

**THE CIVIL SERVICE:
REVIVING KEBBI STATE'S
ENGINE OF DEVELOPMENT**

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**A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE
AND KEBBI ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT HELD
AT THE PRESIDENTIAL LODGE, BIRNIN KEBBI, KEBBI
STATE**

9TH OCTOBER, 2025

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Introduction: The Missing Link in Development Planning

Over the past two days in this hall, distinguished speakers have presented compelling visions for Kebbi State's development across education, agriculture, health, solid minerals, and other critical sectors. Yet one fundamental question remains: Who will transform these brilliant ideas into reality? The answer is unequivocal: public and civil servants.

Without an effective civil service, even the most inspired development plans remain dormant in files and forgotten in archives. This truth echoes the wisdom of Fredrick Herbison, who wrote in "Human Resources as the Wealth of Nations" (1973): "Human resources, not capital, constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations, and carry forward national development."

This paper, strategically positioned as the final presentation, examines the civil service not merely as a government department, but as the indispensable engine that must drive Kebbi State toward prosperity.

Understanding Public Service: The Machinery of Governance

Public service encompasses all organizations within the government machinery responsible for implementing policies, delivering services, and ensuring citizens' wellbeing. This includes the Civil Service, Police, Armed Forces, security agencies, National Assembly, Judiciary, parastatals, regulatory bodies, and educational institutions.

At the heart of this ecosystem lies the Civil Service, the permanent body of trained professionals within Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) who ensure stability, continuity, expert advice, and accountability across political transitions. The civil service advances development through specialized MDAs handling agriculture and rural development, commerce and industry, youth development, culture and tourism, mineral resources, security, environment, infrastructure, education, women's affairs, communications, justice, transport, health, housing, and water resources. Each represents a critical pillar of societal progress.

Learning from a Distinguished Public Servant

To understand the principles that should guide our civil service revival, we draw heavily from the experiences of Alhaji Idris Koko, Madawakin Gwandu, a towering figure in Nigerian public administration whose career spans the most transformative periods of our nation's governance history.

Alhaji Idris Koko served the northern regional government in many positions, as well as the Sokoto State Government in many ministries as permanent secretary until he became the head of the civil service. Now over 90 years old, his service encompassed the old Sokoto State which then covered the areas now constituting Kebbi, Sokoto, and Zamfara States. His autobiography, "Civil Service and Governance in Nigeria," in which His Royal Highness, the Emir of Gwandu, Alh Muhammad Bashar wrote an eloquent Foreword, provides invaluable insights from someone who witnessed and shaped public administration across colonial, independence, and post-independence eras.

In recognition of his distinguished service, the Sokoto State Government renamed its Government Technical College, Farfaru, after him, a proof of his enduring legacy in public service excellence. His observations carry the authority of lived

experience at the highest levels of governance, making them particularly relevant as we chart Kebbi State's path forward.

A Historical Journey: From Colonial Roots to Contemporary Challenges

The Colonial Foundation (1862-1960)

Nigeria's civil service emerged in 1862 following the conquest of Lagos. As colonial administration expanded, reforms followed: the 1866 integration with Gold Coast governance, the 1874 restructuring, the 1886 Lagos Colony establishment, the 1890 Protectorates formation, and the momentous 1914 amalgamation that created a unified civil service structure.

Pre-independence reforms included the Hunt Commission (1934), Tudor Davies Commission (1945), Harragin Commission (1946), Foot Commission (1948), Gorsuch Committee (1954), Newns Committee (1958-9), and Mbanefo Commission (1959), which notably provided for Nigeria's first indigenous Permanent Secretaries.

Post-Independence Evolution (1960-1991)

Independence in 1960 necessitated the Morgan Salary and Wages Commission (1963), followed by the Wey Panel (1968), El-Wood Grading Team (1969), Adebo Commission (1970), and the landmark Udoji Public Service Review Commission (1974).

The 1988 Civil Service Re-organization (Decree No.43) brought radical changes, including replacing Permanent Secretaries with Directors-General, a controversial decision later reversed by the Ayida Panel under General Abacha's regime.

President Obasanjo's Public Service Renewal Programme (1999-2007) represented the most comprehensive reform in Nigerian history, introducing staff audits, MDA restructuring, National Minimum Wage, monetization of benefits, contributory pension schemes, anti-corruption institutions (ICPC and EFCC), and

SERVICOM for service delivery improvement. President Yar'adua continued reform efforts from 2007-2010.

As Madawakin Gwandu noted, these twenty-plus reform bodies "had not only significantly shaped the civil service as an institution and the civil servants who worked in it...but had also impacted upon the socio-economic and political development of the country."

Kebbi State: Birth and Development (1991-Present)

Kebbi State was formed from a part of Sokoto State on 27 August 1991, during the administration of General Ibrahim Babangida. Named for the city of Birnin Kebbi, the state's capital and largest city, Kebbi is the tenth largest state in area and 17th most populous with an estimated population of about 6 million as of 2023. The state comprises 21 Local Government Areas and 4 Emirates Councils under first class Emirs: Gwandu, Argungu, Yauri and Zuru, with the Emir of Gwandu serving as Chairman of Kebbi State Council of Chiefs.

The Military Era (1991-1999): Foundation Building

The military era witnessed the establishment of Kebbi State's administrative structures and civil service framework. During these foundational years, the state civil service:

- A. Established Core Institutions: Created the fundamental ministries, departments, and agencies necessary for state governance
- B. Inherited Experienced Personnel: Benefited from civil servants who had served in the old Sokoto State, bringing institutional knowledge and administrative expertise
- C. Developed Basic Infrastructure: Laid the groundwork for government operations, including secretariat facilities and administrative systems

- D. Navigated Resource Constraints: Operated under challenging economic conditions while establishing essential services

Democratic Dispensation (1999-2024): Expansion and Challenges

The transition to democratic governance in 1999 marked a new chapter for Kebbi State's civil service. Over the past 25 years of democratic rule:

Progressive Developments:

- A. Institutional Expansion: Growth in the number and scope of MDAs to meet expanding state responsibilities
- B. Democratic Governance Support: Adaptation to work with elected officials and legislative oversight
- C. Service Delivery Evolution: Implementation of various sectoral programs in education, health, agriculture, and infrastructure
- D. Capacity Building Initiatives: Training programs and professional development opportunities for civil servants
- E. Technology Integration: Gradual adoption of ICT systems for improved service delivery
- F. Recent recruitment efforts, of very essential staff in Teaching and Health Sectors into the state civil service demonstrate ongoing workforce development.

Persistent Challenges:

Despite these achievements, Kebbi State's civil service has confronted numerous obstacles that have limited its effectiveness as an engine of development. These challenges mirror national patterns but carry specific local dimensions that require targeted interventions.

Role of Civil Service in Governance:

The civil service serves as the permanent backbone of governance through:

1. Policy Initiation and Advisory: Providing expert counsel on policy implications and options available to government
2. Policy Execution: Implementing decisions once settled by Cabinet or political leadership
3. Institutional Memory: Preserving knowledge of past decisions, procedures, and lessons learned
4. National Unity: Serving as a unifying force during crises and political transitions
5. Government Embodiment: Representing state authority through daily citizen interactions at all levels
6. Social Service Provision: Delivering education, healthcare, water, electricity, roads, housing, and essential amenities
7. Economic Contribution: Creating employment, facilitating infrastructure, and generating revenue
8. Governance Perception Management: Shaping public opinion of government through efficiency, fairness, and integrity

This continuity function cannot be overstated. Without stable civil service, each new administration would start from scratch, wasting precious time and resources. The civil service ensures smooth governmental transitions and uninterrupted essential services; the institutional memory that prevents costly repetition of past mistakes.

The Golden Era: When Excellence Was the Standard

To understand how far we've fallen, we must remember when Nigeria's civil service was the pride of Africa. Alhaji Idris Koko, reflecting on his tenure as Head

of Service of the old Sokoto State (which included present-day Kebbi), painted a striking picture of this golden period:

What Made It Work

Judicious Resource Management: Madawakin Gwandu observed, "Although we had very limited resources at the time compared to what obtains today, yet government was able to achieve a lot because of the judicious use of resources at the time." This statement is particularly poignant; we now have more resources but achieve less.

Dignified Conditions of Service: During this era, "conditions of service for all categories of civil servants, inclusive of very senior ones, were, so to say, good...the salaries and conditions of service were such that one could afford to meet his basic needs." Official housing and car loans were standard benefits for deserving officers.

Professional Integrity: "Things were not deplorable to the degree that civil servants engaged in massive corruption or were leaving the service in search of greener pastures." The service attracted and retained talent because it offered dignified livelihoods.

Transparent Processes: "As part of its role for carrying out the various development projects adopted by the government of the day...the Office of the Head of Service often placed adverts for the invitation of tenders for different projects as well as prequalify same before any award of contract." This ensured "work went on to be carried out very well."

Early post-independence Nigeria's civil service commanded respect for professionalism, efficiency, and adherence to rules. Civil servants played pivotal roles in nation-building, ensuring smooth governance operations and leading policy formulation through the political crises and military leadership periods

extending into the mid-1970s. This era produced comprehensive development plans for socio-economic, infrastructural, and industrial advancement.

The Turning Point

The 1975 public service purge marked the beginning of sharp decline. By 1979, even as Head of Service, Madawakin Gwandu observed that "salaries and wages were beginning not to keep pace with the rate of inflation." Economic difficulties necessitated austerity measures, culminating in the December 1983 overthrow of the Shagari Administration. The descent has continued despite numerous reform attempts.

Madawakin Gwandu's wisdom on reforms remains relevant: "As the population of a country increases, responsibilities of government tend to expand. Consequently, reforms of the civil service become inevitable in order to meet increased demands for improved service delivery from the citizenry." He defined reform as "a deliberate policy and action to alter organizational structures, processes, and behaviour in order to improve administrative capacity for efficient and effective performance."

Yet he acknowledged a troubling reality: "All the reforms...were directed towards achieving result-oriented, effective and efficient civil service. Unfortunately, the objectives are still far away from being achieved. After every reform there arose new sets of problems, hence the need to fine-tune some aspects of the previous reforms."

This pattern continues in Kebbi State today.

The Current Crisis: Eleven Critical Challenges

Today's civil service struggles under multiple burdens, some imposed by ruling elites, others self-inflicted, and many structural:

1. Chronic Underfunding

Governments prioritize physical infrastructure over human capital development, starving the civil service of resources needed for effective operation.

2. Poverty Wages

Civil servants remain the lowest-paid public officers despite handling the most critical functions. While special salary structures exist for other cadres (often processed by civil servants themselves), the civil service remains trapped in outdated grading systems.

3. Political Interference

Merit and seniority regularly fall victim to political considerations in appointments, postings, and career progression. This politicization undermines morale and competence.

4. Training Neglect

The hallmark training programs, local and international, that once defined civil service excellence have been abandoned, even as ICT and modern governance tools demand new competencies.

5. Abolished Recognition Systems

Incentives and recognition for hardworking officers, once vital motivational tools, have been forgotten, creating cultures of mediocrity.

6. Disciplinary Collapse

External interference, godfatherism, and political protection make enforcing discipline nearly impossible, emboldening misconduct.

7. Power Centralization

Over-concentration of authority at the top ignores schedules of duty, areas of responsibility, and proper delegation, paralyzing initiative and efficiency.

8. Severe Understaffing

The early 2000s recruitment embargo left many MDAs operating without full staff complements as experienced officers retired without replacement.

9. Institutional Amnesia

Disregard for rules and regulations has become normalized. Many civil servants lack basic knowledge of the frameworks governing their service—a catastrophic departure from past standards.

10. Endemic Corruption

From appointments and postings to retirements and project execution, corrupt practices have infected virtually every operation.

11. Nepotism

Tribal, religious, and personal considerations trump merit in appointments and even project siting, undermining fairness and effectiveness.

These challenges create a vicious cycle where the civil service cannot function as the required engine for socio-economic development. Without urgent intervention, Kebbi State's development aspirations will remain frustrated regardless of policy quality.

The Path Forward: A Comprehensive Revival Strategy

1. Strategic Manpower Planning

Effective planning requires understanding current capacity versus actual needs through:

- a) **Manpower Planning:** Conduct comprehensive inventory of existing staff across all MDAs, documenting qualifications, experience, current deployments, and gaps
- b) **Manpower Forecasting:** Project short and long-term requirements based on state development priorities, population growth, and service delivery standards
- c) **Gap Analysis and Action Plans:** Develop targeted strategies to bridge identified gaps through recruitment, promotion, posting, training, and structural adjustments. The State should commission an immediate comprehensive manpower audit to establish baseline data for planning

2. Comprehensive Training Architecture

Revive the training culture through:

Induction Programs: Systematic orientation for newly recruited or promoted officers on civil service ethics, procedures, and expectations

Advancement Training: Preparing officers for higher responsibilities through leadership development and specialized skills acquisition

Proficiency Training: Enhancing job-specific competencies, particularly in ICT, project management, financial administration, and modern governance tools

Statutory Training: Meeting mandatory requirements for promotion in specialized cadres

Without well-trained, knowledgeable civil servants, Kebbi State's development will remain a mirage.

3. Civil Service Examinations

Introduce mandatory examinations (as practiced federally and in progressive states) to:

- I. Ensure officers understand service rules and regulations
- II. Create competency standards for advancement
- III. Promote meritocracy over political connections
- IV. Professionalize the service and restore respect for expertise

4. Competitive Remuneration

Substantially improve salaries and conditions to:

- I. Attract qualified professionals who currently avoid civil service
- II. Reduce vulnerability to corruption
- III. Retain experienced officers who might otherwise seek greener pastures
- IV. Restore dignity to public service careers
- V. Introduce performance bonuses

This requires political will to prioritize human capital investment over ribbon-cutting projects. As Madawakin Gwandu's era demonstrated, dignified compensation yields professional excellence and reduced corruption.

5. Empowered Civil Service Commission

Strengthen the Commission by:

- I. Appointing experienced, principled retired officers with proven integrity to leadership positions
- II. Providing adequate funding and modern equipment for effective operations
- III. Granting genuine autonomy from political interference
- IV. Restoring its constitutional role as guardian of civil service integrity and professionalism
- V.

6. Operational Funding

Ensure timely release of operational funds to MDAs for:

- I. Project supervision and monitoring
- II. Field visits and staff support
- III. Equipment maintenance and procurement
- IV. Effective service delivery

Budget allocations are meaningless if funds remain unreleased or diverted. Regular quarterly releases should become standard practice.

7. Political Neutrality

Discourage direct political involvement by civil servants, who must maintain loyalty to the state rather than individual politicians or parties. This requires:

- I. Clear guidelines on political activities
- II. Protection from political victimization across administrations
- III. Recognition that professional civil servants serve all governments equally
- IV. Enforcement of neutrality provisions in civil service rules

8. Civil-Political Relations

Establish frameworks for cordial, productive relationships between civil servants and political appointees through:

- I. Orientation programs for new political office holders on civil service rules and procedures
- II. Clear delineation of policymaking (political) versus implementation (administrative) responsibilities
- III. Mutual respect protocols recognizing complementary roles
- IV. Conflict resolution mechanisms when tensions arise

9. Rules Enforcement

Restore respect for regulations, particularly disciplinary procedures, by:

- I. Updating and widely disseminating civil service rules in accessible formats
- II. Creating independent disciplinary tribunals insulated from political pressure
- III. Protecting enforcement officers from interference
- IV. Making examples of serious violations regardless of perpetrator's connections
- V. Celebrating and rewarding compliance alongside punishing infractions

10. Learn from Success

Study and adapt best practices from the golden era Madawakin Gwandu described:

- I. Judicious resource utilization over wasteful spending
- II. Transparent procurement processes with public advertisement and prequalification
- III. Merit-based advancement respecting seniority and competence
- IV. Dignified treatment of officers through fair compensation and recognition
- V. Strong institutional frameworks that transcend individual personalities

11. Documentation and Knowledge Management

Establish systems to preserve institutional memory:

- I. Create comprehensive records management systems
- II. Document standard operating procedures for all functions
- III. Develop case studies of successful and failed initiatives
- IV. Build digital repositories accessible to current and future officers
- V. Institute mentorship programs pairing experienced officers with younger colleagues

12. Performance Management

Introduce results-based accountability:

- I. Develop clear performance indicators for all positions
- II. Conduct regular, objective performance evaluations
- III. Link career progression to demonstrated competence and results
- IV. Publish annual performance reports for major MDAs
- V. Celebrate excellence through awards and recognition

Conclusion: The Choice Before Us

The papers presented over these two days have charted ambitious courses for Kebbi State's development across multiple sectors. But brilliant plans without capable implementation are merely intellectual exercises. The civil service is not one development sector among many; it is the mechanism through which all other sectors advance or stagnate.

Since its creation in 1991, Kebbi State's civil service has faced the dual challenge of building new institutions while navigating Nigeria's broader public administration crisis. Through military rule and democratic governance, civil servants have laboured to serve the people despite inadequate resources, poor remuneration, political interference, and systemic dysfunction.

Alhaji Idris Koko's reflections, drawn from service spanning the old Sokoto State that included present-day Kebbi, remind us that excellence is not theoretical. Nigeria once had a civil service that achieved much with little through professionalism, integrity, and judicious resource management. We now have more resources but achieve less due to systemic dysfunction.

The challenges are severe but not insurmountable. With political commitment, adequate investment, and systematic reform implementation, Kebbi State's civil

service can bounce back. The question is not whether revival is possible, but whether we possess the collective will to make it happen.

Every policy discussed in this forum, agricultural transformation, educational advancement, healthcare improvement, mineral resource development, depends entirely on civil servants for implementation. If we fail to fix this engine room, no amount of policy brilliance will move our state forward.

Madawakin Gwandu's era demonstrated what's possible when civil servants work in enabling environments. His lifetime of distinguished service, from the Northern Regional Government through the old Sokoto State's civil service leadership, and as Minister of the Federal Republic, provides a roadmap: invest in people, reward merit, maintain discipline, ensure dignity, and demand results.

The time for action is now. Kebbi State's future prosperity depends not just on what we plan, but on empowering those who must turn plans into reality. We must move beyond endless reforms that spawn new problems, to fundamental transformation that restores the civil service as the respected, effective engine of development it once was and can be again.

Let us honour the legacy of civil service pioneers like Madawakin Gwandu, Alh Idris Koko; Alh Muhammadu Jega; Alh Abubakar Kigo; Alh Attahiru Kamba; Alh Muhammad Carpenter; Alh Yahaya Bawa, Alh. Yahaya Maigari and host of others by building a Kebbi State civil service worthy of the next generation, professional, competent, ethical, and effective. Our state's development depends on it. Our people deserve no less. To quote a famous phrase that “clearly, a country which is unable to develop skills and knowledge of its people and utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything” (Harbison, 1973).

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