

# **Civil Service in Ethiopia: the Marriage between Profession and Politics**

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## **Abstract**

This paper assesses the organisational development in Ethiopia. Since the fall of the Military administration, the Ethiopian civil service has undergone major structural changes. However, there are controversial issue among scholars about the extent of marriage between the civil service professional and the governors (politicians in power). Bureaucratic organisational structure was effective in the older days when the role of the state was limited to performing few governmental activities. Currently, citizens expect variety of services from the government that require seamless and flexible organisation that is effective and efficient in delivering services. The analysis in this paper has used primary data, secondary data, informal discussion made with different individuals. In addition, this research has evaluated the impact of the reward system and restructuring organisations on motivation of professionals, professions and professionalism in the civil service. Some African scholars believe that Africa is suffering not only from the lack of capacity but also from human factor decay. The assessment in this paper indicates that professional position has not significantly changed in relation to other jobs in the civil service for the last ten years, corruption indicators indicate that Ethiopia has improved in 2009, the civil service has a conducive environment for professionalism inspite of the fact that political affiliation and nepotism are existing in recruitment and promotion of employees. In order to enhance the capacity of professionals and to strengthen professionalism in the civil service, this paper recommends to prepare training package in civil service at a masters level for any fresh entrants to the civil service, to strengthen the human resource of the Ministry of Civil Service in management expertise focusing on organisational design and development, information technology and human resource management and finally the government to start the two-year horizontal salary increments of civil servants.

## **1. Introduction**

The Ethiopian civil service has been in the process of major structural change since 1993. Structuring the civil service has been vital to adapt to the social, political, economic and technological changes taking at the international and at national level. For this reason, the government has been implementing CSRP as a part of the package of Structural Adjustment Program. The government delegated this responsibility to the former Ministry of Capacity Building.

The Ministry sponsored a lot of management trainings such as Service Delivery System, Strategic Planning and Management, Result Based Performance Management system, Civil service ethics, etc. in an attempt to implement RBPMS in all of the civil service organizations. In implementing the reform, different issue were discussed between scholars, civil service professionals and government officials, in other words the politicians. Hence this paper assesses the different factors that affect the professionals and professionalism in the civil service.

To assess the professionalization of the civil service, the researcher has used his experience, primary data collected through questionnaire, participated in meetings, participated in trainings in BPR, performance management, strategic plan trainings Observation and reading documents.

## **2. The institutionalisation process in Ethiopia**

According to the definition of Scanlan and Keys, institutionalisation is “the process of establishing standard roles, duties and behaviour”. Institutionalisation is important to change an organisation from “enterprise” level, highly “individual and informal”, to bureaucracy, highly “institutional and formal” (Scanlan and Keys, 1979:177)<sup>i</sup> Since we are discussing about organisations that are the arms of the government to implement development and economic policies, it is essential to highlight some points on the growth of education in Ethiopia. Education is vital in institutionalisation process. In Europe, the establishment of modern government organisations took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries long after many schools and universities were established. For example, Austria established modern government organisations long after the University of Vienna started in the mid 14th century (Mühlberger and Maisel, 1999).

Ethiopia started to establish its modern organisations around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century before any formal education started in the country. Modern bureaucracy needs skilled manpower to function properly. The first modern schools were established around 1908 (Pankhrust, 1997) before the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1930. Between the mid 1920s and the mid 1930s, the number of elementary and secondary schools increased. Many students were sent abroad, particularly to Egypt, Lebanon, Europe, and the United States (Pankhrust, 1997). Except for the brief period of the Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941, Emperor Haile Selassie paid much attention in expanding education in the country until the early 1960s. The first university college, the current Addis Ababa University, was established in 1950 (Source: Addis Ababa University Website). Starting from 1923, the emperor was strengthening the aristocracy, and between 1930 and 1960 the pure feudal system modified to feudo-bureaucratic system. These schools and colleges were useful in feeding the human resource needed in the then government organisations and the military. In spite of the effort the emperor exerted to expand education, he was not aware of the effect that education might bring on shaking the foundation of the feudal system. Currently, there

are more than 10 universities and there is a plan to increase this number of universities to twenty by the end of 2015.

### **Historical Development of the establishment of civil service organisations**

Ethiopia until the advent of Emperor Tewodros, was closed to the outside world. The rise of colonialism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century threatened the survival of Ethiopia as independent nation. After the battle of Adwa<sup>1</sup>, Ethiopian rulers understood that they were going to be a prey of colonialism, in the name of “civilisation”, unless they proved to European powers that they were on the track of modernisation. In 1907 Emperor Minilik established seven ministries: Ministry of War, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Pen, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Commerce and Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of the Imperial Court (Zewdie, 1991<sup>ii</sup>; Pankhrust, 1997<sup>iii</sup>). According to Zewdie (1991), the first ministries were established between a “dilemma of tradition and change”. This implies that these ministries were run by feudal lords and priests, with a slight of knowledge reading and writing obtained from church education..

The establishment of modern state organisations in Ethiopia took place approximately 120 years late from that of in Europe. For example, in Austria, the foundations of modern state administration were laid between 1749 and 1790 during Empress Maria Theresa (Solsten, 1993). In Sweden, the separation of the central government into ministries and agencies dated back in the late 1600s (Wilks, 1996, p. 24). However, in Ethiopia, Emperor Hailesellassie restructured the government apparatus to curtail the power of the nobility and to strengthen the central authority of the monarchy during the early 1930s and after the country was liberated from the Italian invasion.

Around the early 1960s, the emperor, with the support of the French, established Central Personnel Agency to administer government employees. Influenced by Europeans, the central personnel agency was structured in line bureaucratic principle of “a strictly defined hierarchy governed by clearly defined regulations and lines of authority”. The major characteristics of Bureaucracy are specialization of tasks, appointment by merit, provision of career opportunities for members, routinization of activities, and a rational impersonal organizational climate.

In the history of the Ethiopian Civil Service, it was the military government that highly strengthened the bureaucracy in the pretext of democratic centralisation. The military converted the civil service into an instrument to promote its communist ideology and to rule the people. In this connection, the military administration had passed a lot of instructions, rules and regulations to control the civil service institutions within the boundary of its ideology. Even if the emperor was requiring civil service employees to declare their loyalties, it was the military junta that violated the autonomy and independence of the institution. Worse than the emperor time the measures taken by the military was the major cause for undermining professionalism in the civil service. This bureaucratic system was too archaic and non-responsive to the technological and social changes that had taken place for decades. Moreover, the central personnel agency had become a bottleneck on the performance of other civil service organisations. This was why the incumbent government after replacing the

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<sup>1</sup> Adwa is a place where the Italians and Ethiopians fought in 1896 - the Italians to colonize the remaining part of Ethiopia in addition to Eritrea, and the Ethiopians to defend their independence.

military government, tried to use different reform tools to change and eliminate the red tapes and the redundant activities that have stifled the operation of the whole civil service

After the political change took place in 1991, one of the milestones taken by the government was the restructuring its organisations so that they could accommodate the new political approach of federalism. The introduction of decentralization of power entailed the change that was taking place in the structure of the civil service and the legal and political environments of the nation. The first structuring took place between 1992 and 1994 to allocate staff from the center to the newly formed regions .

To improve the living standards of its people, a government of any developing country has the responsibility of undertaking different types of development programmes. In addition, it has to revise its policies frequently to create congenial business environment and to attract private investors to the country. Hence, the government needs to improve its administrative capacity by strengthening the management skill of its organs and should focus on professionalising of the civil servants in order to achieve its goal spelled in the Growth and Transformation Plan of the nation.

### **Concepts of Professional and Professionalism**

As discussed previously, bureaucracy is about merit based, rules and regulations, routinisation of tasks and impersonal organizational climate. On the other hand the New Public Management (NPM) is about efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, transparency, fair, equity, private firm like management, etc. Today, the bureaucratic civil service organization is giving ways to agile and flexible organizations that produces results and provide efficient services to citizens. Therefore, this is directly related with the current concepts of good governance that in turn are demanding for professionals and professionalism in the civil service.

In short a professional is a person who is educated and trained and who is competent, motivated and impartial civil servants working in a system dedicated to serving the public interest (OECD (1997))<sup>iv</sup>. Professionalism is defined as "Meticulous adherence to undeviating courtesy, honesty, and responsibility in one's dealings with citizens associates, plus a level of excellence that goes over and above the commercial considerations and legal requirements."<sup>v</sup> This explains the characteristics of professional public servants as people that:

- give priority to the public interest over their personal interest;
- engage in professional socialization to enhance civil service culture in their work place and out of workplace
- possess intellectual capacity to make fair judgements towards their clients, work independently, pride in their profession,
- are dedicated to improving the quality of their services and should have pride in the quality of their work.

Professional socialization is the process by which civil servants learn and inculcate ethos, values, ethics and standards of conduct through education and training programmes, including demonstrating the existence of good role models at senior levels (Kernaghan 1993 and Langford, 1990 in UNDP, 2007)<sup>vi</sup>.

## **The Civil Service Reform on Results Based Performance Management System**

Due to the changes in office technologies at the international level and due to social, political and demographic changes at a national level, the restructuring of Ethiopian public organisations to accommodate these new changes became crucial. Since the late 1980s, the trends of public administrations in developed countries have been towards transparency, accountability and “result based performance evaluation of civil servants”(Flynn and Strehl, 1996). Similarly, the current government of Ethiopia has undertaken civil service reform program. with the objective of implementing “result based performance evaluation” in all of its civil service Result based performance evaluation needs transparent system, accountable management and measurable performance standards. In addition, result based control depends on the degree of decentralisation of power, the use of information technology and the availability of skilled manpower.

With regard to Ethiopia, before we conclude that result based approach is a panacea for all ills of the civil service, it is essential to consider the organizational factors that affect the management of public organizations. There were different views reflected on why public organisations underperformed. Some blamed the bureaucracy in the civil service for inefficient performance. Others blame the interference of the politicians in the affair of the civil service (Kassahun, )<sup>vii</sup>. It is undeniable that civil service organizations should serve all parties irrespective of the political party in power. These scholars are in favor of rules, regulations or believe in the eternity of the bureaucracy. However, the current trend in the nature and structure of the civil service is towards the principles of NPM which requires agile and flexible organisational structure. Therefore, bureaucracy is not a structure that fits the current thinking of organisations that are effective and efficient for results, that empowers managers and professionals, creates accountability for results,

### **Some points on the African Civil Service**

In Africa, much of organisational decisions are made within the view of political interest rather than organisational efficiency. For example, all ministries and government agencies have Women Affairs Department. There are also some scholars who believe that politics in Africa is seen as a means of livelihood and politicians use these public organisations as a means of achieving their political and economic end rather than as a means of accruing benefits to their nationals. In most cases organisational systems, whether they are existing or new ones, are under the influence of authorised individuals to be changed easily without considering the impact of the change on the whole system and on the environment.

The African civil service was subject for restructuring because of the deteriorating economic conditions of developing countries as a result of the “oil price shock”, With the objective of alleviating such problems, the World Bank launched the structural adjustment program in many parts of the world including in many Sub Saharan African countries such as Tanzania, Ghana, Uganda and Kenya (Toye, 1990).

However the success of this program has been dubious and has been the main focus of critics by many scholars. Some argue that a nation cannot achieve sustainable economic growth unless the structural adjustment program addresses the main problem i.e. the “human factor decay” (corruption, mismanagement, embezzlement, irresponsibility, lack of personal integrity, lack of work motivation, indifference, etc.) (Senyo, 1998)<sup>viii</sup>. He further forwards a solution to focus on HR development.

In to days Sub Saharan Africa, it is obvious that the HF decay is taking root and becoming rampant. System decay begins when the control subsystem of a system is not able to control itself and the function of its members. The HF decay is the result of many social, political and cultural problems. When the control subsystem starts to abuse its power, the beginning of system decay, people (members) begin to lose confidence and hope in their social, political and economic systems and starts to revolt as the Arab world are doing today, or try to accommodate the situation until the time is ripe for change. Therefore the solution of developing the human resource may not be the only solution for the decay of a system because the educated employees in the public sector, who abuse their knowledge and power, are the main subjects of the mentioned human factor decays. In order to survive, employees in the public sector have become dishonest and corrupt while the efficiency and working culture of their organisations are deteriorating from time to time (Malima, )<sup>ix</sup>.

Restructuring of the public sector involves the dismantling of some of government institutions and creating new ones. As a result governments were requested to lay off some of their civil servants in the 1990s. For example, beginning from 1992/93, Tanzania was required to lay off 50,000 of its civil servants out of the 330,000 in two and half years time (Malima, 1994). According to Senyo (1998) <sup>x</sup>, the retrenchment in Tanzania didn't meet its objective of increasing civil service efficiency rather it exacerbated the decay of human factor in the public sector of the country.

#### **4. Effects of restructuring on professionals**

A lot of civil servants were forced to leave their organisations during merging and unmerging of government organizations. The then adjusted salary in the public sector was not compatible to the salaries offered by NGOs and the rapidly increasing private sector organisations in the country to retain the experienced and qualified personnel. As professional employees were leaving the public sector for private and NGO sector for better payment many positions in the civil service offices became vacant, which brought intense competition among civil service offices themselves for experienced professionals. In the year 2000, the statistics of the FCSC indicates that out of 2047 employees separated from their offices 916 (44.8%) left voluntarily<sup>2</sup>

In general the low level of salary payment in the civil service sector, the better offer of the market and the free movement of labour had made civil service offices to lose many of their qualified personnel. This had forced agencies and regional bureaus to recruit low qualified personnel and fresh graduates. The frequent changes of employees is also the main reason for losing organizational memory and inability to establish organizational culture.

#### **Quantity and quality evaluation of Employees in the civil service sector**

The number of employees has grown from 46701 in 1962/63 to more than 620, 000 in 2007. In the year 2000, there were 25 ministries and authorities, and 22 board administered organisations under the federal government,. There were also about 42000 permanent and 3000 temporary civil servants . In addition, federal states had around 58 different kinds of civil service offices with 302,000 permanent employees (FCSC, 2001b). The following table shows the change in the number of organisations and employees between 2001 and 2008.

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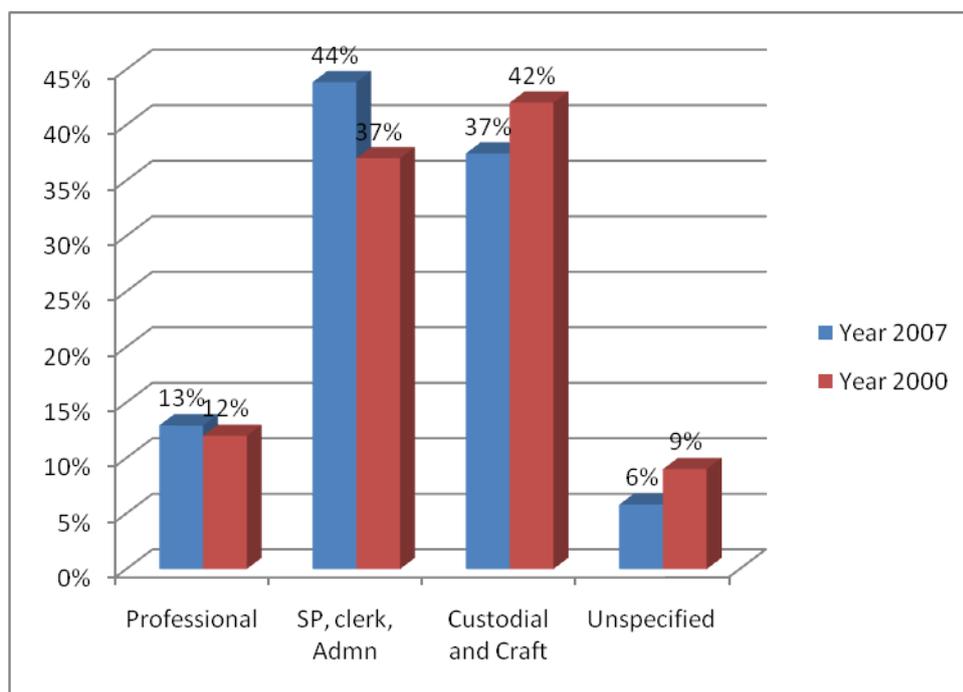
<sup>2</sup> Source FCSC employee statistical Bulletin, 2000

Items	2001	2008	Change in percentage
No of ministries and authorities	25	25	0%
No of Federal Agencies (within ministries)	22	76 <sup>3</sup>	200%
No of Federal Employees Permanent	42000	57012	35%
Federal Contract Employees	3000	3750	25%
Regions permanent	302000	563,250	87%

According to the current statistical data of the Federal Service Agency there are above 620000 permanent and 12216 temporary/contract civil service employees throughout the country. Out of these, the Federal Government has 57012 permanent employees and 3746 temporary/contract employees<sup>xi</sup>.

The change in job structure indicates to what extent the quality of jobs is shifted lower level job structure to professional job structure. The ideal civil service structure should have professional jobs more than 40% of the available jobs and somewhat 20% or less for clerical or sub professional jobs and less than 10% for custodial and manual jobs (Tesfaye Debela 2009)

**Figure 1: Job structure by classification of jobs**



Despite the fact that the number of federal employees has increased from 42000 in the year 2000 to 57000 in the year 2007, Figure 1 shows that the professional job structure increased by 10%, the sub professionals increased by 7% whereas the custodial and handicraft declined by 5%, Hence, the job structure of the civil service has slightly shifted towards sub professional activities during the specified period. Therefore, the size of professional structure has not significantly improved in the periods between 2000 and 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Out of the 76 agencies 10 are universities

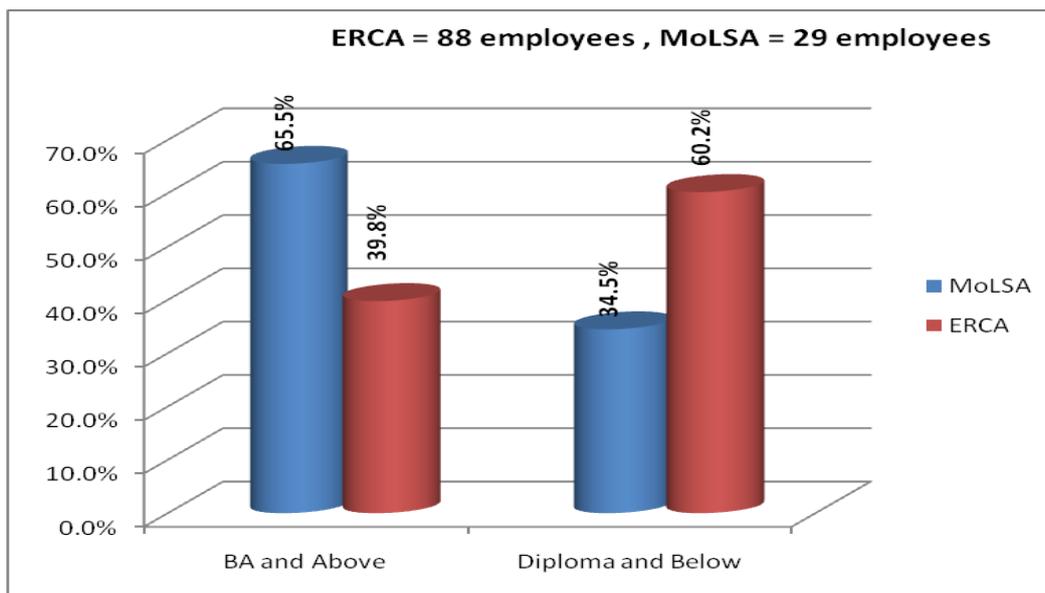
## Professionalism and payment system

The Ethiopian government has frozen the bi-annual horizontal salary increment of the civil service believing that it can link performance result of employees with the associated reward by implementing result based performance management system in all of its civil service organisations. However, the government did this without establishing the result based performance management system. However, recent researches indicate that organisations differ in their missions and that some organisations are amenable for measuring their results whereas some organization are not easy to measure their results at organizational level (Tesfaye and Atkilt, unpublished). Therefore, it is remote at this time to measure the results of organisations live alone to measure the results of individual employees that fall within the assessment power of the supervisor or the manager of the organization.

Since the freezing of this salary, the government has scaled-up the salary of all civil servants more than three times to minimize the effect of inflation on the living situation of civil servants. However, Not yet proved in research, there is a hypothesis that the information of across the board salary increment exacerbates the inflation in the country. Hence, freezing the two years horizontal increment undermines the motivation of the civil service professional to act and behave professionally.

In addition a survey was conducted to assess the effect of payment on the performance of employees. Out of the 29 employees who voluntarily left MoLSA in 2008/09 and in 2009/10, 65% were highly qualified personnel with BA degree and above whereas only 15% were with diploma and below(see Figure 2),. On the other hand, out of the 88 employees who left ERCA, 60% were employees with lower qualifications - diploma or below. MoLSA is losing its highly qualified employees in search of better living conditions and jobs. In addition, productivity of MoLSA continues to fall as a result of the dilemma that the employees have between looking for other jobs and doing their assignments in MoLSA.

**Figure 2: Employee separation by proportions of Qualifications (ERCA and MoLSA)**

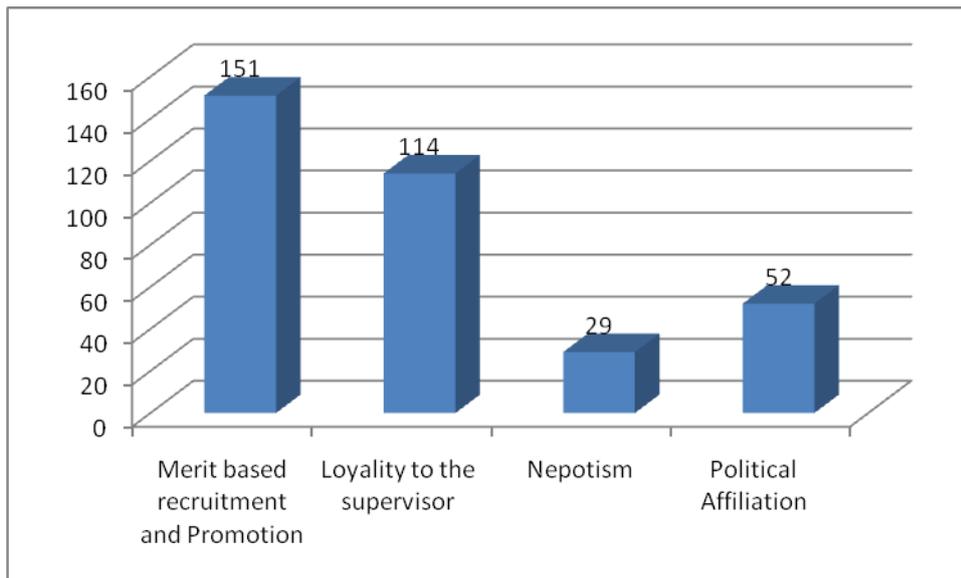


Source: Tesfaye and Atkilt (2011)

At the time of implementing BPR, the results indicate that fierce resistance came from professionals and middle level managers (Tesfaye and Atkilt 2011). As a result, many professionals were not comfortable with the change process and large number of them voluntarily left the ministry.

In addition, some 43 employees from two ministries were questioned to assign points between 0 (none) and 5 (very high) points to the factors that highly influence the recruitment and promotion of employees in the organisation. This is to measure to what extent professionalism is affected in the organisation. The comparison was made between four variables (see Figure 3) the first is merit of the employee (qualification, experience and performance) with the maximum weight of 151, the second is loyalty to the supervisor with a point of 114 and the third is political affiliation with a point of 52 and the fourth is nepotism with a point of 29. This indicates that the two organisations are mainly recruiting and promoting employees based on their qualification, experience and performance. Since the qualifications of the respondents were first degree and above, the response is valid to assume that professional are favoured in promotion and recruitment. However, this doesn't exclude the possibility of political affiliation in recruiting and promoting employees in the civil service. This has a negative effect on maintaining professionals in the organisation.

**Figure 3: the factors that influence promotion and recruitment in the organisation**



One of the factors for the measure of professionalism in the civil service is the annual corruption survey conducted by the Transparency International. The scale moves between zero for completely corrupt system and ten for a system free of corruption Table – show that Ethiopia has improved its point from 2.6 in 2008 to 2.7 in the year 2009 and its rank has improved from 126/180 in 2008 to 116/178 in the year 2010. For Eritrea the corruption level is the same where as the rank reduced mainly because of the two countries absent during. The case of Ghana seems exceptional in Africa.

Year From The recent to the earliest	Ethiopia		Eritrea		Ghana	
	Point	Rank	Point	Rank	Point	Rank
2010	2.7	116/178	2.6	123/178	4.1	62/178
2009	2.7	120/180	2.6	126/180	3.9	69/180
2008	2.6	126/180	2.6	126/180	3.9	67/180

Source: Transparency International Reports

### **Factors that erode professionalism**

The following are the factors that undermine professionalism (source informal discussion)

- Backward Beliefs and attitudes in the civil service:
- The we and they attitude: We have seen that the development of the Ethiopian politics goes from Feudalism, to Military Dictatorship and the current government. The political tradition of the country was surrounded with hostile political environment.
- Inadequate facilities and work environment
- When the politician dictates the solution that requires professional involvement (the professional becomes neutral on the situation. When the politician interferes in the work of the professional.
- When the professional resists political decision
- Salary which doesnot satisfy the basic personal need.

### **Outlooks between the professional and the politician**

There may be different outlooks and interpretations concerning the relationship between the governor and the professional.

The civil service in the eye of the politician

- Resists change
- The civil servants are there to fulfil the strategic objective of the government
- Wants to interfere in my political work

The politician in the eye of the civil service

- He is a politician he doesn't know how to run a bureaucracy
- Interferes in my work
- Recruits politically affiliated personnel
- changes are implemented as a result of political decision rather than as a result of research.
- Sentimental and short sighted: Wants to see results quick, thinks always about his political goal.
- Wants to make us busy, increase work load, in the name of change

### **Conclusion**

The current trend in public management is the shift from bureaucratic organization that require the compliances of the manager on the rules, regulation and procedures towards seamless organization that deliver effective and efficient services to citizens. Thus

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organizations need professional civil servants that work independently and that are at the front line to solve the problems of citizens. The retrenchment program could not remedy the moral deterioration among the civil servants.

Declining social values (honesty, integrity, dependability, impartiality, courtesious, and fairness are gradually disappearing from the public service (Agere and Mendoza, 1999:26).”. In Ethiopian case any reform measure creates fear of job losses, increases paperwork and workload. This has made civil service organisations to waste their limited human resources, financial resources as well as the memory of their organisations

The main problem of inefficiency in the public sector is not redundancy in the number of employees but the lack of motivation, helplessness, and low salary that throw people to become careless, negligent, indifferent and corrupt. Therefore the focus should be directed towards how to motivate the existing workforce, how to increase the number of civil service employees in quantity and quality. The reform program should focus on establishing stable and effective systems to increase accountability, to reconcile the need of managers and the politicians.

Accordingt to UNDP (2007: 6) “Adopting new laws including code of conduct by itself does not go very far without implementing the spirit and the word as well as political will.” This statement agrees with the assessment made in this paper because it is difficult for modern civil service organisations to operate with strict lawas and regulation where the citizens environment is dynamic as a result of the advancement of information technology. Similar to the assessment of UNDP (2007;6), experience in Ethiopian civil service reveals that the government has attempted to promote ethical behaviour in the civil service through solidifying legal structures for example establishing Anti-Corruption Commission; a code of conduct for the civil service, for example tying badges: ethics campaigns for example introducing ethics course in colleges, trainings, etc. Unlike to the assessment of UNDP (2007:6) the government has not introduced ‘citizens' charters’, has been weak in implementation of transparent control and accountability systems at organizational levels..

**The dominancy of political ideology in controlling:** The designs of most controlling systems in public sectors are highly influenced by the ideologies of politicians in power. An imposition of ideology implies controlling norms, values, expectations, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals, and it is tantamount to enforcing social control without getting the willingness of the group. Copying a controlling method used in ideological organisations to economic organisations (Etzioni, 1975) may have a negative effect on the performances of the economic organisations. The attempt of politicians to use their ideologies to control government organisations may cause divergence of goals between the politicians and the managers of the organisations.

***The vague relationship among the agent and the principal in government organisations:*** Control is affected by the relationship of the principal and the agent towards a property or work. According to agency theorists, principal and agent are interchangeable. The politicians in power represent the people and act as principals. These politicians do not have any alternative except using state bureaucracy to deliver the services they promised to the public. Hence they hire professional to manage and run the bureaucracy. A professional, becoming the agent of the government, is responsible to run the bureaucracy to deliver the service promised by the politician. If merit based approach is to be implemented and if

organisational change is sought, then the government should not make the management positions of government organisations permanent tenure of few individuals and should make these positions open for competition every four or six years so that the civil service can get inflow of competent managers that would bring change.

## **Recommendations**

- 1. Strategy to reform the Ministry of Civil Service (MoCS):** The approval of government organisational structure and salary scale based on outdated procedures has made, the former FCSA a hurdle on the performance of government organisations. Therefore, the MoCS should be concerned with the general human resource policies and designing systems and organisational structure of government offices. This requires enhancing the human resource of the ministry with well qualified and well-paid organisational experts. These experts should have the skill and capacity to undertake periodic research, revise the structure of government organisations and advise politicians on organisation change process by taking into account the political, social, economic and technological changes.
- 2. Developing Dynamic Managers and Professionals:** The civil service requires highly qualified professionals that can plan, organise, lead and control strategies of the government and provide citizens with fair and equitable services. Hence, to accommodate the frequent organisational changes requirements in the public sector, the MoCS should plan on how to induct professionals when they first join the sector has to design short term trainings that would increase their awareness on the organisational changes happening around them and the world. It is also important to make “professional tasks” to be “controlled by those who already perform them” (Mintzberg, 1991b)
- 3. Designing schemes to motivate professional employees:** The government is striving to implement result based performance management system in its public agencies, though it has to be cautious on which of the organisations it should apply first. This increases the risk of the managers as well as the professionals. Public managers can take risks associated with their decisions if the rewards they earn can compensate the challenges they withstand. In addition, any theoretical and technical knowledge obtained in academics becomes worthless unless it is supported by favourable working environment.

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