline at work is more a consequence of variations in the sector in which individuals are employed than a matter of personality attributes of employees. In other words, work discipline is primarily a function of the structural/organizational context in which work is done. The discipline or undisciplined worker is reacting to his work environment. Thus, work attitude may vary between private and public organizations, between private commercial organizations and their public counterparts or even between civil service organizations and public commercial enterprises.

Workers in the Nigeria civil service portray two conspicuous features of indiscipline which we have termed “the culture of unexplained absences”, and “the culture of corridor congregation”. The culture of unexplained absence is the tendency of workers to be absent from their offices with their colleagues, superior or subordinates unable to give account of their whereabouts. The incidents of unexplained absence are least at the top levels of the organizations (permanent secretaries, directors of units and their deputies) but tend to be widespread among middle and low level of the senior staff as well as the junior category. Officials at the top levels of ministries are busy because they attend most of the meetings, make most of the decisions, issue most of the instructions, receive and evaluate reports from lower cadre employees. But in the same ministry you will see many people senior and junior staff alike sitting down, doing nothing. Sometimes they may read newspapers, sleep, engage in storytelling and conversations, buy and sell or take very long self approved breaks during office hours.

The second feature of work-indiscipline in the Nigeria civil service is, “the culture of corridor congregation”. This is the habit of some workers, (clerks, messengers, executive officers, technicians and sometimes senior technical and administrative staff) to form small conversational gatherings along office corridors or outside office buildings. It is common for a visitor to observe enormous non work-related or unofficial interactions and movements of people along office corridors and around the ministry environment. Upon inquiry, the observer may discover that a significant number of interacting persons are employees’ of the ministry. It is also a common phenomenon to enter a section of a ministry and see that out of about 10 people in an office room; only between 2 or 4 are consistently busy. The rest are either idle or perform skeletal tasks at intervals. These seemingly abnormal work behaviours indicate among other things low work content in the civil service.

Table 6: Portray respondents’ views on whether they are effectively utilized by rank in organization by sector of employment.

	<b>Sector of Employment</b>	High %	Middle %	Low %	Total
Valid	Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare	86	65.	75	63
	Ministry of Agriculture	90	35	12.5	8.1
	Ministry of Local Government and Chieftaincy Affairs	100	67	40	56
	Ministry of Information	83	53	53	60
	Ministry of Justice	100	71	77	78
	Ministry of Works	57	71	77	78

Total	120	100.0	100.0	100.0
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Source: Field Survey March, 2015

That very top civil servants are lopsidedly busier than their lower level counterparts is verified in table 6 above which shows civil servants perception of effective utilization of their skills and capabilities by organizational status across ministries increases. Conversely, effective utilization decreases as one move down the hierarchy. This finding is in line with Igbokwe-Ibeto (2012); Briggs (2007) and Cohen’s (1981) contention that in Nigeria public bureaucracies, top officials are over-worked while the lower one are underused. It is important to recall that these respondents are highly trained professionals most of who possess university postgraduate degrees and whose skills are of great importance to the growth and development of the nation. For instance, in a recent conversation in a ministry, an administrative officer was asked by the author why he was reading a book in the office at 10am. The admin officer replied, “My boss does not give me any job so I use the opportunity to prepare for my part time degree programme”. Such a response is not surprising and should not be, because the main index of participation in a bureaucracy is division of labour. But once you have divided labour and some do not get a share they spontaneously find alternative channels for their time and energies. Therefore, the popular belief that civil servants engage in private business primarily because of the poor financial remunerations in the service should be properly re-examined.

Also, it is important to note that the limited responsibility or low work activity or still high degree of idleness and redundancy observed in the ministries may sometimes be a result of the rigid hierarchical structure in which decisions and actions are centered at the top levels of organizational hierarchy. At other hand, it may be a function of unclear goals and therefore unclear definition of tasks and responsibilities.

Furthermore, limited responsibility and employee idleness and the consequent worker indiscipline may result from limited work resources, overpopulated work force, or a reaction to poor financial incentives. Although Igbokwe-Ibeto & Aremo (2013) share the sentiment that financial reward is an important worker incentive. However, financial reward is ineffective as a single motivational factor without a corresponding provision of responsibilities and work activities. Put differently, absence of responsibility and tasks will always lead to employee idleness and underutilization of skills and capabilities irrespective of how much money the worker is given (Ukaegbu, 1995). It is along this line of thought that Fajana (2001) observe that Nigeria wages policy in the public sector, over the years is an instrument for the reduction of income inequalities rather than an instrument to increase productivity.

**Work Content in the Nigerian Civil Service and Sustainable Development: The Way Forward**

We have identified low work content as one of the challenges facing Nigeria civil service in its efforts towards achieving sustainable development. On a prima facie basis, these challenges may appear so huge and complex. Yet, they are not insurmountable. With concerted efforts and dedication to the course of Nigeria's development, what seem to be an ugly situation can be turned around for the good of the country. In this section of the discourse, we shall examine some steps which could be taken to address the low work content and employee idleness in the civil service through the instrumentality of enhanced work content.

The problem of employee idleness, redundancy, unexplained absence, corridor congregation and other negative work behaviour already outlined will continue as long as the observed over-staffing remains unchecked. Therefore, in addition to the current positional reforms, the civil service should undergo a process of pruning through we call 'Decongestion by Alternative Employment (DAE)' or 'Decongestion by Transfer of Service (DTS)', or still 'Decongestion by Substitute Employment (DSE)', whichever phrase that best captures the intention. This invariably will address the issue of over bloated civil service and the right sizing/merger of Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) as recommended by 2012 Stev Oronsaye Committee Report.

Decongestion by Alternative Employment ( DAE) begins with a rigorous study of the quantity of tasks in respective ministries after which the number of people who can be fully engaged in these tasks is estimated. The study of task quantity will include knowledge of the number of positions required for various categories of tasks and several questions will come to mind. Do the three typists in a unit have enough materials to type each day or even each week? Do the four administrative officers in a department or in one zone of a ministry say, the headquarters have enough activity to fully occupy them? What about the accountants, accounts clerks, principal and assistant engineers etc? Does the volume of work performed in each unit each day fully engage and challenge the number of incumbents of each of these positions? Do some units have peak seasons in which work pressure may demand more hands?

After the estimated volume of work and appropriate number of workers has been determined through job analysis, the extra employees' should remain employees of their respective ministries while arrangement to transfer them to other government establishments is made. By this is meant giving the excess civil service staff alternative employment in government industries, commercial houses, agricultural farms, social service units etc.

Alternative employment will be systematic and general as follows. When government establishes new ventures, 20percent of the employees' should be taken from the pool of excess manpower from the civil service. 80percent should be made up of new entrants from the labour market. This differential takes into consideration the high level of unemployment in the country. Also, it is imperative to state that recruitment of civil servants into such new ventures should not be automatic but merit based.

They should be formally examined and interviewed to determine their suitability for the new job. Successful candidates should be given jobs while unsuccessful ones should remain in the ministry awaiting future openings and interviews. One thing is clear from this; decongestion by

alternative employment does not mean retrenchment and total loss of job as recommended by 2012 Orosanye Committee Report.

It could be strongly argued that recruiting civil servants into other sectors could lead to injection of the negative work ethic of the former into the later. But it has also been found from empirical studies of Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Agboola (2013) that work attitude tends to be influenced more by the organizational context and sector in which work is performed than the personality attributes of employees. Specifically, Igbokwe-Ibeto, Akhakpe & Agboola (2013) found that once employment was obtained in a specific organizational context, individual levels of performance soon conformed to the characteristics of that context. Therefore, an enthusiastic, conscientious, diligent and resourceful person may become dull, idle, nonchalant, unimaginative and apathetic if he or she was employed in an unchallenged work environment. Conversely, an apparently lazy, slow, weak and apathetic individual may become active, aggressive, strong and resourceful if he or she was employed in an environment where job challenges are high.

A more fundamental argument is what are the prospects for a successful Decongestion by Alternatives Employment (DAE) given the economic policy and ideology of the present transformation government and the Orosanye pending report? We recall that the DAE suggests that excess civil service manpower or personnel be channeled into other government establishments. But there is the policy of privatization in which government sells its economic investments to private businessmen and decides not to invest in new ones. Apart from privatization of industrial investments, government has recently indicated its intention to remove itself from agricultural production, a sector which could have also acted as receptacle for the excess staff of a decongested civil service. Therefore the policy of government disengagement from ownership of economic enterprises will not be in the interest of DAE.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

The issue of work content in the Nigerian civil service has been espoused with an attempt at clarifying the intellectual “cobweb” surrounding the low work content in the Nigerian civil service and its implication on sustainable development. In addition, searchlight was also beamed on the theoretical framework for a better understanding of the concepts under investigation. Thus, labour productivity theory underpinning the paper has been examined as captured by scholars. An attempt has also been made to establish the interface between work content and sustainable development.

From the analysis made, it is obvious that the civil service/ public sector have an important role to play in the development of any given society especially in the quest of bringing about social change from the traditional methods of doing things to the evolvement of modernity. Thus, our conclusion and central argument in this paper is that much of the idleness and low activity found among civil service employee is significantly caused by low work-content and apparent over-staffing of public sector organizations. As earlier stated, a series of reforms in Nigeria have concentrated on power relations, reorganization of units and redistribution of departmental functions. Reforms on civil service work content and physical conditions of work are yet to take place. Some analysts may suggest increase in delegation of roles, responsibility and authority to subordinates as a way to reduce idleness. But delegation of roles and responsibility may not explain why three typists deployed in a unit are simultaneously idle. Neither can delegation explain why 6 out of 12

workers in an office are idle yet the three busy ones do not complain of work pressure. Delegation of roles and responsibilities does not help us understand why a stenographer directly attached to a principal assistant secretary does not perform any task several days of the week.

One of the implications of low work content in the Nigerian civil service is that, the quests for sustainable development in Nigeria will for long remain a mirage unless the current employees' idleness in the service occasioned by lack of activity is urgently addressed through enhanced work content. Yet, since most of the works are concentrated at the top level and only very few people find themselves at the peak of civil service organizations, most of the middle and low level professionals as well as other skilled and unskilled labour overstaffed will remain underutilized.

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