

## **PUNTLAND CIVIL SERVANT REFORM: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

**MOHAMED AHMED MOHAMED**  
(BURTINLE)

Puntland State University, Puntland-Somalia  
[mburtinle10@gmail.com](mailto:mburtinle10@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Challenges arising in the implementation of the civil servant reform program in Puntland include internal and structural challenges such as lack of willingness and commitment, delays and slow review process, weak institutions, negative perception of the reform. Policy, political and cultural challenges include lack of policy implementation, nepotism and patronage. Recruitment challenges include lack of proper resource planning and limited capacity of the current civil servants. Opportunities created by the civil servants reform are improved government institutions image, enhanced status of government employees, better working environment. Additionally, improved incentives and clarity of roles will attract talents. Gender equality will be enhanced and improved workers welfare through increased incomes, pensions and health insurances. The reforms will also protect employees from job insecurities and harassments which affects their wellbeing. The reforms will improve attendance which means that civil servants will work for the citizens while they are in office.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Civil service reforms started to prevail in the 1980s in advanced capitalist democracies as a response to the realization of poor performance of civil service evidenced in expanded government size, over expenditure in wage bills and unaccountability of civil servants among others. The poor performance problems called for reform strategies. However, the strategies for dealing with this problem varied between nations considerably in scope, orientation, and accomplishments (Lane, 1997). Following its global spread, Civil Service Reforms (CSR) were increasingly being adopted in several African countries. The idea of CSRs was started since the independence of African countries, some of the countries they focus on how they improve their public service through creating good governance and inforced the judiciary system as well as improving their civil service delivery.

According to Kithinji (2002), in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) like other regions of the world, CSR has evolved over time. In a general perspective, there have been three waves of CSR in the region. First phase of CSR in the 1980s and early 1990s focuses on structural reforms and most of the reforms were funded by donors. These included retrenching redundant staff and removal of ghost workers from the payrols with the aim to cut down public expenditure. In the late 1990s, CSR in the SSA focused on capacity building; it was deemed that lack of capacity of the civil servant was the root cuase of the problem in the public sector. Interventions intended to build capacity of the civil servants include: skill development, performance-based incentives, improving the work environment and proper budgetary allocations for improved operation (Polidano, 2001).

The third phase started about 2000 with the particular focus on improvement in service delivery. In this last phase, result-oriented service delivery, transparency and accountability and new public management practices were pronounced (Polidano, 2001). However, Polidano notes that there are considerable overlaps. Some countries still have a pronounced element of the first and/or second wave while moving into the third wave in their reform programme.

Generally, Africa has experienced a low level of public service delivery due to poor or insufficient of resources, misallocation of resources, ineffective service delivery and corruption that exist in most public sectors in the government institutions. In Puntland State of Somalia, CSR remained a prioity since its establishment in 1998 and the successive governments faced

numerous challenges for the implementation of successful CSR mainly due to the resource constraints and absence of political willingness (Olowu, 2010).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

From its establishment, Puntland restored public institutions after the collapse of the central state in 1991 and civil servants were recruited to deliver public services. However, the civil servants were not recruited based on formal procedures rather based on clan quotas and recommendations by the key traditional elders and other informal powerholders. Most of the civil servants earned low wages and worked with very meagre budgets. These conditions affected service delivery and the performance of the civil servants.

Recognizing challenges, the World Bank partnered with the government and launched Puntland Civil Service Reform Strategy (2015-2017). The Strategy is expected to bring tangible changes in the structure and functions of the government. Recruitment of civil servants based on merit is one of the ambitious objectives of this reform strategy. However, the main challenge could be deeply embedded clan quotas. It is against this backdrop that this study aims to establish the challenges and opportunities of Puntland civil service sector reform.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

#### **1.3.1 General Objectives**

The general objective of this study is to investigate possible challenges and opportunities of Puntland civil servant reform program

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To investigate the possible challenges arising in the implementation of the civil servant reform program in Puntland
- ii. To assess the opportunities created by the civil servant reform program in Puntland

#### **1.3.3 Research Questions**

- i. What are the main challenges created with the implementation of civil servant reform programs?
- ii. What are the key opportunities introduced by the civil servant reform program in Puntland?

#### **1.4 Justification of the Study**

Civil servants are persons employed in the government civil service and works in any ministry or departments of the government. The focus of reforms is on improving service delivery and building citizens' faith in democratic institutions and governance mechanisms through effective engagement of civil servants. Literature has been written on the civil servant reform there are gaps on challenges and opportunities in the context of Puntland. The recommendations of this research will benefit the policy makers, civil service commission, government as a whole and community at large by showcasing the challenges and opportunities of Puntland civil servant reform.

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Historical Perspectives of Civil Service Reform**

Civil service reform is one of the most intractable yet important challenges for governments and their supporters today. It touches not only on government's very purpose for existence but also on some of its most sensitive, protected areas. The civil service is the backbone of the state by supporting or undermining the entire system of governance. It therefore supports many other types of reform. The history of civil service reform can be categorized into three phases. In the first phase, roughly taking place in the 1980s, donors supported various aspects of institutional development as they began to recognize the civil service's crucial role in changing policy.

Following the collapse of Communism and the failure of many of the aid programmes of the previous phase, the 1990s saw a growing consensus that the key to civil service reform was to minimize the role of the state. This phase also brought unintended results, and since the late 1990s, donors have focused on promoting accountable systems whose leaders understand and support the reforms they are implementing. Civil service reform generally includes reforms in areas such as remuneration, human resources, downsizing and operational efficiencies. It is the aspect of public administration (or public sector) reform which also includes public financial management, leadership and policy making, and service delivery that receives the least analytical attention, even as it touches on the most basic functions of the system ( Sarah, 2014).

Most analysts would say that, on the whole, civil service reform has been relatively unsuccessful, especially as compared with public financial management. This shortcoming is

measured both in terms of a weak record of meeting objectives and a lack of evidence that outcomes have improved (Evans, 2008). Many reasons have been given for why civil service reform has not made greater strides, including the interdependencies and complexity of the system, the conflicting interests of stakeholders combined with the sensitivity of the changes that must take place, the delayed and sometimes ambiguous nature of results and what caused them, a lack of consensus on what the most important civil service objectives should be, and an absence of a theoretical model to guide practitioners in how to approach and monitor reform (UNDP, 2004; Evans, 2008; Scott, 2011). Regardless of the reasons, civil service reforms have been ad hoc at best and misguided at their worst.

The Puntland state through its CSRs programme, which is supported by the international partners, continues to improve its systems to support the development of the state as well as to improve public service provision by the public institutions. To this effect, Puntland state has taken the initiative to improve the capacity of public institutions. Based on this initiative, the government has adopted reform programs to promote and improve for public service. Ministry of Labour, Youth and Sport (MoLY&S) and Puntland Civil Service Commission (PCSC) are the responsible organs for supervising, coordinating and guiding the implementation of CSRs. According to the Puntland civil service reform strategy (PCS, 2014).

Currently the size of civil service is considered unbalanced and not in accordance with the functions and structures of the government, with some institutions seeming to be overstaffed and other understaffed both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Further, the Government has also observed that the organisational structures are outdated and need restructuring in accordance with clearly spelt out mandates and functions, and to implement national development policies in their right perspective. To improve the civil servants, the necessary legal framework should be in place. Much needed frameworks include: recruitment policies (Duh, 2016)

Recruitment of the civil servants does not have follow any policies, neither it is based on merit. The Act 5 which regulates civil services and recruitment is very old and requires review and amendments. Systems for HR Development, recruitment, placement, promotion, transfer, and succession planning for replacement after retirement of civil servants required a complete revision and replacement with modern tools of HR management and database.

The reform programs are not comprehensive, training programmes are conducted using the facilities in Puntland State University. The facilities and training curriculum does not adequately address the training needs of civil servants. Puntland Civil Service Reform Strategy (PCS, 2014), is one document which aims to bring tangible changes in the structure and functions of the government and the impact will be on civil servants' work life and continuance in civil service and retirement with reasonable benefits. The focus of reforms is on improving service delivery and building citizens' faith in democratic institutions and governance mechanisms through effective engagement of civil servants. Successful implementation depends on sharing the program and approach with all the implements and other stakeholders. An advocacy plan will be drafted and implemented for sharing the implementation program with all the stakeholders. All citizens of the state are also expected to know what the government is doing to enhance service delivery, create job opportunities, and strengthening the public administration.

Puntland Government is one of the largest employer in Puntland or the second largest employer. The authority pays salaries to an estimated total of 19,400 security people, comprising police, Custodial Corps and Darawish and about 6200 civil servants. According to Puntland Good Governance Bureau (PGGB) Commission 47% of the current civil servants have been directly recruited by employing institutions while 13% have no recruitment records whatsoever (PCS, 2014). Little attempt has being made to address the overstaffing issue – the fact that the fiscal resources are not fully available to employ all the staff. The number of civil servants rose from 1,141 in 2002 to 6,200 in 2013.

Extremely low remuneration levels and the lack of civil service management policies and motivation measures have further exacerbated the problem. These have caused, among others, large number of ghost workers and chronic absenteeism in the Puntland civil service. Despite all these inefficiencies, a significant amount of the total revenue of Puntland was spent on the civil service. With Civil Service, reform and right sizing the government could lower its expenditure and that would have far-reaching implications for the economy of Puntland. In addition to this, it would ensure a merit based recruitment and effective civil service that would give a value for Puntland taxpayer's money (PCS, 2014)

The current Puntland Government has made Civil Service Reform (CSR) one of its top three priorities. There have been several studies in the past on civil service reforms, including ones

commissioned by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) and Puntland Good Governance Bureau (PGGB) as well as other international partner agencies. However, it is a difficult exercise considering government's bloated status, the high unemployment, political nature of civil service staffing as well as the infrastructure and the institutions of governance. Puntland has an unemployment rate of almost 75% with the state being the highest single employer (Duh, 2016).

State revenue, which is largely dependent on customs taxation is low. Civil service reforms also have to take into account constitutional provisions governing the distribution of powers between the central government and the institutions of local government (PCS, 2014).

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research employed qualitative approach. The researcher used key informative interviews and desk reviews. The qualitative research approach is one in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based primarily on constructivist perspectives that is the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed with an intent of developing theory or pattern (Amin, 2005). The study interviewed a total of 30 interviewees including employees and directors of government agencies; including; MoPIC, MoLY&S, MoL&R, MoAI, Office of the president, PCSC, Puntland State Bank. Snowballing and purposive sampling was used. Clan composition and gender were considered during the selection process. The researcher used semi-structured questions to guide interviews.

Both primary and secondary data was collected. Secondary data was collected through deskwork, both published and unpublished sources. The interviews were conducting in the morning hours from 9:00-12:30 based on convenience time and venue for the interviewer. Data was collected with in January 2018. After data collection, data was transcribed, codes and patterns were identified. Data organization was guided by the research questions. Categories were created based on the research questions.

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Challenges Arising in the Implementation Of the Civil Servant Reform Program in Puntland**

#### **4.1.1 Internal and Structural Challenges to the Implimentation of Civil Service Reforms in Puntland**

Lack of williginess and commitment; interview participants were in consensus that the main challenge facing civil service reform is lack of williginess and commitment from the government sectors and officials that were supposed to undertake such reform was identified as the main challenge facing civil service reforms, according to interview participants. Sekar and Hirve (2007) stated that reforms were not achieved objective as intended due to various challenges like organizational resistance, insufficient resource, and lack of top management commitment, misconception of reforms and lack of adequate training.

Delays and slow review process; previous attempts to induce reforms in the sector were hampered by delays, as stated interview participants from Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) “ *the recruitment of the second batch of the civil servants was supposed to be finalized on November last year 2017, unfortunately less than 10% of the above mentioned activity has been achieved so far*”.<sup>1</sup> The delay could be caused by lack of commitment and poltical will from the government side.

Conflict between stakeholder; the third challenges faced in the implementation of the reform program was said to be conflict between stakeholders. Key stakeholders in the reform including parliament, community leders, civil society and donors never agreed on what type of reform is required. According to the views of participantst the main source of conflicts was clan based quotas, overlap of mandates among the government institution, outdated laws and regulations and Inconsistence and lack of synergy between the UN and INGOs who support the government in terms of Capacity building for the civil servants.

Weak institutions; government institutions that were supposed to spreadhead the reform remain weak and underfunded. For example,the policies/ laws approved the legislatures remain unimplemented. For example, Law No. 65. Participants viewed that for reform to take

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<sup>1</sup> interview, January, 2018



place, key government institutions should be empowered, made transparent and funded sufficiently<sup>2</sup>.

Negative perception of the reform; the participants identified negative perception towards reforms as the constraint to the successful reforms. Some of the reasons for the perception were found to be valid, for example less skilled civil servants feared for their jobs<sup>3</sup>. However, other reasons were found to be illegitimate, one of the participants from MoLY&S identified that and said 'if the position is advertised, there is higher possibility that new candidate is employed due to his qualification and competence and this is why the reform itself is reluctant by the government'. The fear coupled with weak implementation were opined as a challenge to reforms.<sup>4</sup>

Right away during the research there was a clear sense that there was a negative perception in not just the recruitment process of Puntland Civil Servants Employees but with the overall reform process as well. The participants said, and in a way were somewhat on same line or in agreement that in order for such policy to undertake and succeed, we need stronger government institutions and real commitment from involved stakeholders. They don't see that, as they put it, of happening anytime soon.

#### **4.1.2 Policy, Political and Cultural Challenges**

Lack of policy implementation; participants talked about what is known as "*shelved policy*", policies that were put into law are now just no more than a document that is in some cabinet shelf of some or few government institutions but with no real meaning to work and undertaken as it does not guide any policy matter. According to our research participants, reform policies have the same fate of shelved policies, they tend to be shelved with no merit and meaning whatsoever. Thus this has resulted that the government legislators approve policies and laws but their implementation was always on question.

Nepotism and patronage; clan based quota system have existed and still functions in our system of staffing process, interviewees believed that nepotism and patronage are common in the civil servant staffing. Political interference in the process of personnel administration and recruitment lead ineffective supervision and corruption. The resulting apathy has in turn led to

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<sup>2</sup> interview, January , 2018

<sup>3</sup> interview, January , 2018

<sup>4</sup> interview, January, 2018

unauthorized and unreasonable absenteeism, lateness, idleness and notably, poor workmanship (Salisu, 2001). The clan based quota system has become very much a normal thing in the system of governance ever since the collapse of the central government in 1991. Pressure from some of government staff was also challenge facing the implementation of the reform. Research participant said some government officials, such as MPs and Ministerial level cabinet members, have at times and still do pressure staffing agencies or whoever is hiring a civil servant staff to give his or her “person” the job. This is possibly due to the clan based quotas or through nepotism or patronage or just as a power favour of “do me this and I will do you that”<sup>5</sup>.

#### **4.1.3 Recruitment Challenges**

Lack of Proper Resource Planing; research participants mentioned that there is a lack of comprehensive human resource planning in the reform. Human resource planning should preceed civil servant reforms. The existing human resource offices lack the capacity to strategise and assign roles and responsibilities properly. The roles of the current civil servants overlap, while there are also duplicate of positions which creates unnecessary competition between civil servants.

Limited capacity of the current civil servants; research participants were on consensus that most of the current civil servants lack capacity. One interview participant said, “ *when government officials are asked why this is a major problem in most our institutions, the answer is always the same and its lack of funds for capacity building trainings and programs*”<sup>6</sup>. According to Radin (2003) capacity building is seen as a core instrument to strengthen the capabilities of officials of different, usually lower, jurisdictions to manage programmes on their own and to fulfil newly assigned responsibilities.

In summary the above mentioned factors seem to be challenges facing the implementation of the Puntland civil servants reform strategy as it was highlighted by the research respondents.

#### **4.2 Opportunities Created by the Civil Servants Reform**

The research participants were enthusiastic about civil service reforms in the country. In fact, some mentioned that that if civil service reform is done, this would be a major milestone with lasting impact on good governance. Reform opportunities listed by the participants included:

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<sup>5</sup> interview, January , 2018

<sup>6</sup> interview, January , 2018

improved government institutions image, enhanced status of government employees, better working environment and improved quality service delivery.

#### **4.2.1 Improved the Civil Servant Skills**

Career development opportunities, research participants were on the view that CSRs may open windows of career opportunities for civil servants. They believed that long-term trainings and career paths could be created.

#### **4.2.2 Moral and Motivational Improvement**

Improved incentives and clarity of roles will attract talents; generally limited skills and low incentives negatively affect the mood of civil servants, while unclear roles, low incentives and overstaffing in the government institutions discourage skilled work force from the civil service sector. Participants opined that successful civil sectors reforms will come with better services and disciplines which is likely to attract competent workforce for the civil sector.

Gender equality; the current clan based recruitment does not favour for women and minorities. The participants believed that gender inequality issues can be better addressed through merit based recruitment. Similarly, improved work ethics and morale is likely to reduce sexual harassment.

#### **4.2.3 Improved Workers Welfare**

Findings revealed that civil service reforms will improve the welfare of civil servants and their families through increased incomes, pensions and health insurances. The reforms will also protect employees from job insecurities and harassments which affects their wellbeing.

#### **4.2.4 Improved Service Delivery**

Participants stated relationship between reforms and improved service delivery. A key informant participant mentioned that , “ reforms will improve attendance which means that civil servants will work for the citizens while they are in office”.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, increased attendance could mean that communication and collaboration between different institutions and departments will increase.

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<sup>7</sup> interview, January , 2018

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The study was conducted to investigate the challenges and opportunities of Puntland civil servant reform. The study concluded that poor commitment, delay of planned activities, conflict between the stakeholders, weak institutions, poor implementation of government policy, inefficiencies caused by clan quota based recruitment, fear of reforms, lack of comprehensive human resource planning, limited of understanding of the reform and political interference are the main challenges to the reform efforts. On the other hand, reform could come with a host of benefits including attraction of talented work force, improved service, improved morale and welfare of the civil servants. Additionally, improved image of government and government institutions, better work environment and reduced sexual harassment included opportunities believed that reforms will bring.

Despite the challenges mentioned, it emerged that civil servant reform is beneficial to the citizens as well as civil servants. Of course, reforms will face resistance from different stakeholders as its immediate benefits may not be obvious to everyone, but it is high time government introduced serious and well thought civil servant reform programmes.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

The study recommended that Individuals and institutions responsible for the civil service reform must be trained on change management while they should understand the objective and overarching goal of the reform. Effective communication, limited or no intervention from top and political leaders and sustaining the reforms programs are also important for successful reforms. Successful civil service reform require the political will and support of politicians and top leadership. The reformers should take into account to develop human resource planning and development. Issues of pension, succession and career paths should be clear and guided by concrete policies.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My sincerely and complete gratitude goes to almighty Allah.. I am grateful to the staff of all the selected government institutions in Puntland who participated in the research. Special thanks to the offices that spared their precious time in answering my questionnaire. Special thanks should go to my beloved wife, Mrs. Anisa Farah for her support which encouraged me

to concentrate on this research article. I would also like to express my thanks to Kaalo Aid & Development for giving funding opportunity. Lastly, my warm regards and blessings go to all of those who have made a positive contribution in my life.

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