

Globalization and the Future of Trade Unionism: In the Nigeria Public Service in Perspective

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Abstract

Trade unionism is part of workplace activities. It also guarantees industrial harmony if properly practiced. Trade unionism is one of the rights of workers to enable them channel whatever grievances they may have from time to time. However, the era of globalization tends to impact negatively on trade unionism especially in the Nigerian public service. Some of the jobs hitherto performed by civil servants have been given out to private organizations while others have been privatized. Job lose have been the order of the day as a result of this. The welfare of Nigerian civil servants is not quite guaranteed due to globalization. The paper sees globalisation as focusing its attention on private businesses while it frowns at public businesses. In order to curb the negative effects of globalization on trade unionism in the Nigerian civil service, the paper recommends, amongst others, that the umbrella bodies of all trade unions in Nigeria should sensitise their members to align themselves to the dictates of globalization while new skills should be acquired so as to adapt to the new realities.

Keywords: civil service, globalization, jobs, trade unionism, workers.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation as a general concept came into focus in the early 1990s. The concept became more pronounced due to the influence of information and communication technology, privatization and deregulation of government businesses. It is truism to say that the world lives in an era of globalization. It is a much used and abused term in contemporary social science lexicon. Economically, globalization is used to denote increased economic integration, that is, greater trade and financial flows across national boundaries (Murshed, 2004). It has transcended many aspects of human endeavour. Be it social, political, economic, and so forth. In the political front, globalization has enabled and enhanced political processes like democratic governance, electoral processes and so forth. Economically, globalization has not only transcended national boundaries, it has enhanced commerce and trade among the comity of nations. Globalization has equally contributed to reduction in the cost of doing business. Socially, human interactions have been greatly improved.

However, in spite of these improvements, globalization has its challenges. This is so because the various key ingredients of globalization like privatization, deregulation, and others have impacted negatively in the social and economic activities of modern human endeavour. In this regard, globalization has also impacted on the management of enterprises, organizations, industrial as well as government institutions, especially the civil service in the area of trade unionism and industrial relations.

Due to the influence of globalization, industrial relations, especially trade unionism, has been affected in the Nigeria public service. Some of the functions of the civil service are being given out to private sector organizations; while some have been privatized. All these have led to job lose in many agencies of government. On the other hand, some of the jobs which required manual man-hours have been affected by automation or technology, like computers, G.S.M. and so on. Consequently, the future of trade unionism in the public service is bleak.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent has globalization affected trade unionism in the Nigerian public service?
2. What is the prospect of the future of trade unionism in the Nigerian public service considering the influence of globalization?
3. Is the welfare of Nigeria workers in the public service guaranteed considering the influence of globalization on trade unionism?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To find out the extent which globalization has affected trade unionism in Nigeria public service.
2. To ascertain the prospects of the future of trade unionism in the Nigeria public service taking into

- consideration, the influence of globalization.
3. To find out if the welfare of Nigeria public servants are guaranteed considering the influence of globalization on trade unionism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globalization

Globalization has no definite concept or definition. Many scholars and professionals define the word the way they see its manifestations on national and global scenes. Globalization is the increasing integration of the activities and practices of persons in modern world (Asobie, 2001). It also concerns the vertical and horizontal integration which involves quantity and variety of transnational commerce of goods and services which concerns foreign capital flows in human migration and through a rapid and broad spread and diffusion of technology (Akpotor et al, 2001). According to Kwanashie (1999), globalization is a process which enhances the integration of the entire system of interrelationship across national frontiers. Globalisation means the process in the reduction of barriers to trade, migration, capital flow, transfer of technology and foreign direct investment. Akpotor et al (2002), opined that the important side of economic globalization includes breaking down of national economic boundaries, the international spread of trade, financial and production activities and the increasing power of multinational corporations and foreign financial institutions.

According to Ali (2005), globalization is the process of increasing economic, cultural, and institutional integration among nations. It is increasingly driven by trade liberalization, investment and capital flow, technological advances, and pressures for the need of assimilation towards international standards. Baylis and Smith (1992), see globalization as the “process of increasing interconnection between societies such that events on one part of the world have more effects on peoples and societies faraway”. They further argued that a globalised world is one in which socio-political, economic and cultural activities have become more firmly connected together. According to Fafowora (1998), globalization is mainly focused on “making global being present worldwide at the world stage or global arena. Globalization has, no doubt, tremendously restructured the interactive aspects of nations by helping to break down the barriers in the cultural, commercial, and communication and several areas of human endeavour (Oluabuwa, 1999).

According to Kim, Kim and Morishima (2001), globalization is a process of increased economic, cultural, and institutional integration among nations which is influenced by trade liberalization, investment and capital flows, technological advances, and pressures for assimilation towards international standards. It is a collapsed barrier to the increase in trade, migration, and investment across boundaries (World Bank, 2008).

The Chinese Communist Party, according to Ali (2005), views the evolution of globalization from these perspectives: (i) globalization has developed out of the necessity of capitalist enterprises to look for the most profitable site to invest, (ii) the term ‘globalisation’ might be a new terminology, the tendency of capitalism to become a global phenomenon is not new, (iii) globalization is not technology-driven but development of the necessary technology has led to mobility of capital and expansion, (iv) globalization leads to homogenization, but their phenomenon would not lead to assimilation as local cultures would counter balance the erosive effects.

Nigeria Public Service

The Nigerian public service has come of age since the colonial era. The position of civil service in any country or nation is determined by the following key factors: the historical traditions, political philosophies, and ideologies, cultural patterns and so forth (Hyden, Jackson, and Okumu, 1970). The Nigerian public service is synonymous or intertwined with the political transformation of the country since 1861. It was established mainly for the maintenance of the British colonial objectives. It was set up as a governmental machinery to maintain law and order, facilitation of commerce and as well as protect the interests of the colonial masters (Etuk, 1992).

In order to ensure the enhancement of their welfare, the employees in the public service, that is, civil servants, formed many trade unions through which they engage the management of their various ministries, departments and agencies for improved conditions of services. However, globalization is fast affecting or impacting on trade unionism in the public service of the country. In Nigeria, all the trade unions in the public service belong to either the Nigeria Labour Congress or the Trade Union Congress. The latter came into existence in 2003 during the regime of President Obasanjo.

Trade Unionism

Trade unionism is the activities of labour or workers’ unions in relation to the welfare of the workers with their organizations or place of work. The organization or workplace could be a private concern or public enterprise or institution. It could also be public or civil service.

A trade union is “an association of wage or salary earners formed with the objective of safeguarding and improving the wage and employment conditions of its members and raise members’ social status and standard of living in the community” (Fajana, 2006). The Nigeria Trade Union Act 1973 defines a trade union as “any

combination or workers or employers, whether temporary or permanent, the principal objectives of which under its constitution are the regulation of the terms and conditions of employment of workers, whether the combination in question would or would not, apart from this Act, be an unlawful combination by reason of any of its purposes being in restraint of trade, and whether its purposes do or do not include the provision of benefits for its members". A trade union has a certificate, an office called a secretariat, structures, constitution and other visible paraphernalia which identifies them (Fajana, 2006).

According to the British Trade Union and Labour Relations Consideration Act of 1992 a trade union is "an organization whose principal purposes are the regulation of relationships between workers and employers or between workers and employers associations". Yesufu (1984), sees a trade union as the association of employees for the enhancement, advancement and defence of the terms and conditions of employment of their members including their standard of living.

International Conventions of International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.)

Consequent on the country's signatory and membership of International Labour Organisation (ILO), the workers are at liberty to form trade unions. As a result, Nigeria is bound by the laws or conventions enacted by the body. Mba and Ikemefuna (2011) enumerate some of the major conventions/laws of I.L.O. on trade unionism and industrial relations thus:

- (a) Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention No. 87 of 1948.
This is very fundamental to the exercise of collective labour rights by trade unions and unionists. This convention was adopted on 9th July, 1948, which Nigeria is a signatory. Under Article 2, the law provides that workers and employees have the right to establish or join organisations of their choice without previous authorization. Section 40 of the Nigeria constitution also guarantees freedom of association and formation of trade union.
- (b) Right to Organize a Collective Bargaining Convention No. 98 of 1949:
In Article 1 (1), this law seeks to protect the rights of stakeholders in industrial relations to be voluntarily involved and engage in collective bargaining. Nigeria has also ratified this convention. This law also prohibits anti-union discrimination against workers.
- (c) Occupational Safety and Health Convention No. 155 of 1981:
This was adopted on 22nd June, 1981. Under Articles 2 and 3, this law is applicable to all persons employed, including public employees (civil servants). It covers all places where workers need to be or to go by reason of their work which are under the direct or indirect control of the employers.

Within the country, the following are some of major post independence laws and legislations passed which are based on International Labour Organisation (ILO) ratified conventions between 1960 and 1993:

- (i) Basic Human Rights Legislation;
- (ii) Trade Unions International Affiliation Decree 35 of 1989, Laws of 1989; and
- (iii) Trade Unions International Affiliation Act Cap 438, laws of Federation of Nigeria 1990.

In spite of these conventions and local legislations, globalisation has impacted on industrial relations and trade unionism in the country's public service. However, it is necessary to state that globalization has many areas with which it can affect trade unionism in organizations in particular and the national economy of a country in general. These areas are:

- (i) Increase in Values and Volumes of Trade: Globalisation deal with the increase in values and volumes of trade in goods and services among nations which is consequent on reduction in tariffs, quota and other trade barriers (World Bank, 2008).
- (ii) Technology: Globalisation equally deals with the development and spread of technologies, especially in areas of information and telecommunication technologies which permits easy access to information all over the world. It also helps to connect with the production, distribution and knowledge networks (World Bank, 2008).

In addition, technology has influenced changes on the organisation of production and work at enterprises/organisational level that provides a good example of the factors encouraging and supporting globalization. In terms of organization of production, new technologies have increased the scope for greater flexibility in the processes of production. It is also solving information or coordination difficulties which earlier limited the capacity for production by organizations. Improved technology has made it possible to produce the same level of output with fewer workers. As a result, there is great emphasis on workers (labour) to possess higher value capacities and skills to perform a variety of jobs.

In the Nigeria public service, information and communication technology (ICT) has been introduced to increase efficiency, effectiveness and more output. For example, due to the introduction of computers, typewriters have been wiped out of the civil service and this has increased the efficiency and effectiveness of the typists who hitherto have been trained on computer usage.

The introduction, similarly, of GSM telephones has reduced the number of personnel

- (manpower) which are sent errands (messages). Where there is need to go long distances to deliver mails, motorcycles are now used to send one person to deliver mails to several places. The job which ten persons (workers) perform are now performed by less than five persons with the use of machines.
- (iii) Privatisation: The effect of globalization on labour and trade unionism in Nigeria started during the Obasanjo administration. The privatization exercise that was carried out in the sea ports reduced the numerical strength of labour by 300,000 occasioned by job lose (Ishola, n.d.). Many public enterprises that were privatized retrenched a lot of labour force. For example, many workers were laid off in the privatisation exercise that was carried out in the power sector in November 2013.
- (iv) Public-Private Partnership: Similar to privatization is public-private partnership (PPP). This is the coming together of government and private organizations to establish or manage an enterprise to the satisfaction of clients and for the purpose of profit. This also has constrained trade unionism in the public service. Public-Private Partnership is business-like and client-focused in its operations. Other areas of PPP which are also connected to globalization are:
- (a) Concession: This also falls within the purview of privatization. A concession makes the private sector operator (called concessionaire) responsible for the full delivery of services in a specified area. These include operation, maintenance, collection, management and construction and rehabilitation of the system. Also, the operator will be responsible for all capital investment. An example is the recent concession of the Nigeria railway transportation system to General Electric of USA by the federal government.
- (b) Contracting: This is another aspect of PPP. Under a service contract, the government hires a private company to carry out one or more tasks or services for a period. The government pays the private firm a predetermined fee for the service. The payment may be based on a one-time fee, or other basis. In the public service, many services have been contracted out to private operators. This is to ensure prudent management of resources and client-oriented in terms of service delivery. In the process, many jobs will be lost while trade unionism will equally fizzle out.
- (c) Joint Venture: It is the process whereby government having a joint contract agreement to jointly operate an enterprise together for the purpose of profit and client satisfaction. Joint ventures are alternatives to full privatization. In this case, the infrastructure is co-owned and operated by the government or public sector and private operators. Because a joint venture is meant to operate as a business concern, the civil service rules will not be applicable in the operations of the concern. The manpower will be reduced. The issue of trade unionism is never pronounced.
- (d) Contributing Pension Scheme: This scheme was introduced in 2004 by the Obasanjo administration. It is a scheme which compels the public servants and their employers or government to contribute equal per cent monthly to an appointed and legalized organization known as Pension Fund Administrator (PFA) who will be in custody of the money till the employee retires from service. The Scheme has neutralized the affected pensioners or retirees as they can no longer come together under one umbrella to agitate for their rights or welfare, unlike the previous scheme.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is hinged on the System Theory postulated by Professor John T. Dunlop (1958). The theory states that industrial relations system is a sub-system of the larger society. The industrial relations system comprised of certain actors, certain contexts, and ideology, which binds the industrial relations together. It also comprised of a body of rules which are used to govern the actors in the workplace and the entire work community. There are three sets of independent variables in the theory. These are the actors, the contexts, and the ideology. The contexts or determinants of the system are very important hence they go a long way in determining the direction or behaviour of the work environment. The significant parts of the environment in which the three actors operate or interact are (a) the technology of the workplace and work community, (b) the market or budgetary constraints, (c) a complex of rules, and (d) the locus and distribution of power in the larger society.

The larger society also operates in many environments like economic, political, cultural, social, and technological. An organization, be it public or private must be affected by the dictates of the industrial environment. Consequently, the Nigeria public service is not an exemption. Hence the trade unions in the Nigeria public service are not immune to globalization. The trade unions in the public service must condition themselves and their members to the dictates of globalization.

As globalization has come to stay, trade unionism and industrial relations must of necessity operate within its ambit. The environment of globalization includes technology, economic, market, privatization, deregulation, and so forth. In the system theory, technology is one of the cardinal determinants of industrial relations as it dictates the type and span of management control including the number of personnel (workers) to be engaged for work (Fajana, 2006, Nnamdi 2013). The constraints in the market environment are two, these are product market and labour market. The product market constraint determines how and the ease with which products or services

can be sold; while the labour market constraint affects or determines the bargaining power of and mobility of labour (Fajana, 2006, Nnamdi 2013).

Consequently, the environments in which all the actors in the industrial relations operate have a lot to do in determining their mode of operation. Globalisation has cut across almost all areas of human endeavour. In the public service, automation or technology is fact taking over most of the work or activities of labour. The computer and Global System of Telecommunication (GSM) have improved the services and output of personnel in the public service. Besides, they have reduced cost of doing businesses in the public and private sectors, hence efficiency has been tremendously ensured.

In the era of government quest to reduce the costs of governance, globalization has given fillip to the activities of public service. Globalization has been entrenched in the governance of nations and corporations in the form of I.C.T. and E-governance.

OBJECTIVES OF TRADE UNIONS

One of the very important aspects of trade union activity is the welfare of the members, like pension schemes, retirement benefits, homes and others. Many unions also take part in national politics. Other objectives of trade unions, according to Babajide (2001), are:

- (a) The promotion of efficiency in the services of members;
- (b) The promotion and protection of the interest of members both individually and collectively;
- (c) The improvement of the social and economic wellbeing of members;
- (d) The regulation of relations between members and their employers; and
- (e) The provision of financial assistance to members who lose their jobs on the basis of strong participation in the politics of the unions.

FUNCTIONS OF TRADE UNIONS

Three main functions of trade unions have been identified. These are:

1. Economic functions: the primary concern of a trade union is the terms and conditions of work. The major function is to ensure that the rates of pay of its members reflect good living standards. Also, the union must ensure that the pay is comparable with the rates and scales of pay of workers in similar organizations or industry. It must also ensure there is job security.
2. Social and Educational Function: as an association which comprises of persons who are exposed to social experiences, trade unions provide convenient and essential platform for the exchange of experiences and ideas and opportunity for mutual assistance and cooperation. In terms of education, trade unions often times organize yearly, district and local conferences so as to learn the state of current industrial relations as well as specific problems of the conditions of national and global economy and the industry as a whole. Also, the unions from time to time publish newsletters and bulletins so as to keep their members abreast of the union activities, including organizational, political, social and economic development.
3. Political Function: Trade unions are involved in political affairs of the state, especially when it affects their wellbeing. The major reason which compels the state to interfere in industrial relations, also explains the need for trade unions to participate actively in politics. Some of the areas which precipitate or ginger trade unions in political activities are the principles and policies on labour laws; the need for the state to intervene in important areas of the life and work of employers and the need for government to maintain a close and continuing alertness in the industries.

Other functions of trade unions are:

1. Trade unions avail workers of the knowledge of market situations regarding wages in the industry so as to help them resist under payment by their employers.
2. Regulation of hours of work, shift working and pay holidays.
3. Introduction of working rules and democratization of labour management.
4. Protection of workers from exploitation and tyranny of employers of labour against victimization for part-taking in union activities including unfair dismissals.
5. They give necessary assistance to government in the drafting, issuing and execution of labour laws.
6. The negotiation and administration of collective bargaining agreements so as to ensure industrial harmony (Nnamdi, 2013).

Impact of Globalisation on Trade Unionism in the Public Service

No doubt, globalization, with all its advantages in modern economic sphere, is having negative toll on the civil service in the area of trade unionism. Some of the effects on trade unionism could be traced from the following angles:

1. Reduction in trade unions and membership numerical strength: Trade unions in the public service will

- definitely reduce in number. This will manifest in the form of number of unions or professional associations which are in the civil service. Also, the number of members in the various trade unions will reduce remarkably. As a result, the few members will find it hard to speak with one voice to make meaningful impact in their welfare.
2. Reduction in Check-Off Dues: Trade unions the world over depend on the check-off dues realized from members' contributions for sustenance and survival. If membership strength shrinks, trade unions will no doubt, be hard hit financially from time to time.
 3. Collective Bargaining: In future, collective bargaining may be decentralized, for example, the issue of minimum wage. The need for trade unions to collectively demand for uniform wage increase and welfare packages may not be possible in the public service.
 4. Organisational Structure and Technology Impact: According to Webster et al, (2008),
 - (a) Many organisations designed methods which solely meet technological requirements. The negative impact of globalization is its main contribution to unemployment, increase in contingent labour force and the weakening of trade unionism and labour movements.
 - (b) Organisation structures are designed to cope with the demands of technological innovation without regard for human elements or activities of individual workers to achieve set goals.
- Other impacts of globalization on trade unionism in the public service in Nigeria are:
1. Unemployment
 2. Flexibility and multi-skilling which leads to inadequate skills in present day public service.
 3. Changing structure of the labour market thereby making it more profitable for the employers, especially semi-independent agencies of government to engage the services of part-time workers.
 4. Exploitation of workers
 5. The destruction of the environment of small and poor countries that lack the capacity to influence the policies of multinational corporations.

Responses to Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent has globalization affected trade unionism in the Nigeria public service?

Globalisation has affected trade unionism in the areas of privatization, deregulation, and technology. Many workers have lost their jobs due to deregulation and privatization; while technology is fast eroding jobs which many workers are doing. As a result, the numerical strengths and finances of trade unions have reduced.

Research Question 2: What is the prospect of the future of trade unionism in the Nigeria public service, considering the influence of globalization?

Though globalization has come to stay in many aspects of human endeavour, trade unionism has a future prospect in the public service. Another factor is the need of government to reduce cost of governance. Taking cognizance of the above factors, the future of trade unionism will not be as vibrant as it is today in the public service.

Research Question 3: Is the welfare of Nigeria workers guaranteed considering the influence of globalization on trade unionism?

The welfare of the public servants is guaranteed, because the civil service cannot be wiped out in the scheme of governance and governmental affairs. The civil service is a key factor in government machinery as it is the executor or implementer of government policies and programmes. What cannot be guaranteed in future is their welfare after retirement due to the new pension scheme because the retirees can no longer unionise. Secondly, the numerical strength of public servants whose welfare can be guaranteed will be few as their finances will also drop considerably as a result of privatization and deregulation and other associated globalisation variants.

CONCLUSION

Globalisation has had a lot of impact in the social, economic, political and technological affairs of modern man the world over especially as regards the mode and methods of private corporations as well as public services. It has had more impact in conducting private businesses. The impact of globalization in the activities of both private and public activities has equally affected the affairs of industrial relations thereby determining the direction and conduct of trade unionism. Its negative impact on trade unionism is felt more in the private sector. The public service has had its impact but due to the importance of public service in the affairs of government, the negative impact has not been much felt by the trade unions, hence there is still prospect in the future of trade unionism in the public service.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the influence of globalization in both public and private sectors, the following recommendations are put

forward in order to guarantee the future of trade unionism in the public service in Nigeria.

1. The trade unions, the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress should always sensitise their members on the need to align themselves to the current dictates of globalization;
2. New skills should be acquired by the workers so as to adapt to the new realities of their occupation and world of work. By so doing they will flow with the currency of globalization;
3. Workers should adopt other ways of saving for retirement and for the rainy day so as not to be caught napping by deregulation, privatization, and the new pension scheme; and
4. The unions need to adopt another method or approach to unionism, considering the fact that the numerical strength of the membership will surely shrink due to technology, deregulation and privatization.

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