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Re-examining public administration management in the DRC: Between institutional and administrative inertia and the marginalisation of civil servants

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ABSTRACT

The management of public administration is a key determinant of a state's ability to design and effectively implement its public policies. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), however, several decades of administrative reforms

have failed to provide a lasting solution to the challenges relating to institutional effectiveness, human resources management, the performance of public services and the recognition of civil servants. This article analyses the management of the Congolese public administration through the lens of two key issues: institutional inertia and the

marginalisation of civil servants in the process of administrative modernisation.

The study adopts a qualitative approach based on a review of the literature and an analysis of academic work on the reform of the Congolese public administration. It shows that the difficulties observed are not solely attributable to inadequate legislation or a lack of reforms. They also stem from a disconnect between institutional norms, administrative practices, career management mechanisms and contemporary demands for public sector performance. Recent literature highlights, in particular, the effects of clientelism, the politicisation of recruitment, nepotism, the weakness of meritocracy and difficulties in career management.

The article argues that the reform of the Congolese public administration should move beyond a primarily institutional approach to adopt a managerial, people-centred and results-oriented approach. The revaluation of civil servants, the professionalisation of careers, transparency in recruitment, continuous training, digitalisation and performance appraisal thus emerge as key levers for transformation.

Keywords: public administration; civil servant; institutional inertia; marginalisation; administrative reform; meritocracy; public performance; DRC.

1. Introduction

Public administration is one of the main instruments through which the State translates political decisions into concrete actions for the benefit of the population. It ensures the continuity of the State, the enforcement of laws, the provision of public services and the implementation of economic and social policies.

In a country such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, characterised by its vast territory, diverse social needs and significant development challenges, the quality of public administration is of particular importance. An effective administration should be capable of mobilising the State's human, material and financial resources in order to carry out the tasks entrusted to it efficiently.

However, the DRC has, for several decades, undergone a succession of administrative reform programmes. Research on this issue shows that these reforms have focused in particular on controlling staff numbers, the wage bill, access to banking services, rejuvenating the civil service, reinstating competitive examinations, administrative training and the modernisation of structures. Despite these efforts, the results remain mixed. This situation calls into question not only the methods of

reform, but also the model of public administration management.

The central question of this article is therefore as follows:

To what extent do institutional inertia and the marginalisation of civil servants contribute to the performance difficulties of the public administration in the DRC, and what managerial changes would enable its efficiency to be improved in the long term?

Three specific questions arise from this main question:

What are the main factors behind institutional inertia in the Congolese public administration?

How might administrative management mechanisms contribute to the marginalisation of civil servants?

What reforms would help to build a more professional, meritocratic and effective Congolese public administration?

The general hypothesis is formulated as follows:

The persistent inefficiency of the Congolese public administration stems less from a lack of reforms than from the poor implementation of those reforms, the persistence of rigid institutional practices and the failure to recognise civil servants as a strategic resource of the State. The public administration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is undergoing a phase of modernisation and reform; a major digital modernisation programme managed via the DRC civil service portal. It faces long-standing bureaucratic challenges whilst implementing reforms to identify and rejuvenate the civil service. The Congolese civil service comprises all the services responsible for ensuring the management and functioning of the state and society (decentralised and regional public services, government departments (1^{er} June 2025).

In the medium term, the aim is to increase productivity by strengthening institutional capacities. If one adheres to a narrow, short-term approach, civil service reform is likely to yield only limited results where the manner in which power is exercised poses serious problems (Dice, 1993). In such cases, recruitment is based on objective criteria; public sector employment is regarded as part of the social protection system; pay is not linked to productivity; and civil servants' loyalty lies with the political leader in power rather than with the state. To improve the efficiency of the civil service, it may be necessary to begin by convincing public opinion of the need for sound public administration."

“Any measures taken to encourage professional and other interest groups, to guarantee freedom of association and expression, and to reform the judicial and legal systems will enable the sector to become more productive and responsive, and will significantly reduce favouritism and corruption. The immediate results of civil service reforms have been somewhat mixed. Most countries that have undertaken reforms have sought to reduce the excessive burden of the public sector’s total wage bill, a burden that did not benefit the civil servants themselves but rather a handful of corrupt leaders – whether civil servants or not – in the public sector; to address ‘overstaffing’; to reverse the erosion of salaries; and to broaden the pay scale. This resulted in a certain reduction in the number of paid posts and in salaries as a percentage of GDP and current expenditure (excluding interest) (World Bank Report on Development Policy, 1993, p. 138). We have examined the surveys, reports, recruitment figures and censuses which reveal discrepancies in their numbers, as well as the unaccounted-for figures regarding their actual salaries and benefits. They highlight waste and often raise several questions: firstly, is it possible to reform a public sector entrenched in its resistance to change and its privileges? Could you accept or even imagine a business leader drawing up their budget without knowing the exact number of employees they have, or the pay scale and nature of the jobs they perform? This article exposes injustices, absurdities, flagrant abuses, waste, and the lack of transparent figures regarding their actual salaries and benefits. The aim of this investigative article is to lift the veil on the benefits enjoyed by public sector staff, but also – and above all – to describe the dysfunctional mechanisms leading to waste within the public sector and to outline the broad contours of a reform strategy. It is imperative first to understand the public administration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

It is essential to first understand this public administration in the DRC, and it seems, in a very modest way, useful to shed light on the current situation and to give a chance to ongoing and future reforms, based on questions such as:

- What do the Congolese people expect from their civil service?
- How many civil servants are needed to ensure they provide proper and loyal service to the nation and are paid fairly?
- Why is it said that civil servants are in fact the real victims of the civil service they serve?

- Can this civil service, estimated at 800,000 people, be described as bloated given a population of 100,000,000?
- Given all these reforms, does everything need to be changed?
- What should be done about the benefits already accrued?
- What strategies should be adopted to improve the management of this administration’s public expenditure so that it does not remain a perpetual burden?
- And if these new reforms continue, what challenges and prospects lie ahead?

Indeed, theoretical thinking on public administration in the DRC appears to be characterised by a desire for reform to improve the efficiency, transparency and quality of public services, whilst combating politicisation and corruption. The challenges are numerous, but efforts are being made to modernise this administration and make it more responsive to citizens’ needs. There are trends towards a more efficient, transparent administration focused on public service for all; for the purposes of this topic, we have brought together the following points:

Observation of numerous instances of malpractice and dysfunction leads to the simple realisation that the provisions set out in the Finance Acts do not provide an accurate picture of either the number of jobs created or funded, or the remuneration allocated to public servants. This situation is unacceptable. Can we imagine a business leader drawing up their budget without knowing the exact number of employees they have, their pay scales, or the nature of the roles they perform? This is why, under these circumstances, MPs are examining and voting on the draft Finance Bill in the absence of precise data: ‘Today, citizens are expressing a growing demand for accountability; as users of public services and taxpayers, they aspire to “zero defects”, and an “additional measure of guidance” would considerably improve the functioning and outcomes to be achieved within this state apparatus. The civil service, like the administration of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in general, is mired in a sort of , which is misunderstood and proves ill-suited to the development objectives assigned to it. Before embarking on any analysis that might identify potential remedies, let us endeavour to briefly characterise the crisis and its main causes through an understanding of the administration.

It seemed useful to shed some light, however modestly, on the situation within our civil service. Five key aspects have been identified to help us understand the phenomenon:

1. Key issue;
2. What do the Congolese want?
3. What is the state of the civil service?
4. Should everything be changed, and what is the biggest problem?
5. What should be done about existing benefits?
6. Strategies for reform.
7. The marginalisation of civil servants: a human resources management issue.
8. Towards a new approach to civil service governance in the DRC.

2. Literature review

According to LIHAU, the current Minister for the Civil Service, in an interview, the latest census indicates that the estimated number of civil servants stands at around 800,000(2022), whilst Professor SAMBA KAPUTO, in his article ‘The Achievements and Shortcomings of Public and Local Government’, observes trends towards a public administration shaped by the centralised structures of Belgian colonial rule, which has now become more office-based (1995). According to Guillaume Munzandji Iyenda, the Congo, as we can see, is capable of practising true public administration (1919); this aspiration is in line with the budget report of 1919. As also noted by (Benartzi et al., 2017), (John, 2023) and Olivier (2015), ‘it is increasingly recognised that the foundations of public policy must be open to alternatives to classical economic reasoning in the light of empirical findings concerning different behaviours’. One of the authors of this article adopts a scientific stance in that the article does not treat reform merely as a matter of institutional structure, but also as a matter of human capital, public management and institutional transformation (2025)

Thierry Jean Pierre (2010), in his book **L’argent des fonctionnaires** (*Civil Servants’ Salaries*), was the most eloquent author, as he emphasised the need to make the civil service—through its status—more transparent, more socially oriented and humane, more efficient and less costly (2010); this is what the Congolese people want from their civil service. Malukisa Nkuku, A. (2025). The ‘ostrich policy’ and the

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2. A historical overview of the Congolese public administration

2.1. Public administration as an institution for development

Public administration should not be viewed merely as a bureaucratic apparatus tasked with implementing decisions. It constitutes an institutional infrastructure that is indispensable to development. Tshienda Muambi (2022) thus regards the civil service as a vehicle for good governance and

development. His analysis emphasises that the effectiveness of public action depends largely on the administration's capacity to enforce rules and implement public policies.

From this perspective, a weak administration can have several consequences: administrative delays, poor allocation of resources, low quality of public services, demoralised staff and a loss of public trust.

2.2. Institutional inertia

Institutional inertia here refers to the difficulty a public organisation faces in adapting its structures, procedures and practices to changes in its environment.

This can manifest itself through:

- The persistence of outdated procedures;
- Excessive centralisation of decision-making;
- Delays in processing cases;
- Resistance to change;
- Insufficient digitisation;
- Poor flow of information;
- The lack of regular evaluation of organisational structures.

Inertia is therefore not necessarily a total absence of activity. An administration can function on a day-to-day basis whilst remaining institutionally static.

2.3. The marginalisation of civil servants

The marginalisation of civil servants can be defined as the weakening of their professional, decision-making and social standing within the civil service. It may result in particular from:

- Insufficient recognition of skills;
- Career progression that is insufficiently linked to merit;
- Unequal access to training;
- Limited involvement in decision-making processes;
- A lack of objective assessment;

- Excessive politicisation of certain administrative decisions;
- Insufficient recognition of performance.

Recent literature on the DRC specifically highlights the difficulties associated with the politicisation of recruitment and promotion, as well as clientelism and nepotism in career management.

2.4. A managerial approach to the civil service

Contemporary public administration is moving away from a strictly bureaucratic model to incorporate management tools such as skills management, performance appraisal, forward-looking workforce planning, continuous professional development and a results-oriented culture. This shift does not mean that public administration should be managed exactly like a private company. Rather, it involves the use of managerial tools tailored to the public service mission.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, documentary and analytical approach.

It is based on an analysis of academic research focusing on:

- The reform of public administration in the DRC;
- The Congolese civil service;
- The management of civil service careers;
- Public governance;
- The performance of civil servants;
- The professionalisation of the civil service.

The method of analysis involves comparing the main objectives of administrative reforms with the challenges identified in the literature.

3.1. Academic scope of the article

The originality of this article lies in the fact that it does not treat administrative reform solely as a matter of institutional structures. It proposes to analyse it simultaneously as a matter of human capital, public management and institutional transformation.

This approach is of particular interest for your work on economic transformation, as it allows a direct link to be drawn between the quality of public administration and the state's capacity to support the economic transformation of the DRC.

3.2. Historical background

1. What is public administration in the DRC?

Historically, the Congolese public administration has been characterised by the legacy and root causes of the malaise in public administration inherited from the colonial era. Since 1960, the Congo's administrative institutions have been subject to a dual influence from foreign institutions: one Belgian, resulting from colonisation, and the other stemming from the adoption of the principles of an administration organised under a dictatorship and chronic political instability.

- **Causes and origins of the deviation from objectives**

The civil service was initially a victim of the Bretton Woods institutions. During the Mobutu era, these institutions demanded that the government cut salaries; this reduced the civil service to destitution, introduced corruption within its ranks, and led to the complete disintegration of the civil service. These measures prevented the public administration, for budgetary reasons, from being present everywhere, thereby increasing the ungovernability of that administration and facilitating unrest across the country, including rebellions that have caused loss of life, not to mention the loss of revenue and the breakdown of state organisation (*RTNC, Media Forum, 21 August 2023*). These institutions have also called on the State to abolish student grants. The resulting consequences have been a decline in university education, rendering it incapable of fostering and safeguarding our economy. The country must become a force for the good of the nation and its people; therefore, the driving force behind this movement must be work, for there can be no development without work. To be recruited, promoted or receive a pay rise, it was not a question of working hard or being diligent. All you needed was to have a brother, a cousin or any relative amongst those in charge of ministerial departments to get ahead. This had a huge psychological impact on the vast majority of civil servants. Not only were they discouraged, but it also led them to cease being conscientious. 'What's the point of working yourself to the bone,' people would say, 'if there's no one to recognise my merits?' Many of you had bosses who possessed none of the qualifications or qualities required of a civil servant.

A civil servant's career was no longer guaranteed and had become unstable. Just as with recruitment, the dismissal of a civil servant depended on the whim of a political superior. As soon as it became apparent that you were opposed to a particular minister or political figure, your career could be terminated at any time, regardless of your rank. Promotions were subject to the same political influences within the disciplinary system. There were civil servants known as 'untouchable civil servants'. These civil servants believed themselves to be protected, gave the impression that they were protected, or were in fact protected. Thus, when a head of department wished to assert his authority and took administrative measures against such officials, no action was taken against him, especially if those officials were relatives or even simply of the same background as a minister or an administrator. With such civil servants, the State could not expect them to perform their duties well.

How does a civil servant conduct themselves whilst carrying out their duties? The makeshift civil servants who emerged in the aftermath of 30 June 1960 were unaware of the nobility inherent in their profession. Corruption, both material and political, has prevented the administrative apparatus from functioning properly. You will recall the famous 'Article 15' (a Kinshasa adage). This crisis will never be definitively resolved unless the political and administrative apparatus is committed to, and fulfils, its role as the guardian of law and order and the driving force behind the Congolese economy. This is why the Congolese administration – at regional and local levels – must be reformed in every respect in order to adapt to the changes taking place, particularly in the administrative and economic spheres. This administration must demonstrate social responsibility. This approach was not merely an objective of successive governments but also the IMF's intention. The IMF played a role in the decline of the civil service, treating this as a *sine qua non* or indirect objective for the smooth functioning of the public service.

In theoretical research, descriptive analysis demonstrates that the administration is a powerful machine that contributes to the perpetuation and reproduction of the State as a sovereign political and territorial entity. Even though a World Bank report on governance in the DRC suggests that the administration 'seems to have abandoned its initial objectives' (Prof. SAMBA KAPUTO, 1995). There are clear trends suggesting that the Congolese public administration has been shaped by the Belgian colonial public administration, which established centralised structures. This influence has left its mark, particularly in terms of centralisation and bureaucracy.

At the end of 1995, the National Conference on the Civil Service concluded that the Congo's public administration was

suffering from three main problems: a lack of commitment to the public interest. Today, when we peruse this document – the country’s three-year economic and social development programme, published in 2019 by the government of the time – and recognise its clear political will to succeed in the challenge of development, we ask ourselves the same question as we did 29 years ago: with what sort of administration does the government believe it can succeed in this challenge? For bringing order to this administration has become a ‘mantra’ of every regime. In his book **L’argent des fonctionnaires** (**Civil Servants’ Money**), Thierry Jean-Pierre reveals the elusive figures regarding their actual salaries and benefits; he denounces waste and poses a troubling question.

Samba Kaputo, along with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Foundation and others, in **The Challenge of the New Democratic Republic of the Congo**, published by the Faculty of Economics and Development, in an article co-authored by the author himself. We note his clear political determination to succeed in the challenge of developing the DRC – a question that has been raised for 17 years, namely: which government believes it can succeed in this endeavour? In 1995, the General Assembly of the Civil Service established that the Congo’s public administration suffered from three fundamental ills: incompetence, inefficiency and a lack of regard for the public interest. To put this, question another way: could you change a sector entrenched in obstruction and its privileges? It simply leads us to this conclusion: the situation prevailing within the public administration has not seen any significant improvement.

The situation has worsened as further inconsistencies have arisen. It should, of course, be noted that civil servants’ salary payments – which had been suspended for several months under the Mobutu regime – resumed under the AFDL regime on the basis of an improved provisional pay scale; however, given the inflation that accompanies these regimes, no one can claim to live a dignified life, apart from officials in a few well-known ministries: the Budget and Finance Ministry, with its financial agencies, and perhaps the Office of the President of the Republic. For the other ministries, this has left them open to corruption, exploitation, predatory behaviour and a disregard for ethics. These are the main factors explaining why the Congolese state in general, and the civil service in particular, is characterised by the problem of personal survival within a sector where civil servants do not know which day will be their last. This is particularly evident in the world of work; we cannot emphasise enough that the future of any country in the world depends on its work ethic, the quality of that work, and a fair level of workers’ incomes. The author, Professor Kalele Kabila, in his book **Chez-nous**, notes that ‘the autocratic and inhumane powers that had ruled the

country until then had created a divided society comprising two camps, which Kalele Kabila describes as “Basusu na bisengo, basusu na mawa” – where, on the one hand, there are the rich living in opulence, in blatant and scandalous luxury, with privileges that allow only them to work and be entitled to happiness; and, on the other, the destitute poor, who possess nothing but their own bodies, their hunger, their illness and their misery. To this day, the country remains mired in the inequality and injustice in which we live.” The author, Raoul Kenge Kienge Inturi, in **The Challenge of Development in Africa**, emphasises the importance of your country’s development through the exercise of social responsibility across the various sectors of our country, with a view to addressing the challenges of integral human development.

With a view to developing the country, nation-building requires, first and foremost, a functional administration, the promotion of productive work and, finally, the equitable distribution of national income. It also requires a continuous struggle against regression, the worrying decline in productive effort and the constant deterioration of workers’ living and working conditions. The State has a duty to create jobs across all sectors of life, rather than merely swelling the ranks of the civil service in an attempt to combat idleness. It must, furthermore, adopt an appropriate wage policy, enabling workers to live with dignity, to care for their children, to send them to school and to build up savings to provide for their old age. This is our way of asking what the Congolese people want from their civil service.

The confusion that persists in relations between ministerial departments and administrative services is at the root of the existing conflicts and is undermining the functioning of the civil service. It is absolutely essential to reintroduce simple, common-sense rules into the management of the DRC’s civil service promotion system. First and foremost, it is vital to make the remuneration of civil servants fully transparent and to reduce the most glaring injustices. Secondly, the spirit and letter of the civil service regulations drawn up by successive governments should be upheld; furthermore, a more socially and humanely oriented approach should be adopted by proposing solutions for a transparent, efficient and more cost-effective public service. This theoretical argument brings us back to the question of what the Congolese people want from their civil service. Changing the Congo is undoubtedly, in the name of development, a noble task for the entire population – civil servants, intellectuals in particular, and ordinary people alike (Thierry Jean-Pierre, 2010, pp. 29–30).

2. What do the Congolese want?

Before we can properly answer this question, we must consider what constitutes the administration and its *raison d'être*. The administration comprises a wide variety of structures. They all share a common denominator: the pursuit of the public interest and the management of public affairs. At first glance, one is struck by the diversity and complexity of a country's institutional and administrative landscape. It is for this reason that some refer to the administrative apparatus or the administrative machine. It is increasingly recognised that the foundations of public policy must be open to alternatives to conventional economic reasoning, in light of empirical findings concerning different behaviours (Benartzi et al., 2017; John, 2013; Olivier, 2015). The institutions and activities of the executive branch are important; the combination of bounded rationality (Simon, 1955) can bring new elements to public administration, leading to better results.

We believe that the Congo is capable of practising genuine public administration that truly leads to social well-being and the exercise of fundamental freedoms: freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom to vote and freedom of the press (Guillaume Munzandji Iyenda, 2019). All Congolese people take the place of their civil service. They are right.

True to their history, they also want the Congo to provide the most disadvantaged with the means to live with dignity. They are absolutely right. To achieve these two objectives simultaneously, governments have one weapon, and one alone: the state budget. But the state's resources are not infinite, and it is now impossible to continue allowing a sprawling public sector to grow whilst effectively combating unemployment and social exclusion. In 2020, the payment of civil servants' salaries accounted for 41 per cent of revenue; this covers the payment of state employees, whilst the remainder is allocated to other expenditure, such as debt servicing and other needs. (2019 Budget Report). The state was expected to meet everyone's expectations by ensuring absolute equality in the handling of each individual's requests. Following so many financial scandals and corruption cases, the principle of equality before the public service is now nothing more than a relic of administrative law, and the State no longer has the capacity to address the demands – whether more or less justified – made by various parties. The public sector has remained disproportionately broad, encompassing purely short-term activities across all sectors at once. 'It's behaviour has made it seem as though it is a champion of unfinished projects, over-invoiced and ultimately biased.' Too big, too costly and less functional, the State has become difficult to manage and control.

Our civil service is the champion of 'always putting things off until the last minute' – do we really have so many civil servants and officials? State reform has become a refrain in election campaigns and at political rallies, where 'its modernisation', 'its transparency' and the 'necessary' adaptation of its structures to ensure it runs smoothly are presented as an action plan. But to what end? Every government since 1965 has promised to reduce public spending: the most daring promise sweeping cuts to the budgets of all ministries and a reduction in officials' standard of living, as if they knew in advance how to separate the wheat from the chaff. Others, pretending to believe that the State can be run like a large corporation, introduce management-inspired techniques: rationalisation of budgetary choices, user committees, charters of good governance or quality. All have been mistaken or are content with election promises which, as we know, are binding only on those who receive them.

All that remains of these failed policies is the foolish temptation to take legal action against civil servants who are powerless to do anything about the situation and who are the first victims of an administration that is inward-looking and extremely hierarchical.

This situation clearly demonstrates that this state of affairs is unacceptable. Can we imagine a business leader drawing up their budget without knowing the exact number of staff they employ, the pay scale, or the nature of the roles they perform? Yet it is under these very conditions that MPs, in the absence of data, examine and vote on the draft Finance Bill? Starting by holding the budget itself hostage for their own benefit and limiting expenditure solely to that recommended by ill-intentioned superiors, which ultimately leads to misappropriation? 'Today, citizens are calling for greater oversight; as users of public services and taxpayers, they aspire to "zero defects" '. This demand for quality cannot be dismissed by those responsible for the public interest. It is in this climate and within the limits of their remit, using the resources at their disposal, that the Court of Auditors, the IGF and the various governments were expected to respond to this legitimate societal demand for 'oversight', which was supposed to accompany a far-reaching reform of the civil service. A lack of political will? A lack of synergy with the civil servants themselves? Poor organisation? Let us hope that this time the current Minister for the Civil Service, who is fighting like a bat out of hell, will fare better. But given the prevailing situation, the light at the end of the tunnel is a long way off if we are to hope for resilience.

4. Current State and Structural Challenges of the Congolese Civil Service

4.1. No more hierarchy amongst people; no more hierarchy amongst affairs

It is recalled that the official who had been dismissed or suspended from service was aware of his punishment before the competent authority notified him of it. This was because the junior clerk who typed up the decision produced several copies and kept one hidden away to give to his friend or uncle who was the subject of the decision. The civil servant, with little or poor supervision, becomes careless and works as he pleases, without a sense of duty and without a proper understanding of the value of his efforts. And, as the French author Rabelais so aptly put it, we quote: 'Knowledge without professional conscience is but the ruin of the soul and the misfortune of the city'. We cannot proceed too far without, however, addressing the perplexing and endemic problem of governments failing to manage their workforce effectively. This study draws heavily on the need to establish a framework incorporating various considerations, including workforce numbers.

4.2. Control of the workforce of state employees and civil servants, as estimated in 2015

An indispensable objective whenever one considers bringing order to this sector through workforce management – which is not merely a matter of labour – has long been the governments' commitment to meeting budgetary requirements and the demands of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. In principle, the following is required: control over the number of state employees and civil servants, a prerequisite for the efficiency and performance of public administration and a high-risk factor for the resilience and development of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by 2030. Indeed, following strong domestic pressure – stemming from a socio-economic crisis – and pressure from the IMF and the World Bank, which have emphasised the need to control staffing levels and the wage bill as necessary conditions for restoring certain balances to improve economic governance, by re-establishing the conditions for financial, budgetary and administrative governance, and by restoring the conditions for an efficient public administration. National opinion suggests that: More than 40 per cent of tax revenue goes towards civil servants' salaries. Others go as high as 90 per cent. However, the current Minister for the Civil Service has revised this figure. It is now estimated that there are between 700,000 and 800,000 Congolese civil servants out of a population of 100,000,000; however, according to the economist GODE MPOYI, he points out that the public administration,

including the Presidency of the Republic, is thought to spend a total of at least 360,000,000 dollars per month, out of an estimated budget of 8 to 10,000,000,000 dollars – contrary to widespread belief that the entire national income is used solely to cover public administration expenditure. This would seem to validate the widely held assumption regarding waste and unequal benefits, helping to explain the situation. So what do they do with the rest of the money from the national budget? The reality was therefore a bitter one, the toll a heavy burden, leading to a downward spiral. To tell the truth, for a country with a population of 100,000,000, having a civil service of 1,000,000 is not a bad thing. Normally, in countries such as France and Germany, the size of the civil service is determined by a quota; one simply needs a sound budget. It is not the number of staff that poses a problem, but managing that number and the amount allocated to pay them. The DRC is struggling because, until now, it has not had a substantial budget.

5. Lack of a state strategy

Since independence, the Congolese state has experienced only brief periods of strategic governance; as soon as regimes sink into populism and the cult of personality – starting with the regime of 1965 and the crisis that followed in 1974 – we have seen our inability to respond to domestic and external economic and social challenges. The Congolese state is currently ill-equipped to cope with globalisation, despite our comparative advantages in raw materials, and is focused solely on pursuing traditional missions – particularly those relating to the necessary equality among citizens and solidarity. Making the state more effective means directing its actions towards well-defined strategies whilst adapting to the environment. Since independence, the policies implemented by Africans in relation to the civil service (and employment in the public sector) have generally shared three common features, all of which have undermined institutional capacity. Firstly, these policies have led to the public sector expanding more rapidly than the wider economy. Secondly, they have prioritised employment growth over income growth in the public sector, which has reduced real wages. Finally, they favoured pay rises for lower-grade staff, thereby narrowing the pay gap between skilled and unskilled employees. Consequently, these countries have a civil service that is larger than necessary, the cost of which exceeds their means and which is less efficient and productive than it ought to be.

In response to these problems, reforms have consisted of short-term measures to control costs and medium-term programmes to increase productivity by strengthening institutional capacity. If one adheres to a narrow, short-term approach, civil service reform is likely to yield only limited

results where the exercise of power poses serious problems (DIA, 1993).

5.1. Strategies for reform

There are various approaches to extricating the Congolese administration from its profound crisis. In any event, it is essential to reform it from top to bottom so that it can modernise and become a development-oriented administration. The changes required occur at several levels. The adaptation of structures at all levels of the public administrative apparatus. For example, at the level of central government, the ministerial cabinet should be restored to its statutory role as a small body that assists the Minister. This implies that it should not interfere in the work of the departments and should avoid creating a sense of frustration amongst civil servants that would prompt them to route all files through the cabinet, thereby contributing to its overburdening. Stabilising the number and remit of ministries. This will put an end to the bottlenecks caused by their constant splitting and merging. The revitalisation of the civil service through substantial material and psychological incentives, with a view to enhancing productivity through remuneration based on greater equity, comprising a range of incentives designed to foster a positive attitude towards the career: index-linking, social benefits, service records, a bonus scheme, a credit system, transport provision, and a decent and respectable pension.

- The recruitment of high-calibre staff on the basis of qualifications and competitive examinations. An employee's career must be closely monitored and assessed solely on the basis of the information contained in their file, which must be kept up to date;
- The restoration of disciplinary powers to combat impunity;
- Reform of a national school of administration, comprising several levels, to prepare students for a career in the civil service and to ensure continuous professional development through advanced training and refresher courses.

Significant resources must be made available to public services in order to ensure their normal functioning and production. These include: financial and material resources, as well as administrative facilities and infrastructure that need to be refurbished and modernised in order to ensure a logistics system capable of promoting production. To succeed, we must begin with genuine political will. It is with this in mind that

the vision for society and the reform strategies set out by each President of the Republic aim, in particular, to restore the State's authority across the entire national territory, to enhance human capital through the promotion of the civil service, to restore citizens' trust in the State, and to lend credibility to public policies in the face of the challenges and issues of emergence and sustainable development that the DRC faces, like other African nations. The current President and his government are no exception. These are significant reforms. The strategic options for reform, following the institutional assessment and evaluation of the state of public administration carried out in 2012, are addressed as such in this presentation. Each reform strategy calls for the establishment of the appropriate number of public sector staff.

Three major reasons underpin the strategic objective of the policy to control the size of the civil service. These include the impact of uncontrolled staffing levels within the public administration's human resources on: (i) public finance management; (ii) human resources management; (iii) organisational development and pay policy. (MATATA MPONYO, Kinshasa 2019, p.45) In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the burden of remuneration expenditure for the payment of salaries and allowances to state employees and civil servants (classified as 'mandatory' expenditure) is reported to account for more than 40 per cent of the State Budget. This percentage is all the more significant given that expenditure on operations, investment and debt servicing has been squeezed over the years as the size of the civil service as a whole – including the police and the army – has grown. Thus, up until 2016, significant progress had already been made in terms of staff numbers control and the realisation of budgetary savings. The results of the biometric census revealed a total of approximately 800,000 civil servants and public sector employees (excluding the army and the police), of whom 35 per cent were affected by the new units, 4 per cent of cases involved irregularities and 31 per cent were eligible for retirement, the majority of whom are concentrated at the very top of the hierarchy of ranks and roles within the civil service. (Staffing situation 2015–2022). This is the central focus of our presentation. But one cannot propose a solution without truly understanding the situation; one must begin by changing everything.

6. Do we need to change everything, and what is the biggest problem?

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has an inadequate budget, making it impossible to free up the necessary resources to **combat** unemployment and poverty effectively. With no financial leeway, the state is reduced to managing the status quo, and there is a risk that this situation will persist

unless it embarks on a path of far-reaching public sector reform, ridding itself of hypocritical measures driven by nepotism. If we compare the situation with that of other countries, despite the irregularities observed here – where the lists include the names of ‘fictitious’ children known only to those who benefit from them – the number of civil servants must necessarily be proportionate to the size of the population. The problem facing the civil service is that of knowing where civil servants’ salaries go, how much they earn, and what their actual numbers are.

Favouritism, regionalism, and the most recent trend to take hold – the increase in staff numbers through ‘political quotas set by those in power’. Our administration is not being crippled by the high number of civil servants, nor by the budgetary sums paid to them. Our country is the victim of an opaque collusion in which each regime does not seek to ascertain the actual number, but rather uses it as a pretext to give the appearance of change. Just imagine what we read about civil servants in countries such as France and Germany – and indeed, in all developed nations. France, to name but one, has over six million civil servants; this is not a display of wealth, but a conscious decision by a country to remain the nation’s largest employer and serve as a model. If it does this, it knows that: ‘the aim is to eliminate the uncertainties for which the civil service is criticised worldwide, and to find substantial means of sharing the national wealth. With a million civil servants, successive governments cannot treat this as a single panacea for resolving the problems of the civil service, but must instead allow the civil servants themselves to draw up lists to be presented once and for all, and limit their role to managing recruitment and departures – pensions, deaths, voluntary resignations – whilst treating revenue as an exceptional source of funding to address the challenges caused by such circumstances (authors’ views).

If one were to outline the broad principles of a method for reforming the state, one would first need to emphasise the need for civil servants themselves to commit – not to yet another modernisation plan, but to a genuine long-term project to transform our society. As such a reform cannot be achieved in a matter of months, the approach itself would then need to be made sustainable, so that its implementation is not hampered by changes in government. Finally, we should dispel once and for all two methodological errors and one conceptual error often committed by those who wish to – and who, at times, begin to implement this or that set of measures. The first error is to imagine that the State can be run like a large company; the State is not a company. Nor, for that matter, are other public bodies. National defence, internal security and the justice system are not small and medium-sized enterprises seeking to expand. And whilst certain rules

of corporate management may, with success, be introduced into public administration, they are not a panacea for the simple and obvious reason that most of the state’s actions defy economic calculation.

The second mistake is to claim that public spending can be reduced by making sweeping cuts to budgets. Those who advocate such cuts believe that an across-the-board, top-down reduction of 5 to 10 per cent ⁱⁿ the budgets of certain ministries would force the departments concerned to review their operating methods. In reality, it is to be feared that such cuts would lead these departments, not to re-evaluate their practices, but rather to abolish or scale back certain activities. Should such errors be committed, what would civil servants be expected to do? Recommendations for them to change tack are everywhere! The conceptual error is always the same. ‘Seeking to pit the welfare state – the great provider of solidarity – against an ultra-liberal state that would perform only its sovereign functions’. The first model corresponds to the Congolese state; the second, to the developed state. It is quite clear, on the one hand, that this highly Manichean presentation is false – the French state stands at the crossroads between the two models – and, on the other hand, that neither of these two models is in itself satisfactory. The ideal state is both committed to fulfilling its traditional role and strong in its redistribution to the most disadvantaged.

It is entirely unrealistic to ask civil servants to make any extra effort until they are convinced that the public money of which they are the custodians is being used properly. The proliferation of political and financial scandals thus fuels a feeling that ‘they’re all corrupt’, a view shared by an increasing number of Congolese. The only remedy for this situation is to allow the justice system to bring cases of major financial crime to a swift conclusion.

We now know that the creation of a few more specialised courts would be sufficient not only to deal with these cases within a reasonable timeframe, but also to launch an effective fight against organised crime and major international trafficking networks. Setting them up would cost the public purse a few tens of millions of francs a year, but would yield infinitely greater returns to the State budget. To take just one example, if the Minister of Justice were finally to decide to provide additional resources to the judges handling cases of embezzlement of public funds, they could already have seized and confiscated the bank accounts and property holdings of those criminally responsible for this massive mismanagement.

6.1. What can be done to reduce this massive squandering?

Once this intolerable sense of impunity amongst members of the establishment has been eliminated, the next step would be to reduce waste. At the initial stage, the role of Parliament and local deliberative assemblies is essential. We have seen just how limited their scope is. Downstream, the investigations carried out by the Court of Auditors, as well as by the General Inspectorate of Finance and the regional chambers, are indispensable. However, as they are too slow, they do not, in most cases, result in any sanctions. Politicians curtail the power of the judiciary; one might therefore speak of a kind of state-sanctioned complicity.

There are therefore three prerequisites for reform – all of which are already fully contained in this sentence from the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen: ‘Society has the right to hold any public official to account for his administration.’ The establishment of specialised courts to prosecute serious financial crime; the restoration of the role of Parliament and local assemblies in budgetary discussions; – strengthening the resources of the Court of Auditors and enacting genuine sanctions against ministers, elected representatives and civil servants who have committed serious mismanagement offences can project a positive image of the State.

In the current context, the challenge of development – whether here in Africa or globally in the context of globalisation – and the sense of social and public responsibility is ‘ethical’. This appears above all as the path to follow for such development, with a view to genuine economic and humanitarian progress (proceedings of the International Symposium held in Kinshasa on 17 and 18 April 2010). It is therefore a matter of centring every development project – whether in administrative or economic activity within the country, in a business, or within a governmental or non-governmental organisation – on the promotion and protection of the individual involved in one way or another in that activity. Furthermore, the issue of development is not merely a global issue; it is also a legal issue: by considering the State as a human being.

The Congolese state is bloated. It struggles to function and can barely carry out the tasks of daily life. It must be made to slim down and redirect its renewed energy towards sectors of activity that are essential to the national community. To take just one example – that of security – it is nothing short of scandalous that entire neighbourhoods have become lawless areas where the police find it incredibly difficult to enter and maintain even a minimum level of order. All the more so as this insecurity affects the most disadvantaged above all and further exacerbates their sense of living in ghettos and/or

poorly developed neighbourhoods. Yet it is possible to restore order in these neighbourhoods. All it takes is a few resources and political will, by implementing modern urban development and employing well-paid, dedicated civil servants.

6.2. The consequences or weaknesses of the reforms

Following independence, the DRC experienced periods of political instability, which affected the functioning of the public administration. Frequent changes of government and ministers made it difficult to implement long-term policies and encouraged the politicisation of the administration. Each government has its own reform programme. There have been several such programmes. Since the early 2000s, the DRC has undertaken reforms to improve governance and the efficiency of the public administration. These reforms aim to enhance the transparency of public officials. As the light shines on these matters, civil servants at certain levels of the presidency or specialised bodies are found to be allocating significant funds with little return. The bloated staff numbers in ministerial offices must be drastically reduced. Not only for reasons of economy, but above all so that central administration directors can once again become the ministers’ primary points of contact, which should make the situation much more manageable.

Another obvious reform is the reduction in the number of staff in ministries and state secretariats. It is easy, at least on paper, to draw up a list of the ministerial departments essential to the proper functioning of the State. These are Foreign Affairs, the Home Office, Regional Planning, Finance, Defence, Justice, Health, National Education, Agriculture, Industry, Labour and the Environment. The other ministries or state secretariats could, without the slightest difficulty, be abolished and merged into one or other of these major ministerial departments; for example, Culture into National Education, Veterans’ Affairs into Defence, etc., and research into National Education – we could have a single Ministry of Education. And if the Ministry of Scientific Research were to become a standalone body, it would need to be given the capacity to invest in fundamental research in order to generate wealth and secure funding; indeed, why not link it to new technologies and innovations?

Within these restructured ministries, the so-called ‘staff directorates’ should be reorganised and, where appropriate, consolidated to avoid any duplication. Other directorates could be merged. To take another example, the Public Accounts Directorate and the Directorate-General for Taxation could be brought together within a single, large

Directorate of Finance. A single secretariat for the Minister for Labour and Social Security.

6.3. Decentralise the management of staff and resources

The structure of the Congolese civil service is characterised by a barely concealed lack of confidence on the part of central government departments in the ability of frontline civil servants to manage the constraints of their working environment effectively. This results in often nit-picking scrutiny, not of the outcomes of administrative action, but rather of compliance with standards set once and for all by each ministry. In terms of staffing and resources, the lack of autonomy among decentralised services leads to rigidity and delays that are highly detrimental to the public. State services operating in local authorities, departments and regions must be allowed to organise themselves as they see fit and to manage their budgets and staffing levels with the greatest possible autonomy. A decentralisation of resources would, not least of all, make it possible to assess the quality of one service against another and thus to adjust the allocation of certain bonuses in line with these results. It is, in fact, quite extraordinary that these bonuses and allowances – theoretically created to compensate for particularly difficult working conditions or extra effort – are paid to all civil servants without any differentiation.

6.4. The public sector's inability to implement public administrative policies

The politicisation of the civil service is a major challenge, with civil servants often involved in public activities, which can compromise their impartiality and effectiveness. Hard-line measures include nepotism, favouritism and the sharing of spoils by political factions; however, corruption remains another persistent problem affecting the functioning of the public administration and hindering the country's development, where meritocracy can no longer be invoked or applied.

The Congolese public administration suffers from inefficiency and a lack of resources, which limits its ability to meet citizens' needs and implement sound public policies. Tribalism and corruption are the two issues that have become the hallmarks of the administrative and political class in the management of the civil service, which we consider to be a sham. As a natural extension of 'decentralisation', merit-based rewards must also be extended to all staff in central government in the same way; heads of departments must, without fail, learn to apply the regulations in force on performance appraisal and discipline.

Finally, if hierarchical authority is to be retained, it must go hand in hand with the ability of lower-level staff to innovate and adapt freely to the constraints they face on the ground. Two complementary approaches are at work here: a top-down, purely hierarchical approach, and a bottom-up approach, arising from the grassroots and based on the experience of professionals in the field.

7. What should be done about acquired benefits?

Over a hundred bonuses and allowances awarded in utter confusion to civil servants; belonging to nearly seventy-eight different grades, not to mention the benefits granted to staff of public enterprises and employees of subsidised organisations; this is enough to make even the finest technocrats' heads spin. Add to this job security, pension schemes that are more favourable for some and less so for others, working hours and conditions that are generally more lenient than in the private sector, higher salaries for some, and a profusion of sector-specific privileges, and one can better appreciate the extent of the vested benefits weighing down the entire public sector.

Not that they are all unjustified, mind you. It seems, for example, perfectly normal that civil servants who arrest offenders, care for people with AIDS, support the dying or teach in tough suburbs – or even in areas controlled by rebel groups – should not receive any benefits; Although rare, there are, at the same time, hundreds of substantial benefits granted in the utmost secrecy and without any specific justification to staff at the Office of the President of the Republic, the Ministry of the Budget and Finance, and the financial authorities. In reality, the system for awarding bonuses and other benefits has, over the years, become utterly unfair. It outrageously favours certain civil servants over others, and employees of public enterprises over civil servants in the strict sense of the term. It is therefore clear that a comprehensive reform is essential here. The only real problem – and it is a significant one – is how to carry out such a reform, given that the removal of any particular benefit immediately triggers a general strike in the sector concerned.

But do the Congolese truly understand the nature of these privileges? Probably not. The first step towards reform would certainly be to make the system transparent to all. The most exorbitant acquired benefits would thus be held up to public scrutiny, and it would be infinitely easier to reduce them. As for the other benefits, it might be worthwhile retaining them whilst distributing them more fairly amongst the rest of the civil servants – given the ever-rising standards of living enjoyed by the privileged and the ever-expanding range of benefits. Taking the analysis a step further, it became clear that the inefficiency of this quasi-liberal system in our country

stems from the inadequacy of the administrative structures designed to implement the country's policy choices. This led us, in this study, to examine this administration in some detail.

Our assessment of the Congolese administration has identified marked shortcomings in its structures, in the functioning of the principle of decentralisation, and in the civil service. As things stand, this administration cannot lead the country towards development nor can it act as an effective conduit for policy implementation, due to internal disorganisation and contradictions: ministerial cabinets have come to dominate administrative departments; the ambiguous position of division heads; and divisions that are merely extensions of ministerial departments rather than genuine, effective territorial administrations. This situation urgently calls for administrative reform before a new type of economy can be established. For this economy is globalised and driven by globalisation. It is changing, multifaceted and, moreover, humanistic in nature; but the only approach is to bear in mind that if you do not know how to look to your neighbour, they are not prepared to look to you, so be careful: even in a win-win situation, nerves are always on edge, and the only effective weapon remains a high-quality administration.

7.1. The State as Strategist

The Congolese State is ill-equipped to deal with both globalisation and the fulfilment of its traditional roles, particularly those relating to the necessary equality amongst citizens and solidarity. Making the State more effective means directing its actions towards clearly defined strategies whilst adapting to the environment. Let us take two examples. In the judicial sphere, this modernisation effort would involve aligning the judicial map with the administrative divisions and concentrating a single court in the departmental or regional capital, which would incorporate all the others. In economic terms, this would involve – to name just one measure amongst a hundred – rationalising the thirty or so schemes providing support for business start-ups, the nature and allocation methods of which led Bertrand Larrera de Morel to write: 'There is, so to speak, no support whose direct objective is the creation of businesses.' (Paul Christian Blanc 1993)

7.2. Towards a genuine rule of law

Over the past decade or so, the epicentre of Congolese society has tended to shift from the State towards the rule of law. In doing so, we are merely emulating developments that have already taken place in Anglo-Saxon countries, and in some cases following the French (European) model. This shift – which is reflected in everyday life by our fellow citizens'

increasingly frequent recourse to the courts – has at least two immediate consequences.

Firstly, the constantly expressed need for absolute equality of treatment before the law. The impunity enjoyed by certain members of the establishment is intolerable given the harshness of the repressive apparatus directed at other individuals subject to the law. (*Berand Larrera 1997*). Some people who are arrested by the courts end up in prison simply to appease public opinion. Secondly, the state's own submission to the rule of law is an illusion. It is for this reason that, for example, the continued existence of specialised administrative courts seems anachronistic. The decisions of our courts, such as the Constitutional Court—whose rulings are final and binding on all—are subject to dramatisation by the judges. To what extent should we intervene to create alternatives and make a difference? For we must contend with the public administration, which is beginning to realise that: the first victims of the State's inaction are the civil servants themselves. Poorly managed, poorly led, lacking in resources, and forced to work with no other objective than to pass their files, after due processing, from one corner of their office to another, the dismay of public servants is understandable. Yet it is with them that this reform must be undertaken. But politicians cannot demand any sort of cooperation from civil servants without first reforming their own way of operating – that is to say, before curbing clientelism, eradicating corruption and reducing the waste of public funds. And as regards the judiciary, these bodies must be allowed to remain independent, and judges must be well paid, free from political, tribal or regional pressure, so that the country can finally be put back on its feet.

8. Results and discussion

8.1. A paradox: the abundance of reforms and the persistence of dysfunctions

One of the first observations is paradoxical: the DRC is not lacking in administrative reforms. For several decades, various initiatives have sought to modernise the administration. The objectives have notably focused on controlling staff numbers, the wage bill, rejuvenating the civil service, increasing access to banking services, recruitment through competitive examinations, and staff training. Yet the results remain inadequate. Mosshonas and Baharanyi Naciyimba have already highlighted the mixed nature of the results of the various reforms and the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the process.

This observation leads us to reframe the question:

Is the problem not simply a matter of knowing which reforms to undertake, but also of understanding why the reforms are struggling to bring about the expected changes?

This question constitutes one of the central contributions of the present analysis.

8.2. Institutional inertia as a barrier to performance

An administration may have modern legislation whilst retaining outdated practices.

Institutional inertia arises when administrative structures no longer meet contemporary economic, technological and social requirements.

In the Congolese context, several manifestations can be identified:

a) Cumbersome procedures

The proliferation of administrative stages can slow down decision-making and reduce institutions' ability to respond.

b) Centralisation

When decision-making is excessively centralised at the top, decentralised departments have little scope for initiative.

c) Limited digital transformation

Digitalisation can reduce processing times, improve traceability and facilitate human resources management. However, the lack of sufficient digitalisation helps to perpetuate certain cumbersome administrative practices.

d) Organisational resistance

Any reform brings about changes in responsibilities, benefits and habits. It may therefore encounter internal resistance.

Inertia must therefore be analysed as an institutional and managerial phenomenon, and not simply as an individual problem amongst civil servants.

- The marginalisation of civil servants: a human resources management issue

Civil servants constitute the administration's main operational resource. Yet reform policies are often presented from the

perspective of structures and procedures rather than from that of staff members' professional experience.

A recent study on the perceptions of Congolese civil servants clearly demonstrates the value of analysing reform from the perspective of the expectations and experiences of the civil servants themselves.

- The issue of merit

The professionalisation of a civil service depends on the ability to recruit, assign and promote staff according to objective criteria.

When factors such as recommendations, patronage or affiliation take precedence over competence, the merit system gradually ceases to function.

Recent studies on administrative reforms in the DRC identify, in particular, the politicisation of competitive examinations, recommendations, quotas and patronage networks as factors likely to undermine meritocracy.

- Career management

An effective civil service must offer a relatively predictable career path.

Civil servants must be able to understand:

- The recruitment conditions;
- The assessment criteria;
- Promotion opportunities;
- Training requirements;
- Mobility arrangements;
- Retirement conditions.

Recent literature on the DRC highlights precisely the difficulties associated with career management, non-compliance with certain regulations, appraisal systems and pension management.

- Training as an investment

Training for civil servants should not be regarded as a secondary expense, but as an institutional investment.

In this regard, the National School of Administration is an important tool for professional development. However, a study published in 2025 highlights that its impact remains limited by the small number of participants and certain structural and financial constraints.

Training should therefore be extended beyond initial recruitment and incorporate a genuine policy of continuing professional development.

9. The central problem: the gap between formal reform and actual reform

One of the main conclusions of this study is the existence of a gap between formal reform and actual reform.

Formal reform refers to the adoption of:

- Laws;
- Regulations;
- Structures;
- Programmes;
- Procedures.

Genuine reform means effective transformation:

- Behaviour;
- Practices;
- Recruitment mechanisms;
- Careers;
- Hierarchical relationships;
- Working methods;
- The performance of public services.

A reform can therefore be legally adopted without bringing about a fundamental change in practices.

This is why the success of administrative reform does not depend solely on the quality of the legislation. It also depends on the mechanisms for implementation, monitoring, evaluation and ownership by civil servants.

10. Towards a new approach to civil service governance in the DRC

The re-examination of the Congolese public administration should lead to a paradigm shift.

Civil servants should no longer be regarded merely as administrative executors. They should be recognised as the state's strategic human capital.

10.1. Moving from an administration based on attendance to one based on performance

The objective should no longer be merely to check whether civil servants are present at their posts.

It is also necessary to measure:

- What they produce;
- The quality of the service provided;
- Meeting deadlines;
- User satisfaction;
- Their contribution to the service's objectives.

10.2. Establishing a genuine culture of merit

Recruitment and promotion must be based on transparent criteria.

In particular, it is important to:

- Strengthen professional competitive examinations;
- Clearly publish recruitment criteria;
- Ensure that decisions are traceable;
- Introduce appeal mechanisms;
- Regularly assess skills.

10.3. Digitising career management

An integrated digital platform could be used to track:

- Administrative records;
- Training;
- Postings;

- Promotions;
- Appraisals;
- Leave;
- Retirement.

Digitisation would thus help to reduce a lack of transparency and improve traceability.

10.4. Enhancing the status of civil servants

The reform must also be social and professional in nature.

Enhancing the status of civil servants does not simply mean increasing their pay. It also involves:

- Professional recognition;
- Career security;
- Training;
- Mobility;
- Empowerment;
- Involvement in decision-making;
- Recognition of merit.

11. Outlook and Recommendations

The outlook for the future remains, for the current regime and for future governments, a commitment to transforming Congolese society, to building a new, prosperous country – even if this is already a lofty ideal – and to forging a new, united, strong and happy nation by improving public services. This is a laudable ambition which, however, needs to be expressed as a coherent vision for society, the realisation of which will fall to the public administration. But for this administration to fulfil this role and become a development-oriented administration – that is, one adapted to the demands of economic growth and the social evolution of the state – the administrative authorities must meet the following key conditions:

1. Restructuring the public administration

The government must assign the administration an overarching service mandate that makes it a key instrument of national development. It must then set intermediate objectives corresponding to each of its main activities. It will therefore

be necessary to reorganise the ministerial departments in line with the intermediate objectives set ... to provide the administration with effective leadership; in order to function properly, the administration needs a sufficient number of competent, capable, experienced, honest and dedicated staff.

2. Provide the public administration with sufficient material and financial resources

This involves mobilising the budgetary resources necessary for the proper functioning and modernisation of the sector by providing the administration with increasing levels of its own resources, and modernising administrative facilities so as to facilitate and improve the administration's work in response to the imperatives of development and the demands of a public that is increasingly well-informed about its rights. Provide the administration with suitable building infrastructure that enables its staff to work in decent conditions (Conrad Adenauer Foundation, Seminar held in Kinshasa from 7 to 10 March 2003). What has transpired recently in the latest financial scandals has, of course, been unacceptable since 2020–2024. Our European neighbours have long since learnt this lesson; they have allowed the private sector in their countries to take over the vast majority of their governments' activities in the competitive sector. The Congo is lagging behind. It will inevitably be forced to follow suit and to reform some of its public services, which have hitherto operated as monopolies, by confining them to the role of simply regulating this or that activity. Improving public sector management: a long-term challenge?

Recommendations

Following this analysis, several recommendations can be made.

- To the Government
 - Develop a coherent multi-year strategy for administrative reform;
 - Ensure consistency between legislation and its implementation;
 - Improve transparency in recruitment;
 - Continue to manage staff numbers;
 - Accelerate the digitalisation of the civil service;
 - Strengthen evaluation mechanisms.
- At the ministry responsible for the civil service

- Develop forward-looking management of posts and skills;
- Introduce a transparent career management system;
- Strengthen continuing professional development;
- Establish competence frameworks;
- Develop mechanisms for professional appraisal.
- To administrative managers
- Encourage delegation and accountability;
- Combat discriminatory practices;
- Recognise staff initiatives;
- Create a working environment conducive to innovation.
- To civil servants
- Strengthen professional skills;
- Develop a results-oriented culture;
- Uphold the principles of ethics and neutrality;
- Actively participate in modernisation processes.

Improving public sector management is a development objective; it is beyond the scope of this study to assess the DRC's progress in this area on a sector-by-sector basis. It always takes a very long time to raise the quality of the civil service, establish career paths, put in place merit-based pay and promotion systems, strengthen budget and investment management as well as regulatory analysis capabilities; and all of this also requires substantial improvements to the institutional environment. Good governance is also required at every stage. The reform programmes of each regime have paved the way – rather than making comparisons to discredit other regimes by claiming that things are already fine today. This has laid the groundwork for obstacles to the implementation of fundamental reforms, which must continue even after they have been put in place.

The main short-term objectives of the measures were to reduce the size of the civil service to a manageable level, to bring real public-sector salaries to a reasonable level where necessary, to bring the payroll system under control, to eliminate the most absurd projects from investment programmes, and to draw up

a rolling investment plan encompassing all ongoing investment operations, and to reform the administration and policy-making process. Even in these areas, it is difficult to quantify the results achieved, partly because there are no well-established standards for measuring progress.

In such cases, recruitment is based on objective criteria; public sector employment is regarded as part of the social protection system; remuneration is not linked to productivity; and civil servants' loyalty lies with the political leaders in power rather than with the state, as indicated in the World Bank's report on economic adjustment in Africa. (2003, pp. 138–139). To improve the efficiency of the civil service, it may be necessary to begin by convincing public opinion of the need for sound public administration. Any measures taken to encourage professional groups and other interest groups, to guarantee freedom of association and expression, and to reform the judicial and legal systems will enable the public sector to become more productive and responsive, and will significantly reduce favouritism in recruitment, promotion and the allocation of advantageous posts, as well as corruption.

12. Conclusion

A critical examination of public administration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo reveals a problem that runs deeper than simply a lack of reforms.

For several decades, the DRC has had initiatives aimed at modernising its administration. However, the persistence of difficulties shows that the adoption of new structures and legislation is not enough to bring about lasting change in administrative practices. The available research highlights problems relating in particular to governance, recruitment, career management, meritocracy, training and the implementation of reforms. Institutional inertia and the marginalisation of civil servants must therefore be regarded as two interdependent aspects of the problem.

An institution that fails to transform itself risks marginalising its own human resources. Conversely, an administration that does not value its staff reduces its capacity to generate the innovation necessary for its own transformation.

Congolese administrative reform should therefore shift from an approach centred primarily on structures to one that combines institutions, human capital, technology and performance. The fundamental question is therefore no longer simply: 'How can we reform the public administration?'

It has become:

‘How can we build a public administration capable of continuously reforming itself and making civil servants genuine agents of national development?’ It is from this perspective that the modernisation of public administration can become a genuine instrument of economic and social transformation in the DRC. The immediate results of civil service reforms have so far been mixed. The only discussion we see in our country centres on the measures to be taken: reducing the excessive burden of the public sector’s wage bill, addressing ‘overstaffing’ where it truly exists, reversing the erosion of salaries, and broadening the range of remuneration packages that are struggling to deliver a national benefit. Throughout the world, the public administration has become a ‘partner’¹ of the political authorities in the drive they have embarked upon for national economic and social development. This implies that the public administration must now embrace change and improve its efficiency in order to rise to the challenge of new services and functions across a wide range of sectors.

The Congolese administration, and more specifically the regional and local administrations, must also face up to the imperative of bringing about the country’s development. This is, in any case, the mission that the political authorities entrust to the central, regional, local, rural and urban administrations, as well as to public enterprises. However, from the outset, the Congolese public administration has been on the wrong foot and must overcome considerable structural and functional obstacles. This is why it is in a state of acute crisis. As the backbone of the state and its driving force, it is therefore unable to ensure production and has dragged everything else into its crisis. This is why it is one of the key factors behind the crisis in the Congolese economy and must undergo far-reaching reform. This crisis will never be definitively resolved unless the political and administrative apparatus is sound and fulfils its role as a guardian, a force for maintaining order and the driving force behind the Congolese economy. This is why the national, regional and local public administrations must be reformed in every respect in order to adapt to the changes taking place, particularly in the economic, social and political spheres. We must establish genuine, effective institutions, starting with leaders capable of putting people to work in the service of sustainable development.

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