

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM AND DECENTRALIZATION POLICY IN GUINEA-BISSAU

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Abstract

The paper investigated the challenging issues of public administration reform and decentralization policy in Guinea-Bissau and analysed the weakness of the administrative system and the failure of the state. The paper critically looked at the politicization of public administration and the misuse of political power as inimical to public administration. The paper also examined the significance of the separation of administration from politics, and concluded that politicians' lack of administrative skills and unpreparedness to manage state affairs and direct the process of public administration reform. Thus, challenging problems in reform of public administration and administrative decentralization in Guinea-Bissau require not only rethinking the "operational scheme" of the state machinery, but also the ethic and discipline of the state to reconstitute and modernize the administrative system. Therefore it is recommended that there should be effective and profound reform in security and defence sectors by adjusting it to modern forces with qualified soldiers, and a relentless fight against acts of corruption, cronyism and nepotism in the system with an effective legal system.

Key words: public administration reform, decentralization, politicization, Guinea-Bissau

Introduction

Public administration reform implies a comprehensive interpretation, decentralization, de-concentration, de-bureaucratization, and privatization of government agencies for effective and efficient people-oriented service. The term is also usually associated with remodelling and an improvement of management of public issues for better governance. Because of this inclusive connotation, reform of administrative system has emerged as a global matter. Guinea-Bissau has an exceedingly centralized administrative system. However, the public administration system control has been notably weak to the range that politicians often manipulate and mismanage the system.

Guinea-Bissau's public administration centralization is exclusively the establishment of the country's political elite. The bureaucrats have enjoyed decisive means of at least discretionary and regulatory powers in administrative system. The leadership mostly issues managerial ground rule and circulars including legislative bills or kinds of policy initiatives. The leadership occupies and exercising administrative powers than the bureaucrats. There is no clear separation of politics and administration. The administrative system has made bureaucrats become a mere picture hanging on

the wall with illustrative role.

In Guinea-Bissau politicians usually play a key role in the country's public administration. Generally, they serve two functions in the government - executive and legislative; all government policies and bills are formulated and implemented by them. The executive bureaucrats are appointed under political conviction and party loyalty which make the administrative system very fragile. There's absolutely no meritocracy policy based on ability and talent or on any qualification like career achievements and/or academic recognition for appointing bureaucrats to public office. One just needs to be a party loyalist. Participating actively in party activities is considered great qualification and distinguishing merit to get government top-job; even if one is non-literate he/she can still get minister. According to Platforma Guiné Mindjor, a civil society organization which calls for the eradication of illiteracy among the leaders of Guinea-Bissau, majority of deputies in Guinea-Bissau's National People's Assembly are illiterate or semi-illiterate (DW, February 21, 2014). How is it possible for an illiterate deputy to appreciate and interpret the programme of government or the state budget? The biggest dilemma about the system is that the leaders do not last long in office and bureaucrats are constantly changed in accordance with the leadership change. Each leadership comes to change the bureaucrats in conformity with their own political convictions or on the basis of nepotism, favouritism and cronyism (Ture, 2015).

For this reason, centralization of power in public administration is one of the ways politicians take advantage of state powers to control the system and seize unlawful gains and misappropriation of public funds. Certainly, the reform of public administration with decentralized system would become a serious challenge and threat to politician's power and their special interests.

Indeed, ordinary citizens as representative of local residents, civil society, labour unions, and business leaders of the country have demonstrated increasing worries over the administrative reform and demanded a decentralization policy. In Guinea-Bissau People believe that political leaders have acquired gratuitous powers to the extent that they have abused of power. The Guinean Human Rights League posits that, "the waves of corruption have been dominating the functioning of the State apparatus and that perpetrators remain unpunished, without any accountability (Bambaram di Padida, Decemebr 16, 2016). For most of social groups, decentralization of administrative system is one of the major methods to reduce influence of power. In their understanding, it is also a better way to developing the governmental vigour of the country. In Guinea-Bissau there is a small group of corrupt people, but they are extremely dangerous and untouchable with power to do everything atrocious to just protect their private interest.

Public Administration Reform

Public administration is to explore what government can appropriately and prosperously do, and how it can do these positive things by properly executing government programmes. The UNDP (2006) defined public administration as, "the aggregate machinery (policies, rules, procedures,

systems, organizational structures, personnel and so forth) funded by the State budget and in charge of the management and direction of the affairs of the executive government, and its interaction with other stakeholders in the State, society and external environment.” For Wilson (1887) Public Administration is the detailed and systematic execution of public law. While Leonard (1926), defined Public Administration as “the management of men and materials in the accomplishment of the purpose of the state. Dwight (1955) described Public Administration as organizing and managing men and materials to achieve the purpose of government. Caiden (1971) probably gave the simplest definition when he stated that it is the “public domain concerned with the administrative aspects of the resolution of public issues.” The execution of public law and the resolution of public issues are the problems that affect Guinea-Bissau.

Is Administrative Reform in Guinea-Bissau a necessity or an obligation?

Administrative reform is a constant shift to improve state organizational structures and performance at every level of government by adjusting new demands to execute innovative plans for better efficiency. According to Wallis (1989), administrative reform means an induced, permanent improvement in administration. Reform is based on the simple idea that man should not wait for changes to take place naturally but should seek to speed up change by artificial means.

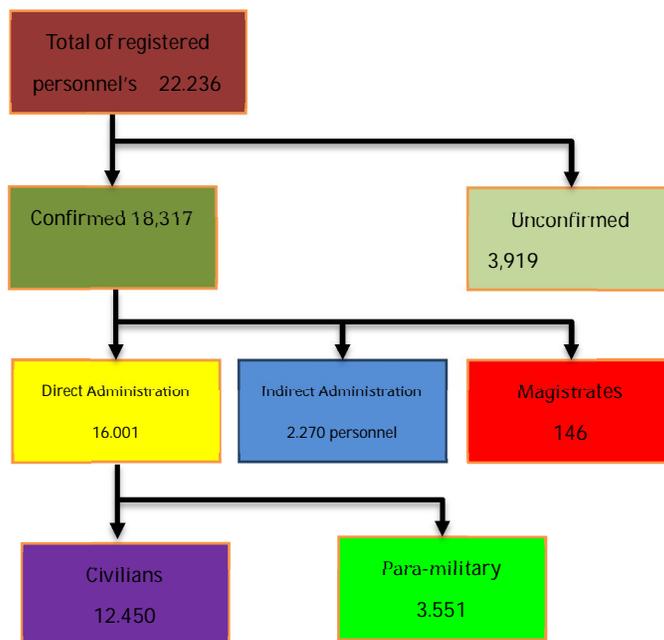
During the four decades as an independent state, Guinea Bissau has faced many troubles in its administrative system from all areas of public administration, notably in security/defence sector, economic sector, agriculture sector, and justice sector. Social areas like education and health sectors are even worse than other sectors. Guinea-Bissau’s administrative system is completely defective (Ture, 2016). The absence of a system for managing jobs and careers acts as an obstacle to the progress towards a true administration for development (Terra Ranka, 2015).

From the colonial administration legacy to the formation of the new state, Guinea-Bissau with Lusophone culture, geographically situated in West Africa and surrounded by majority of Francophone and Anglophone countries influenced by Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) and West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU) both as sub-regional integrated organization, Guinea-Bissau is between twist and turn. Under this reality there are two questions to answer, 1) should Guinea-Bissau remain with Lusophone administrative system that is culturally closer to the history of the country? 2) Should Guinea-Bissau adopt new administrative system, which would be Francophone or Anglophone to facilitate community integration and regional competitiveness? Even after the independence, the country did not change administrative system and still suffered from the system. Former colonial administrative system is creating problems in interpreting legislative procedures in public administration and stagnating development. The nation building in Guinea-Bissau was a failure right from the beginning. Instead of opening public administration to all ethnic groups, the new administration took over colonial structures and remained with same administrative personnel, mainly Creoles (Lopes, 1982).

The administrative system is messy. Personal interests are undermining the Guinean political elites and the civil society is forced to conform to the situation. Ex-Prime Minister of Guinea-Bissau, Bacira Dja, said that, “the state of Guinea Bissau is a prisoner of private interests” (Jornal Conosaba, July 1, 2016). Guinean political class has not put the country's interests first and they are only contributing to “put off the country,” (Blog Ditadura do consenso April 20, 2016). The system is completely manipulated and controlled by thoughtless politicians. There is a need to stop the illusions so that everyone will think about finding the right path to development.

Guinea-Bissau’s Public administration system helps the practice of corruption go smoothly. Since the independence in 1973, the successive governments of Guinea-Bissau have been working without database profile of Public administration. Only in 2010 did Guinea-Bissau conduct its first biometric census of public civil servants. Even with new database, there are still thousands of ghost workers and unconfirmed public civil servants. See figure -1 below

Figure - 1



Source: Ministry of Civil Service, Labour and Modernization of the State, 2010

The system has been working under some doubtful schemes with many “ghost workers” added by some government officers to gain from the payroll system. Strangely, Guinea-Bissau has always been facing the same problem of unbalanced state budget because of ghost workers. The system helped officers to be rich illicitly. The worse thing about the system is that it lacks the rule of law and no control in managing public money. Financial directors use to carry public money to their home for two/three days, then, seat public transportation with millions traveling 100 kilometres to go to pay salary. Tax-collectors, collect taxes while they have two receipts books, first one from

government (original), and his own receipt book, then, he collects one for government and two for himself and his boss. The system works in favour of the corrupt and powerful people. Unfortunately, the legal rules are not applied fairly and consistently to all citizens.

Another big problem of public administration system is standardization and categorization of civil servants in accordance with the level and functions that is based on career and renumbering standardized public civil servants within the public administration system. There is a discriminatory policy among public civil servants, a newly formed jurist salary is higher three times than a medical doctor with 25 years of experience, five times higher than a schoolteacher of 30 years of experience and seven times higher than an agronomic engineer. The system is simply full of silliness. Geraldo Martins, Minister of Economy and Finance of Guinea-Bissau, questioned how it is possible for an agronomic engineer to earn 57,000 XOF, which is equivalent to \$98 USD as monthly salary? (RDN, ANG, November 11, 2014).

Politicization of public administration

Politicization in Guinea-Bissau's public administration is an authentic dilemma. In Guinea-Bissau the party is everything. The state continues without autonomy in public administration and public institutions, which is impeding the institutional harmonization. Worst of all, there is no clear separation of duties between public servant and party member, between business and politics, between politician and leader. In short, between the state and the party.

The successive governments have been doing significant changes in management positions of public administration especially in top-level jobs. Politicization is one of the major roots of deterioration of public administration systems; every party forms government then the first priority of newly appointed ministers will be to premium the party loyal supporters with government top-job positions. According with (Ture, 2015) the political parties became employment agencies in the country. No one talks about the professional career. The greatest awful act in Guinea-Bissau's public administration system is that the list of executive bureaucrats and public servants is prepared from headquarters of political parties. The party has swallowed the state and nepotism is swallowing meritocracy. Citizens are not promoted on the basis of merit or competence, but only by the sympathy or party loyalty.

In 2012, a government of Guinea-Bissau led by Prime-minister Rui Barros with orientation of a political party rewarded 323 of the party supporters to work in Bissau Municipal Government and in an agency known as "Administração dos Portos da Guiné-Bissau" (APGB) without following any public civil service recruitment criteria, rules and laws, and all the employees from one party only. In 2014, newly elected government led by Prime minister, Domingo Simoes Perreira, from another party came with new policy to privatize the agency, and then new government fired all 323 employees. According to Secretary of State of Transport and Communication, Joao Bernardo Vieira, "most of employees were unqualified and the agency was overcrowded, more than seventy percent

of them had no job to do; ten people were employed to do the job of one person and they were earning the wages above the public servants (Jornal-o democrata, 2015; Risipito.com, 2015).

Administration and Politics Dichotomy

The separation of politics from administration has been one of the most crucial issues in public administration. According to Wilson (1887: 18) administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices. In Guinea-Bissau administration is suffering from politics, everything is started and ended by politicians. One of the issues that make government systems defective is non-separation of politics and administration.

Political process involves citizens to elect their leaders and making policy to take care of the will of the people. It is a process of making law according to demand of the people and give government to implement the law. While administration is a process of implementation of the law, which government has to qualify and selects professional public officials for the functions according their areas of specialisation. Waldo (1987) says that, “nothing is more central in thinking about public administration than the nature and interrelations of politics and administration. Nor are the nature and interrelations of politics and administration matters only for academic theorizing. What is more important in the day-to- day, year-to-year, decade-to-decade operation of government than the ways in which politics and administration are conceptualized, rationalized, and related one to the other. There is absolute necessity to separate public administration and politics although politicians and public administration are totally interdependent, but they are separable.

Administrative Decentralization from Central to Local Government

Administrative decentralization can be an integral component to bring government closer to the people to participate in governance process for the development of community and promote closer relationship between rulers and ordinary citizens. One aspect of the efficiency argument contends that decentralized planning and service delivery can more accurately identify and satisfy local needs and expectations, especially those of marginalized populations (Burki, 1999; Cheema & Rondinelli 1983; The World Bank 2001). Administrative perspective decentralization has encountered clear outlines from 1996 by the authorities and laws had passed by the National People’s Assembly, which opted for progressive decentralization process. In terms of administrative organization, the constitutions expressly granted the government administrative functions, and defined it as “the supreme organ of public administration” (art. 96). Government has the competencies to direct the public administration, coordinating and controlling the activities of ministries and other central bodies of the administration and local government (art. 100a).

Recently decentralization is one of the hottest topics in public administration systems and became very important component of governmental innovative methods from central government to

local administration power for promoting politico-administrative, and democratic reform and inclusive governance. In the past decades, precisely since 1990's, World Bank, the United Nations and many others bilateral development agencies have vigorously promoted and encouraged decentralization initiatives. Decentralization advocates assume that bringing the state closer to people allows more public participation in decision-making and ensures transparency and accountability.

Decentralization is the process of rapprochement of the administration to local populations which builds the framework that meet the best conditions for constructive and lasting partnership among government, private sector and civil society to include the excluded and the poorest people in the community. Decentralization brings together the 5 fundamentals components of promoting good governance as: a) openness; b) responsiveness; c) effectiveness; d) transparency and e) accountability. Decentralization process involves "civil society" which is formal and informal groups of citizens formed in association for common interest for the development of the community. Civil society can be extensively perceived as an imperative sector for the collaborative governance and for promoting good governance. According with Connor "civil society consist of a range of local groups, specialized organizations and linkages between them to amplify the corrective voices of civil society as a partner in governance and the market" (Connor, 1999).

The Challenges of Implementing Administrative Decentralization

The decentralization process is based on the transfer of competencies and powers from central government to democratically elected institutions in localities. Therefore the local administration requires qualified staff with capacity and expertise to ensure the implementation of different instruments of governmental decentralization. The big questions to answer are: a) how to decentralize power without qualified personnel in local administration? b) Are local authorities ready for decentralization and to take power from central government? The biggest problem of decentralization process in Guinea-Bissau is high-level of illiteracy rate of local administration personnel. According to Ministry of Territorial Administration and Land Planning of Guinea-Bissau, approximately 80% of local administration civil servants have no high school degree; 0% have bachelor degree; 32% reached primary school grade 4; 27% are completely uneducated cannot read and write; 21% got high school degree; and 21% of employees are in retirement age but still in active (Ministry of Territorial Administration and Land Planning, 2010). See summarized information in table 1.

Table - 1

Personnel situation		
Description	Number of employees	%
Employess with retirement age	126	21%
Employess with Bachelor Level	0	0%
Employees with Vocational School level	10	2%
Employees with high school level	122	21%
Employees with secondary school level (grade 9)	106	18%
Employees with primary school level (grade 4)	189	32%
Uneducated employess (less than grade 4)	162	27%

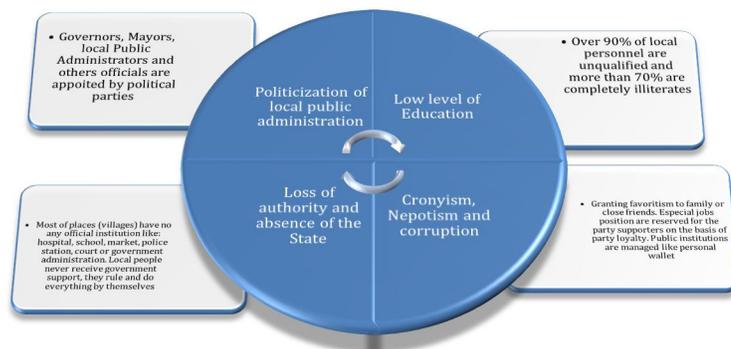
Source: Ministry of Territorial Administration and Land Planning, 2010

The challenging problems in the system is that more than 90% of local administration personnel are unqualified, and more than 70% are completely uneducated, untrained and lack of professional skill. Another big problem is the administration system itself, everything is centralized in capital Bissau: good life, good school, good hospital, good transportation, good market can only be found in Bissau. Even to buy good shoes or a beautiful shirt you need to travel to the capital for your shopping. Because of the centralized system all qualified personnel do not accept to work out of the capital. Living in the capital is better than living in interior of country and nobody wanted to leave the capital to go to work in interior, many people believe that working out of Bissau is synonym of poverty and non-development.

The administration system has many challenging problems and they need to be solve from the roots, and to improve local government personnel working conditions by paying good salary, good isolation allowance with matching subsidies in accordance with localities to motivate qualified professionals to go to work in the interior of the country.

The main challenges ahead in the process of administrative decentralization to local authorities are: i) Politicization of local public administration; ii) Low level of education; iii) Loss of authority and absence of the state; iv) Cronyism, Nepotism and corruption. The main challenging problems presented in figure 2 below.

Figure – 2



Source: The Author

Conclusion and Recommendation

History counts, reality reflects and experience guides. Guinea-Bissau's administrative system has been seriously influenced by the bad legacy of Portuguese colonial rule, which ruled the country over five centuries. The country is on the brink of a colossal failure on the statehood and national sovereignty is in the threat. It would not be so easy to recover the failure of five centuries in just four decades. "It is imperative to modernize the state with reformed decentralize administrative system and reinstall discipline in the public service sector. It is a frightening mediocrity of decades of poor governance, corruption, crimes of all kinds with the certainty of impunity which destroyed public administration, undermined the foundations of economy, salvaged the private sector and neutralized civil society. The current politicians (generation post-independence) have failed to implement least public policies and consequently have left the population without basic services as food, improved drinking water, healthcare, education and access to justice. "It is imperious to rescue the state" from hands of current political elites. They have proven that they cannot solve the problems that they have created by themselves.

Surely, we cannot expect significant changes with a group of the same people, with the same ideology, with the same thought, same practice, and with the same mentality. The generation of politicians post-independence is just simply helpless. Guinea-Bissau requires a fresh generation to save the country. Hence, is it recommended that there should be

- a) Effective and profound reform in Security and Defence sectors by adjusting it to modern forces with qualified soldiers as "Republican Army and Scientific Security Force" committed with the state law;
- b) Relentless fight against acts of corruption, cronyism and nepotism in the system with an effective legal system;

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- c) Rigorous selection process for qualified public servants with “meritocracy spirit” and without political bias;
 - d) Constitutional reform and adjustment in the politico-administrative system which could reflect in local culture reality;
 - e) Separate politics from administration and to respect public service servants career based on the merit and competence or in career achievement;
 - f) Standardize salary of public service servants, and equate civil servants within the system according to the job categories, functions and qualifications;
 - g) Create the law that allows serious control in the collection of public revenues and prevent public money go hand to hand;
 - h) Consolidation and improvement of the quality of management of public finance;
 - i) Decentralize and de-concentrate power from central government to local government;
 - j) Train and guide the public managers to learn adjust public spending according to the variation of revenues;
 - k) Create liability law that charges who "intentionally infringe control standards or economic rules of rational management, causing extensive damage in economic unit of the public sector, as well as those whom accused of mismanagement;
 - l) Adopt a law that should obligate every appointee to public office to hand over his/her personal income statement (Declaration of Income Statement), capital including properties to the Supreme Court;
 - m) Promote incentive for more participation of second and third sectors in development process within the community

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