

Public Service Recruitment in the Sudan

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The recruitment policies and practices in the Sudanese civil service suffer from several weaknesses such as: (1) lack of long-range recruitment policy in all government agencies, (2) absence of uniform methods of recruitment, (3) failure of the civil service leadership to understand the importance of the probationary period, and (4) preference of men over women in employment. Also, the socio-cultural and political environment has a great influence on recruitment policies and practices. Thus, although some public officials do adhere to modern bureaucratic norms and practices, many more seem to yield to personalism as a criterion in personnel selection and appointment. To eliminate or at least to minimize these deficiencies, the Public Service Recruitment Board was set up in 1974. However, although the reformed recruitment system is an improvement over the previous setup, it still has its weaknesses and limitations.

Recruitment Policies and Practices

The prevailing personnel classification system in the Sudan is the rank or "man-oriented" system. The public service is divided into three main classes: (a) administrative and professional, (b) sub-professional and technical, and (c) clerical. Entry primarily depends upon educational qualifications. Recruits to the administrative and professional class are usually university graduates. Members of the sub-professional and technical class are selected from high school

graduates while junior clerks are drawn from the junior high school leavers or from those who failed the high school final examination. However, there is a provision in the Sudanese civil service for some individuals to subsequently move from lower to higher classes of the service. It is obvious that this system is very similar to the British personnel classification system where recruitment is directly linked to the output of the educational system.

The Personnel Regulations stipulate certain general requirements which each applicant for a public service job should meet.¹ The first condition is that of citizenship. Second, no person is allowed to compete for a government job unless he or she is sixteen years of age. There is no maximum age requirement in the personnel laws and regulations. The third general condition is the medical fitness of the

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¹Ministry of Public Service, *Personnel Laws and Regulations*, Article 17 (Khartoum: Government Printing Press, 1976), p. 109. (In Arabic.)

applicant. Each applicant must present a report from a certified doctor that he is medically fit to undertake a government job. This condition, however, has not been observed very strictly by the authorities. Fourth, he should possess the qualifications approved for entry to the specific position. A fifth condition is that he must be of good personal conduct and manner.

Besides, there are specific conditions which differ from one job to the other and which are specified by each ministry or agency involved. They are usually academic qualifications and experience or training requirements or whatever skills the ministry considers desirable for certain special positions.

Sources of Information on Employment

In 1974, the National Council for Research conducted a survey among 374 employed graduates of university and post-higher secondary schools to determine the sources of information which led to the first employment. Sources of information were university authorities, labor department, newspapers, personal contacts, friends and relations, and others.²

The response of the graduates are shown in Table I.

From the table it is clear that the Labor Department is the most important source of information on jobs (43.85%), followed by personal con-

tacts (22.46%), the university (16.58%), in that order. Other sources of information on employment accounts for the remaining 8.82 percent.

However, the importance of these sources of information on employment differs from one employment sector to the other. For agricultural and transport sectors, university authorities are the most important source of information whereas 60.87 percent of the graduates employed in the general administrative sector, 48.04 percent working in the industrial sector and 50 percent serving in the educational sector got their first appointment through information received from the labor department.

The same study also shows the degree of importance of the different sources for graduates having different specializations. It reveals that for science specialists, personal contacts are the most important source of employment but for engineers, the information from university authorities seems to be most important. As regards social science and arts graduates, the labor department is the most effective source.

On the other hand, employers were asked to indicate the relative importance of the following media in the recruitment of their personnel: (1) institutional authorities, (2) newspaper advertisement, (3) personal contact with employees, (4) Labor Department, (5) friends and relatives of employees, and (6) others.

The analysis of the responses given by the employers reveals that the most important medium of recruitment is the Labor Department which

²Bikas E. Sanyal and Elsammani A. Yaccoub, *Higher Education and Employment in the Sudan* (Paris: UNESCO, 1975). Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent information on sources of employment are from this study.

Table 1. Source of Information on Employment

| Sources of Information | Number of Graduates | % |
|------------------------|---------------------|--------|
| University Authorities | 62 | 16.58 |
| Labor Department | 164 | 43.85 |
| Newspapers | 23 | 6.15 |
| Personal Contacts | 84 | 22.46 |
| Friends and Relations | 8 | 2.14 |
| Others | 33 | 8.82 |
| Total | 374 | 100.00 |

Source: Sanyal and Yaccoub, *Higher Education and Employment*, p. 154.

received a score of 28 (35 percent) out of a total of 78 scores received by all media collectively, followed by institutional authorities (26.92 percent) and newspapers (20.51 percent), respectively. Personal contact with employees and with their friends and relatives does not seem to be a very important recruitment medium.

Thus, from these data we can conclude that the graduates and the employers judge the effectiveness of personal contacts differently; the former emphasizing its effectiveness and the latter understating it. The Labor Department is considered the most important source by both. The high rating given to the Labor Department may be due to the fact that the Manpower Act of 1974 stipulates that no establishment with ten or more employees which falls within the jurisdiction of an Employment Exchange area is permitted to employ any person who has not registered with the relevant labor office and no notice is permitted to be published in respect of an employment vacancy unless the relevant labor office has given permission.

Appointment

The President appoints the top-level leadership positions. Appointments to senior positions are approved by the Minister of Public Service and Administrative Reform upon recommendation of the Minister of the agency concerned. The Civil Service Department has to approve the appointments to all other pensionable jobs. Appointment to labor (non-pensionable) positions is the responsibility of the head of the agency concerned.

The newly appointed employee is required to be placed on probation for two years. This period may be shortened or waived by the head of the agency concerned if the recruit has previous similar work experience or if he possesses excellent relevant educational qualifications.³

A Critical Appraisal

Several criticisms have been leveled against the recruitment and selection

³ *Personnel Laws and Regulations*, Article 23.

policies in the Sudan. Abu Sin argues that one of the defects is the lack of long-range policy of recruitment in almost all government departments. He goes on to suggest that:

Since the university remains the main well-spring of recruitment for the administrative and professional class, there has to be more coordination between the university authorities and the government departments in forecasting the departments' future manpower needs and the ways and means of fulfilling these needs. The unfortunate fact is that there is hardly any cooperation or coordination at present in this respect. As the number of graduates increases, there is an imminent danger of considerable waste of time, effort and money unless planning between these authorities takes place.⁴

Further, El Beshir observed that:

There has been neither a uniform method of recruitment nor a single office or agency responsible for the appointment and placement of personnel. As a matter of fact, the appointment and placement of functions have been shared by the Establishment Branch of the Ministry of Finance and Economics, the Public Service Commission and the individual departments and ministries — with the latter being the dominant group. Such a lack of single agency capable of coordinating governmental recruitment and placement policies has often resulted in considerable confusion.⁵

⁴Ahmed I. Abu Sin, "The Development of the Civil Service in the Republic of the Sudan, 1899-1961" (Master's Thesis, New York University, 1961), pp. 89-90.

⁵El Beshir Mutasim, "Administration and Development: A Study of the Role of the Civil Service in the Sudan" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1967), p. 149.

Besides, the civil leadership has not shown any understanding of the probationary period. There is hardly any training for new employees who are left completely to their own devices. Moreover, there is no systematic observation of the work of new recruits during this period to determine whether they should be retained in office or not. According to our information, there has not been a single case of dismissal of a probationary employee. This certainly offers no proof of the soundness and perfection of the selection methods but could be attributed to the influence of cultural norms on administrative behavior, shortage of manpower and laxity on the part of the supervisor.

Now let us discuss the influence of the socio-cultural and political environment on recruitment policies and practices.

It is needless to emphasize that the extended family is all-pervasive in the Sudan despite the many recent social changes. This system includes an assortment of blood relatives as opposed to the nuclear family consisting of parents and children. As described by a Sudanese scholar:

Although members of the household, married or bachelors, may have their private sleeping quarters, they live together under one roof, in the family house, or in close proximity, and all, or in large groupings eat together. Each individual has deep ties with and feels an obligation to a large number of people.⁶

⁶Abdel Rahim Mirghani, "The Design and Implementation of a Development Plan: Sudan Experience 1961-62-1965-66" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Khartoum, 1974), p. 239.

Besides, there is identification with one's clan, tribe and locality. According to one author, this type of identification could be explained by

the enormous heterogeneity of the society, the rather limited social mobility caused in part by the relatively slow penetration of educational growth into the hinterlands, but particularly by the overwhelming obstacles to more effective communication, and by the fact that marriage in the Sudan still unites members of the same clan or tribe.⁷

It is obvious that the social system places tremendous pressure on the civil servant in the performance of his role. The native son is expected to support the causes of his "own." Failure to do so would be interpreted as anti-family bias. In an address to the nation, President Al-Nimeiri has harshly attacked favoritism and nepotism in the civil service which he related to the predominance of family and tribal ties in the Sudanese society. Moreover, according to a student of Sudanese administration:

It is common knowledge that appointment to a senior administrative position invariably entices the new executive to stock most available vacancies with relatives or other fellow tribesmen. The practice is sufficiently common that it has been followed in the government bureaucracy, private enterprise and higher education and at the highest level of academia.⁸

Further, a former Sudanese Prime Minister states:

⁷Peter K. Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan: Parliamentary and Military Rule in an Emerging African Nation* (New York: Praeger, 1976), pp. 68-69.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 69.

It is, however, admitted that in societies like ours, particular kinds of nepotism dominate the minds of all. The grip of social relations and strong emotional attachment to the local home, family and friends make us feel bound to keep our family members, friends and colleagues in some way or another. This is virtuous according to our social moral code. Consciously, or unconsciously, we carry this virtue with us into the civil service. This can be dangerous and destructive to the morale of the civil servants: charity on government expense is a sin that must be checked.⁹

A political scientist who lived in the Sudan for some time maintains that the unwillingness of senior public servants to enforce discipline results partly from family connections and cultural traits, which "urge everyone to be on easy and accommodating terms with everyone else."¹⁰ He goes on to say that "any effort to make subordinate do his duty is readily turned into a personal confrontation."¹¹ Just as the Sudanese father does not disinherit his son in the end either because of sentiment or under pressure from mediators, so does the state behave toward officials who misuse their authority. Severe punitive measures, even when in order, are not applied in most cases to officials guilty of corruption either because of face-to-face relationship or due to the pressure of mediators who are available to any Sudanese.

⁹Mohammed Ahmed Mahjoub, *Tradition and Change: Problems of Progress* (Khartoum, 1960), p. 13. (Mimeographed.)

¹⁰Oluwadare Aguda, "The State and the Economy in the Sudan: From a Political Scientist's Point of View," *Journal of Developing Areas*, Vol. XL, No. 3 (April 1973), p. 433.

¹¹*Ibid.*

Another feature of the employment policy and practice is the predominance of males. In 1968, out of 13,507 classified posts, only 3,723 were occupied by women. The majority of them were employed in the Ministry of Education as junior school teachers. A male candidate is generally selected for employment even though a female applicant has distinguished herself better in examination or performance.¹² Until the sixties, women received two-thirds of the salary of a male equivalent and had no pension. However, today women employees receive equal pay and a pension.

Factors militating against the appointment of women in the Sudanese civil service include the traditional attitude that the only proper job for women, educated or uneducated, is housekeeping and the charge that women have a high turnover rate because of marriage, pregnancy, and obligation to stay at home with children, ill parents or change in the location of the husband's job.¹³

Besides, "overall recruitment policies resulted from political expediency rather than market demand."¹⁴ A close observer of the Sudanese scene cites as example the appointment of thousands of high school and university graduates prior to elections, and the across-the-board raise of public service salaries in times of political unrest despite the rapidly

deteriorating financial situation.¹⁵ In 1966 the Government set up the Employment Relief Fund to absorb into the public service university and high school graduates who lacked the necessary or relevant qualifications or skills. The Employment Relief Fund amounted to £S 2,144,040. This amount was used to pay 8,367 persons. This means the government has guaranteed all university graduates and school leavers employment in the public service.

In 1974 this policy was revised to exclude university graduates in such fields as arts, humanities, law, general science and mathematics, but employment continued to be guaranteed to the "professional category" (i.e., medical doctors, engineers, agriculturists, etc.) and all non-degree tertiary level technicians.

A recent ILO report on employment in the Sudan was very critical of this policy. It states:

The present policy is likely to produce an ever growing number of students insisting on free university education as a "right," followed by employment at going salaries. The effects are felt also at lower levels of the educational system because the secondary school leaving certificate now becomes a guarantee of government employment once the university hurdle is passed. Cramming in the secondary schools is now preceded by cramming and rote-learning in the primary schools. In fact, the whole educational system is rapidly converted by such a policy into a highroad leading to membership in a highly subsidized aristocracy. Similarly, the surfeit of highly trained manpower which this policy is certain to produce leads in time, if it has not already done so, to the wasteful use of such man-

¹²Selma Muhammed Suleiman, "Women in the Sudan Public Service," *Sudan Journal of Administration and Development*, Vol. II No. 1 (1966), pp. 50-51.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁴Bechtold, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁵Bechtold, *op. cit.*

power, to the gross distortion of labor markets at the upper ends of the wage structure, to a situation in which labor costing of projects itself ceases to have any economic meaning.¹⁶

Furthermore, this has a great impact on the morale and discipline of the civil service. It has been reported that:

It was an all too common sight for a visitor to find government employees either late for work, or departing early for some undefined 'mission,' or those who were actually at their crowded desks circulating newspapers among themselves, while blue-covered files mounted before their eyes, only to rest undisturbed at great length under the ever present stone weights.¹⁷

Another factor which has greater damaging effect on the public service has been the "purge" of well-trained and experienced top-level officials by successive governments since the military coup of 1958. Eighty-seven top and mid-level public servants were removed between 1958 and 1954.¹⁸ In March 1970 hundreds of public servants in various government agencies including the Judiciary and the University of Khartoum were fired.¹⁹ The reason for removal has always

been their cooperation with the former regime. As a result, an atmosphere of insecurity and anxiety has prevailed in the public service.

Closely related to this is the fact that the Sudan is now experiencing a severe brain drain. Many well-trained manpower and thousands of skilled workers leave every year for secure and better paying jobs in the oil-rich Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Arabian Gulf Emirates and Libya. Tens of newspaper advertisements appear every day announcing boards of disciplines for all kinds of public servants (especially professional and technical personnel). For instance, in 1976 there were 886 highly qualified medical doctors working in foreign countries such as Great Britain (630), Arabian Gulf Emirates (200), Saudi Arabia (50), Iran (5), Scandinavia (5), and Brazil (1).²⁰ This state of affairs has led the government to take some measures to stop the exodus of trained manpower "but the flow is continuing unabated and it is more likely that it will increase."²¹

Reforming Recruitment: The Public Service Recruitment Board

As early as 1958, the Franklin Commission found that departmental recruitment in the Sudan, where the power of appointment was in the

¹⁶ International Labor Organization/ United Nations Development Program, "Labour Market Policies and Procedures," Part III of Growth, Employment and Equity: A Comprehensive Strategy for Sudan, 1976, p. 10. (Mimeographed.)

¹⁷ Bechtold, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ *Report on the Reorganization of the Civil Service* (Khartoum, 1968), Appendix pp. 15-21. (In Arabic.)

¹⁹ Oluwadare Aguda, "The Sudan Civil Service 1964-1971," *Quarterly Journal of Administration* (University of Ife, Nigeria, April 1972), p. 336.

²⁰ Sayid Ahmed El-Hassan Omer, "The Emigration of Sudanese Medical Doctors," *Al-Ayam* (a Khartoum Daily), May 27, 1977, p. 5. (In Arabic.)

²¹ Abdel Rahman E. Ali Taha and M.E. Mehaisi, "Higher Education and Development in the Sudan: A Review of New Policy" (Khartoum: Economic and Social Research Council, December 1976), p. 11. (Mimeographed.)

hands of one man, the head of the agency, was unsatisfactory for the following reasons:

(1) Entry to the civil service should not depend on the choice of one person alone. However fair he tries to be in making selections, allegations of favoritism and nepotism will almost certainly be made by unsuccessful candidates. In the long run this would be detrimental to the public interest.

(2) Each Head of Department has his own standards of selection and the quality of recruits to the Service is likely to vary from Department to Department. If, however recruitment were in the hands of a centralized agency, there would be parity in standards of selection and the intake of new Civil Servants would be of an even quality.

(3) Since Heads of Departments are interested mainly in securing personnel for vacant posts, they are not likely to concern themselves with the question of whether a candidate would be better fitted for work in some other department. A centralized recruitment agency would be generally able to ensure the appointment of candidates to Departments they are best suited in terms of personality and qualifications.

As a general principle, we would suggest that recruitment to the Civil Service should be made in such a manner as to ensure that candidates are selected, not on the basis of the preference of an individual official but on the basis of the collective wisdom and experience of a group of independent officials, so that:

(1) It becomes difficult for anyone to impute partiality on the part of the selecting authority.

(2) It facilitates balanced recruitment because of impartiality in standards of selection.²²

²²Republic of the Sudan, *The Report of the Terms of Service Committee* (Khartoum, 1958-59), pp. 214-215.

In 1973, the Sudan Government invited a United Nations Mission to look into the problems of personnel administration. The Commission proposed (among other things) the establishment of a Public Service Recruitment Board, located within the Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform. The Board came into existence on September 29, 1974. The membership of the Board consists of a chairman (at the Undersecretary level) and four top-level government officials representing the Ministries of Finance, Education, Local Government and Public Corporations. The Board has a small secretariat in charge of the day-to-day administration.

The Board has the following functions:

(1) To advise on the framing of the recruitment regulations for the various public services in accordance with the terms of the broad policy laid down by the government in consultation with the Public Service Council.

(2) To undertake actual recruitment to posts in the administrative and professional class.

(3) To allocate such selected candidates to the various units.²³

As we mentioned earlier, the recruitment process used to be decentralized. Each individual ministry and agency conducted its own recruitment and selection programs. After 1974, the two functions were centralized in the Recruitment Board. The

²³Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform, *Personnel: Administrative and Related Reforms*, Report of an International Commission (Khartoum, December 1973), p. 21.

Board undertakes to recruit candidates for jobs in the administrative and professional class. It has also been entrusted with the recruitment of graduates of the two-year high technical institutes. Its jurisdiction covers both the civil service and the public corporations. It does not, however cover the Southern Region which has a separate civil service, nor the universities. The idea behind the centralization of recruitment and selection processes in the Recruitment Board is to eliminate favoritism and nepotism from the government service.

Thus, whenever there is a vacancy to be filled, it is the ministry or department concerned which informs the Public Service Recruitment Board of the nature of the position. Applications are then solicited from all qualified persons. The Public Service Act of 1973 specifies that such an advertisement should be announced in newspapers and over the radio for a minimum period of fifteen days for the filing of applications. These are usually brief statements which include a reasonably detailed outline of the required qualifications but practically no information about the job to be filled.

At the closing date of submitting applications, the Board examines all these applications and supporting documents and weeds out candidates who do not possess the required qualifications. On the basis of this preliminary check, the Board prepares a list of candidates who are eligible to participate in the written examination and/or the interview

The selection method mostly used is the interview. The interview panel consists of a member of the Board (as

chairman), an independent member and a member from the agency concerned. The written examination is used in the selection of applicants to the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Local Government or when it is specifically requested by the employing agency. According to the Secretary of the Board, written examinations have proved to be very expensive in terms of money and time.²⁴

Specialists such as engineers, doctors, agriculturists, etc., are exempted from both the interview and the written examination because the professional examination they have passed leading to the degree serves as evidence that they possess the basic minimum preparation. Another important reason is that in so far as the professional university graduates and technicians are concerned, the Civil Service Department gives standing approval for their employment because of the great need for them.

After conducting the examinations and interviews, the Board prepares a list of eligible candidates, ranked in the order in which they have passed, from which appointments are made. The Board reserves to itself the right to treat any examination as null and void, as what happened in 1978 in regard to the examination of local government officers.²⁵

In 1974, its first year of operation, the Public Service Recruitment Board selected 2,574 graduates for work in the government service. The breakdown of this number is as follows:

²⁴Interview with Sayid Shumaina, Secretary, Public Service Recruitment Board October 11, 1977.

²⁵*Ibid.*

| Selected Graduates ²⁶ | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| Faculty/Higher Institute | Number Selected |
| Applied and Natural Science | 1,085 |
| Arts and Social Studies | 981 |
| High Technical Institutes | 498 |
| Total | 2,564 |

Although it may be too early to assess the effectiveness of the Public Service Recruitment Board, we will try to make some remarks.

We have mentioned earlier that the rationale behind the creation of the recruitment and selection board was to eliminate favoritism from the civil service. Our information shows that the Public Service Recruitment Board has been able to resist pressures towards favoritism or nepotism. Some of these pressures came from very high-ranking political and administrative officers; but the members of the Board, who are known for their integrity and honesty, stood firm against any sort of interference. Moreover, for the first time, women and university graduates other than those of Khartoum University could find a fair chance to compete for public service jobs. Under the decentralized system, some heads of agencies used to discriminate against the appointment of women and graduates of foreign universities. However, we are not eliminating the possibility that favoritism in recruitment might creep into the Board after the expiration of the term of office of the present members.

Besides, as there is a shortage of recruits in technical and professional fields in the Sudan, this Board by

²⁶Source: N. E. Shadad, "Public Service Recruitment Board," *Sudan Journal of Administration and Development*, Vol. X, (1974), p. 41.

coordinating demands and rationalizing and rationing the supply could prevent a disorganized competition for personnel.

It is also a fact that in the Sudan, small departments (and even some of the large departments) do not have the technical resources and skills to carry on recruitment, particularly in view of the growing complexity of government tasks.

However, the Board was faced with resistance from government departments and public corporations. Ministries claim that the centralization delayed the recruitment and selection processes. They also say that the Board is aloof and remote from departmental needs. The answer to this, however, is that it is the Board's policy and practice to involve the agency concerned in the setting of the examinations and in the selection of candidates. Further, the recruitment of supervisory, clerical and junior staff is still departmental.

As regards selection, we are of the opinion that examinations conducted by the Board are very "theoretical" in nature and tend to concentrate on assessing the general academic knowledge of the applicants. Such a type of examination can not detect and measure the specialized knowledge and experience which may be essential for efficient performance.

Another observation is that the examining committees which prepare, administer, and grade examinations usually lack well-qualified and trained experts. It is true that they include experts in the various fields of the study concerned, but they should also include members skilled in the preparation of examinations.