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SINGLE SPINE, DOUBLE SPINE OR MULTIPLE SPINE: SOLVING LABOUR CONFLICTS AND MAKING PUBLIC SECTOR JOBS MORE REWARDING IN GHANA

Isaac Brako and Kwame Asah-Asante

Abstract: The governments of Ghana and public sector workers have since the country's independence, well over fifty years ago, been embroiled in a protracted fisticuff all in their quest for a rewarding compensation package that will adequately recompense the latter for the physical and mental efforts they exert at their various places of work. The road to finding a lasting solution to this brawl has been tortuous, bumpy and chequered.

Commissions upon commissions have been instituted to among other issues, advise the government on the effective ways of rewarding the country's labour to stem the tide of labour agitations for an enhanced, equitable and rewarding compensation regime, but this single laudable objective has never been attained.

Incessant strikes, threats of strikes and storms of protests continue to greet every government that assumes political power in Ghana. Hardly a year goes passed without a group of labour unions issuing such threats or embarking upon work stoppage either to demonstrate their dissatisfaction with government's lackadaisical attitude to the implementation of one public sector salary regime or to demand for enhanced remuneration package.

The real solution to this age-long problem continues to elude the country. The single-spine pay policy (SSPP), which was touted to be a panacea for the craved for rewarding compensation by Ghana labour has failed to suffice to whet the appetite of public sector workers. So, where do we turn next?

This paper traces various attempts both past and present governments have made to find a lasting solution to the protracted labour agitations for enhanced remuneration for a comprehensive, equitable and

rewarding compensation package for the public sector workers in Ghana. It enquires into other possible measures of solving the matrices of confronting the onslaught in the labour front to stem the tide of agitations over wages and salaries. The data was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data comprises of reports by commissions and committees set up to review wages and salaries for the country's public sector which is supported with information from existing literature on the subject.

Keywords: *Agitations, disparities, distortions, inequities, perennial*

Introduction

Various governments of Ghana have, since the country's independence from the British colonialists have made and continue to make frantic efforts at rewarding public sector employees adequately to attract and retain well qualified and competent staff for the sector. In spite of their efforts, not much seems to have been achieved as the implementation of salary reform regimes introduced by governments aimed at achieving this laudable objective is punctuated by labour agitations and the clamour for a better salary regime. Furthermore, there seems to be no clear path. The path to lead the country to achieve the feat of implementing a salary regime that will suffice to meet the expectations of the Ghanaian public sector labour seems to be bumpy, winding and tortuous. This problem is, in part, the direct consequence of the absence of a salary reform agenda or policy path for successive governments to follow. This lacuna of a clear reform agenda has indeed, become the bane of Ghana's public sector salary administration.

Statement of the problem

As many as eight salary regimes or recommendations of salary review bodies have been implemented by successive governments in the almost six decades of Ghana's existence as a nation. The implementation of each regime creates further problems leading to agitations by labour unions and the subsequent introduction of yet another salary regime. The spiral effect of this has been the distortions, disparities and inequities that have characterized the pay regime in the country. These are the very problems the numerous salary reform regimes seek

to address. What is the real solution to this problem that seems to have eluded us as a nation? This is what the study seeks to establish.

Objective of the study

The study seeks to trace the evolution of salary review bodies set up by successive governments in Ghana and their respective recommendations made to salvage the anomalies in pay regime in the country. It also seeks to identify the challenges encountered in the implementation of pay reforms and suggest ways of overcoming them.

Methodology

The data of the research is obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprise information obtained from reports from commissions and committees set up to make recommendations to the government for implementation and thesis reports on the topic. Existing literature relevant to the topic has also been used to supplement it and constitutes the secondary sources of data.

Theoretical framework

The government-labour fisticuff can best be explained by the elite model of policy implementation. The model is premised on the theme that public policy is a decision by the ruling elites. The fundamental argument of the model is that it is not the people or the masses who determine public policy through their demands and actions; rather public policy is decided by the ruling elites and carried out by public officials and agencies. If the above is true, then it can be said that public policy may reflect the taste and serve the interest of the governing elites at the expense of the large non-elite segment of the society (Dye 1995: 26; Dye 2011: 20; Brako 2012). The elite theory typifies the top-down approach.

The elite concept is associated with three scholars: Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1936) and Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) both Italians, and Robert Michels (1876-1936), a German. This trio forms the *classical elitist* who profoundly influenced thinking about power in the twentieth century political science.

Thomas R. Dye and Harmon Zeigler in their book, the *Irony of Democracy*, summarise the assumptions of the elite theory as follows:

1. Society is divided into two - the few who have power and determine public policy and the many who do not have power and comply with determined public policy. Only a small number of persons (the ruling elites) allocate values for society; the masses do not decide public policy.
2. The few who govern are not typical or representative of the masses who are governed. This stems from the fact that the elites are drawn disproportionately from the upper socio-economic strata of society – education, profession, status.
3. There can be transformation or shifts from non-elite to elite positions, but it is only non-elites who have accepted the basic elite consensus or views who can be admitted to governing circles. This movement of non-elites to elite positions must, however, be gradual and continuous in order to avoid revolution and maintain stability (the status quo).
4. Public policy does not reflect demands of the masses but rather the prevailing values of the elite. Changes in public policy will be incremental rather than revolutionary.
5. The masses or non-elites are apathetic, ill-informed and passive and do not show that they are interested in what goes on in the political arena. By the virtue of their apathy, the elites take advantage and decide on behalf of the masses.
6. Active elites are subject to relatively little direct influence from apathetic masses. Elites influence the masses more than the masses influence the elites.

The elite theory postulates that public policy will always serve the interest of this small group of people in the society called the elites. The implication there is that public policy does not reflect demands of the people so much as it does the interest and values of elites. Changes and innovations in public policy come about as a result of redefinition by elites of their own values (Dye 1995; Dye 2011; Brako 2012). The model emphasizes that a small elite group is responsible for the

formulation of a public policy and the small group also governs and manipulates a rather large, passive, apathetic and ill-informed public. Policy thus flows downwards from the elites to the masses and is applied by a select group of appointed public officials.

An overview of salary reforms in Ghana's public sector

It will be apposite to traverse the trajectory of the salary reform regime by successive governments in order to appreciate the real issues in question. Successive governments have since 1967 set up various committees and commissions to among other issues examine and review disparities, distortions and anomalies inherent in the compensation system in the public sector (Republic of Ghana 1983: 12). Between 1967 and 2013, a period of forty-six years, successive governments have set up seven such major salary review bodies.

These are the Mills-Odoi Commission, set up in 1967; the Issifu-Ali Committee established in 1973; the Azu-Crabbe Commission of 1979; the National Committee for Wage and Salary Rationalization instituted in 1983; the Gyampoh Salary Review Committee, inaugurated in 1992; the Price Waterhouse and Associates established in 1997 and the last but not least the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission, created in 2007. The overall objectives of the salary review commissions and committees had been to craft salary structures for the public services that will improve efficiency and the economy in administration and secure the elimination of waste. It is appropriate to take a closer look at the reports of the various bodies at this stage.

The Mills-Odoi Salary Review

The Mills-Odoi Salary Review Commission was set up in January 1967 by the National Liberation Council (NLC). The commission was, to among other issues, consider and make recommendations on certain matters concerning the structure and remuneration of the public service (Republic of Ghana 1967: 2) and examine the salary proposals for the removal of any such disparity, taking into account the job classification and the qualification required for the establishment of parity in the emolument of public officials (Republic of Ghana 1993: 2).

Regarding remuneration and conditions of services, the commission sought to investigate the following:

The remuneration and conditions of service of all grades in the public services and to recommend what changes may be necessary therein;

The need to establish permanent machinery for ensuring that the remuneration in the different sectors of the economy are kept in proper balance and to make recommendations therein; and

The relations to be established between the public services and statutory corporations and the public services and trade unions, paying particular attention to the principles governing relative levels of remuneration (Republic of Ghana 1967: 24).

The commission made a number of findings after the study. First, it identified that the wages and salaries of public boards and corporations were generally higher than those in the private sector and the civil service. It also established that the improvements in the civil service salary rates should not justify further increases in salary rates of the public corporations and the private sector. The commission further found that the earning trend was skewed in favour of the private sector, indicating a dwindling in the public officials' share of the national cake (Republic of Ghana 1967: 24).

The Mills-Odoi Commission made far reaching recommendations. These included the establishment of a permanent body to be called the Public Service Salary and Wages Commission (PSSWC), whose main responsibility was to advise government on the determination of salaries and wages and other conditions of service in the public services. The commission also recommended a new salary structure to take care of the employees of the public sector to bridge the gap between remunerations of the public sector employee (Republic of Ghana 1967: 6). The commission, in addition, called for the consolidation of all non-taxable allowances into one non-taxable allowance to stem the tide of the proliferation of allowances in the public service. Another recommendation made by the commission was for the establishment of an industrial court to act as the supreme and final authority on matters in disputes. It was also to ensure that personnel in the public services, including the civil service, would be governed by standard practices in appointment, recruitment, advancement and discipline

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as a means of introducing parity in remuneration and conditions of service (Republic of Ghana 1967: 6). In addition, the commission suggested the introduction of uniformed rules and regulations relating to retirement benefits, which should be applicable to all public servants.

Though the NLC government set up administrative machinery called the Office of Government Machinery (OGM) after receiving the Commission's report, not much was done to implement the recommendations. Public sector salaries were increased, however the basic problem of distortions and disparities in salaries still persisted. One factor that could possibly explain the partial implementation of the recommendations was that the report was submitted at the time the NLC government was busily preparing to return the country to constitutional rule. This perhaps overshadowed the implementation of the Mills-Odoi recommendations, and as a result most of them were left for the Progress Party (PP) government to implement (Aggrey-Darkoh 2001: 82).

The Progress Party government, just like its predecessor government, could also not do any serious work to implement the recommendations. The non-implementation issued from the gross disappointment expressed by civil servants culminating in the formation of the Civil Servants Association of Ghana (CSAG), which staged a series of demonstrations and strikes to register their repulsion with regard to the commission's recommendations on salary, stating that the costs fell below their expectations (Civil Service Association 1992: 46).

The Issifu Ali Committee

To address the concerns of the public sector workers especially regarding the issues of salary distortions and disparities, the National Redemption Council (NRC) which later metamorphosed into the Supreme Military Council (SMC), set up the Issifu Ali Committee on 10th August 1973, after the council had taken over the country's administration from the PP government. The committee was tasked to investigate the remuneration and conditions of service of all grades of personnel in public service and also to investigate the means of bridging the gap between the lower and higher income groups. It was also to take into account the impact of the cost of living on levels of

income in the country and make appropriate recommendations to the government (Republic of Ghana 1974: 1).

The Committee found out that people left the civil service, particularly the professional grades, to work in the public boards and corporations to perform similar functions, obviously for better remuneration (Republic of Ghana 1974: 11). Consequently, it recommended that the salaries of Principal Secretaries in the civil service were to be on par with managing directors of public boards and corporations. Closely allied to that, the Committee recommended that posts requiring qualification and workloads as those in the public services were to be remunerated about the same. The committee further recommended that workers ought to be adequately compensated to offset any effect of inflation that is, reversing the trend in the falling of real minimum wages due to inflation. In line with the above, the committee recommended changes in salary levels, thus improving upon the Mills-Odoi salary structure and levels. The Committee also recommended the abolition of the existing grading system because of the imbalances in salaries inherent in it (Republic of Ghana 1974: 14). The Issifu Ali Committee made a number of outstanding recommendations which marked a departure from those made by the Mills-Odoi Commission. One of them was to the effect that the Prices and Incomes Board (PIB) be charged with the responsibility of implementing the recommendations therein (Republic of Ghana 1974: 63). Another novel recommendation made concerned the provision of subsidized meals, transport services and comprehensive housing schemes. Also unique from the previous Mills-Odoi report was the recommendation for the compression of the salary structure by suggesting higher increases for the lower income group in relation to the higher income group.

Upon the receipt of the Committee's report, the NRC government implemented most of the recommendations made by the Committee. First, the daily minimum wage was raised to ₵2.00 as against the ₵1.80 recommended by the Committee because the government considered it to be inadequate to cushion workers against the prevailing economic challenges. Secondly, the government approved the Committee's recommendation to remove the income disparity between civil servants and their counterparts in public corporations. This move was to stem the tide of experienced staff from the civil service exiting to work in corporations and the private sector. Other recommendations such as

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the introduction of subsidized meals, transport and housing allowances; the new enhanced salary schedules of salary ranges for the public sector as well as the recommendation for higher increases in the salaries for the lower income group as a way of bridging the gap between the highest paid and the lowest paid workers which paved the way for the compression of salaries were equally accepted by the government and implemented (Aggrey-Darkoh 2001: 88).

It is instructive to note that the implementation of the recommendation to greatly increase the salaries of the lowest income earners as a means of bridging the income gap between them and the highest paid salary earners became a disincentive to senior and executive personnel as it led to serious distortions. During the period of the implementation of the Issifu Ali Committee's recommendations, the country's export plummeted as inflation was hiked thus eroding the purchasing power of workers. Instead of the government finding a real solution to the economic quagmire the country had been plunged into, it resorted to anti-labour practices such as arbitrary salary reduction, retrenchment of workers, putting workers on long periods of leave without pay and loss of employment benefits (Aggrey-Darkoh 2001: 90).

The situation provoked a storm of protests from the labour front. Industrial strikes were rife and even utility service providers like the Electricity Corporation of Ghana (now Electricity Company of Ghana) did not pity their numerous consumers when they withdrew their services by staging a 10-day nation-wide strike in 1978. The Civil Servants Association of Ghana (CSAG) also joined the fray by embarking upon industrial action which nearly paralysed the government machinery. The precarious state of affairs and the absence of industrial peace fueled by a string of strikes compelled the government to set up yet another salary review body, the Azu-Crabbe Commission.

The Azu-Crabbe Commission (1979-1983)

The Azu-Crabbe Commission was set up in February 1979 by the second Supreme Military Council (SMC II); a government formed after the overthrow of the Acheampong-led SMC I. Like the other previous salary review bodies, the Azu-Crabbe Commission was commissioned

to investigate issues regarding the remuneration and conditions of service of all grades of personnel in the public service including the civil service (Republic of Ghana 1993: 6). The Commission was to take into consideration job classification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) as the basis for the determination of jobs and their respective remuneration relativities.

The Commission recommended among other issues, the use of cost of living as a basis for fixing wages so as to reduce corruption, increase productivity and attract and retain the best brains in the public service. It also recommended the adoption of government approved salary and wage range structure by all government establishments when negotiating for revision in salaries. The Commission further recommended the consolidation of allowances into the basic salary levels as a pay supplement. The Azu-Crabbe Commission recommended a new salary and wage structure and general salary increase levels of between 15 and 20 percent of gross incomes (Aggrey-Darkoh 2001: 91).

Notwithstanding the laudable recommendations made by the body, very little was done by the government to implement them. It is worthy of note that between 1979 when the Azu-Crabbe Commission was set up and 1983, when a similar salary review was established, the country witnessed a turbulent political climate. The military junta that formed the SMC II government in 1978 was overthrown and replaced by another military junta, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) in 1979. The AFRC was replaced by the constitutionally elected People's National Party (PNP) government in 1979. In December 1981, the PNP administration was toppled in a military coup d'état and its stead taken by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). The political instability witnessed during the period perhaps explains the failure of the Azu-Crabbe Commission recommendations from seeing the light of day.

The PNDC government assumed political office in 1982, when the country had still not recovered from the economic malaise that had hit it since the 1970s. The economy lapsed into serious crisis in the 1980s as inflation soared reaching triple digits in some years. During the period, production in all sectors of the country's economic life declined and as a result real export earnings dropped by approximately 52 percent, while real wages also dipped by over 80 percent (Aggrey-Darkoh

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2001: 94). The PNDC government was compelled by this calamitous economic decline to seek financial support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) to resuscitate the economy. This led to the implementation of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) and later Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) (Donkor 1997: 119; Brako 2003: 52).

The National Committee for Wage and Salary Rationalization (Ncwsr) (1983-1993)

As part of the implementation of the ERP/SAP, there were moves to reform public sector wages, public utility pricing and subsidies (Killick 2010: 407). In an effort to improve the standard of living of the entire citizenry and public sector workers in particular, the government set up the National Committee for Wage and Salary Rationalization (NCWSR) in 1983. The body was to compile all relevant data on job classification, both local and foreign; evaluate the content of jobs and their respective ratings; submit all other relevant criteria to be used in determining the rationalization system of remuneration and entitlements; and to develop guidelines for a rationalized salary and allowances regime that expresses the principle of “each according to his ability and for each according to his work”. Republic of Ghana 1993: 9). The Committee recommended the classification of top posts in the public service; consolidation of salaries, a retreat from a policy of wage compression; and also to the effect that productivity increases ought to be the basis for salary increases.

The implementation of the above recommendations created mixed emotions among workers thus sparking off pockets of labour unrest. It was amidst this hostile industrial milieu that the government set up yet another salary review body, the Gyampoh Commission.

The Gyampoh Salary Review Commission (1993-1997)

The spate of industrial unrests that characterized the country’s labour front between 1983 and 1992 following distortions and inequalities in salary levels as well as the dwindling purchasing power of the worker haunted and moved the PNDC government to set up the Gyampoh Commission in February 1992. The chronic problem of distortions and

disparities that had bedeviled the compensation system in the public sector had intensified the sufferings of the Ghanaian worker because of the consolidation of salaries based on the recommendation of the National Committee for Wage and Salary Rationalization (NCWSR). The Gyampoh Commission was set up to find a lasting solution to this age old problem so its terms of reference were not diametrically different from those of its predecessor bodies. It was to investigate the remuneration and conditions of service of all grades of personnel in the public service including the civil service and to examine, in particular, the differentials and relativities within the public service following the implementation of the consolidation concept and make recommendations for both horizontal/vertical adjustments of salaries and wages. The Commission was also to determine the relations to be established between the unionized and non-unionized sectors of the public service (Republic of Ghana 1993: 7).

The Gyampoh Commission found that the consolidation of salaries to include only lunch, leave, transport and housing/rent was relatively limited for civil servants; and that allowances consolidated differed in number and in rates between the Civil Service and the Universities and other analogous institutions resulting in two different salary regimes (Republic of Ghana 1994; Adupaku 2006: 51). The Commission again found that the Civil Service Negotiating Machinery (CSNM), which consisted of representatives of civil servants and the government, other professional bodies within the civil service, principally those in the Ministry of Health negotiated separately for additional improvement in salary and other conditions of service exclusively for their members (Adupaku 2006: 53). The Commission made quite a number of recommendations some of which are listed below:

Salaries and other conditions of service of top managerial staff of public sector institutions should not be dependent upon negotiations, but should be separately negotiated in order to avoid a conflict of interest.

A vigorous policy of phased improvements in salaries for all grades in the civil service and subvented organizations whose salaries are on a par with the equivalent grades in the civil service and do not have Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs).

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The review of the various reimbursable and compensation allowances, which include overnight allowances, fuel allowance, vehicle maintenance allowance, per diem allowance, among others.

The resolution of the age-old phenomenon of wage conflicts and confrontations within the context of a comprehensive job evaluation exercise. The upward adjustment of salaries by 20 percent for the civil service and other subvented organizations.

As from January 1995, all organizations within the public and civil service with CBAs will have a 2-year duration and negotiations should commence and end before the commencement of the budget year in which the new agreement will be implemented.

The government in a White Paper issued on 13th January 1994, accepted almost all the recommendations made by the commission and consequently granted the payment of the 20 percent salary increases, responsibility allowances and ordered the payment of ex-gratia awards to pupil teachers. The recommendation on the need to review the various reimbursable and compensating allowances, including overnight, vehicle, fuel, risk and height, warm clothing, per diem and funeral allowance was also accepted by the government.

The Commission's recommendations were not very different from those of the earlier bodies, and in spite of granting salary increases to public sector workers, it failed to live up to the expectation of the Ghanaian labour front. Rather than addressing the age old concerns of workers, the implementation of the Gyampoh Commission's Report worsened the income disparities between the low and high-level salaried workers thereby deepening the plight of low-level income earners. Labour conflicts as the antidote to the perennial problem persisted and it became imperative as usual for another salary review body to be established.

Messrs Price Waterhouse and Associates (1997- 2009)

In 1997, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government acting upon the advice of the Public Services Commission (PSC) engaged Messrs Price Waterhouse and Associates to develop the "medium and long-term public sector salaries and wages policy" that will eliminate

the piece-meal and ad hoc approach to salary administration. The objective of the income policy was to create a more satisfying and rewarding environment that will enhance the productivity and efficiency of those who prefer to work in the public sector.

The body was given the under listed terms of reference:

Study the causes of problems that have bedeviled pay systems in the country over the years.

Provide detailed job grading and a comprehensive classification structure for the public service by classification of jobs and placing public sector positions within organizations that will be on the universal salary structure.

Define the general characteristics and review the position on each level of the Universal Job Level Structure.

Determine the cost and time frame for correcting public sector pay disparities over the next three years, using initial 1997 Universal Salary Structure as a basis for analysis; and

Develop the medium and long-term public sector salaries and wages policy that will eliminate the piece-meal and ad hoc approach to incomes and wages determination (Price Waterhouse 1997: 68).

The body adopted a number of approaches to execute its mandate most of which were novel relative to the approach employed by the previous salary review bodies. First, it invited and received memoranda from stakeholders touching on the various aspects of their work. It must be stated that this strategy was not new as other similar bodies did the same. Second, it employed the services of local consultants drawn from the public sector, particularly the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Management Development and Productivity Institute (MDPI), Universities and the Office of the Head of the Civil Service (OHCS). In order to establish a rational basis for job comparison, it undertook an evaluation exercise in which about six hundred and seventy (670) positions in the public sector were valued for the purposes of developing a job evaluation chart.

Price Waterhouse and Associates (PWA) made recommendations on a broad range of issues in its report submitted to the government in December 1997. Some of the relevant ones to the issues under discussion in this paper are highlighted below:

a) Policy on Salary and Wages

The government was to ensure that public sector employees are equitably compensated in relation to each other and based on their performance. Performance is a key ingredient in incomes policy. As a matter of urgency, the government was required to correct all anomalies and inequalities in public sector salaries and wages (Price Waterhouse 1997: 22).

b) Policy on Benefits

The government was to minimize non-cash benefits such as free utilities and vehicles so that the total compensation of public sector workers can be more easily budgeted and more effectively managed.

c) Policy on Allowance

The income policy should include as a component of the job, all aspects of the performance of one's duties. Hence, an allowance would only be necessary to cover temporary extra dimensions of a job or the existence of temporary special conditions under which a job is performed (Price Waterhouse 1997: 23).

d) Policy on Salary Administration and Negotiation

There was the establishment of a Central Management Board (CMB) with legal and operational authority and competence, to perform the following functions:

- To ensure the uniform implementation of the government's new medium to long term public sector salaries and wages policy.
- To serve as a monitoring agency to ensure that standards are established and maintained continuously, so that distortions in remuneration does not creep into the system.

- To ensure regular, periodic, evenly daily liaison with the Ministry of Finance on issues concerning the administration of salaries and wages in the public sector.
- To serve as a centralized clearing house to coordinate the role of Governing Boards in Collective Bargaining Agreements.
- To document pieces of legislation needing amendments.
- To manage crisis's arising out of disagreements on wages and salaries between management and employees.
- To represent the government as the largest employer at the National Tripartite Committee meetings and
- To play an early warning watch dog role (Republic of Ghana 1999: 10-11).

e) Public Sector Job Structure

For there to be a universal public sector jobs structure, a 22-level structure was recommended for grading and classifying all public sector jobs to replace the old ranges of 1 – 130.

f) Coverage

To make the policy truly universal, all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) that subsist on the Consolidated Fund were to be included. This was, however, to be done in phases to accommodate the cost involved. The PWA submitted its final report to the government on 12th December 1997, two years passed before the recommendations were implemented by the government. Just as it happened to all the previous salaries review bodies, the implementation of the Ghana Universal Salary Structure (GUSS), as the salary structure recommended by the PWA was called, was also fraught with the usual perennial problems of distortions and disparities. This adversely affected the morale of the public sector workers and for that matter, numerous strikes were recorded in the country. The chaotic scenes that had characterized the labour front since the 1960s reared its ugly head again.

This threatened the realization of the objective of universality underpinning the salary regime. Matters got to a head when sections of the

Public Services were allowed to opt out of the regime without being sanctioned. The failure of the GUSS, could also be attributed to the fact that the Central Management Board (CMB) and the Appellate Body (AB) that were to manage its implementation were not backed by any legal instrument and were also not adequately resourced.

The Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC) and the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS) – 2010 and beyond

The Single Spine Salary Policy (SSSP) was proposed against the backdrop of a debate that had been ongoing for several years. Four main issues had engaged the attention of both government and the labour force as far as public sector pay was concerned. They centered on pay disparities that have emerged within the public services; the rising cost of the public sector wage bill; the large number of public sector pay negotiations; and the linkage of pay to productivity.

It was in the light of the above that the latest pay reform, the SSSP, was introduced. The Pay Reform component of the broader Public Sector Reform Agenda was initiated by the government to restore fairness in the Public Service Pay Administration System (PSPAS). To carry out its mission, the government, in May 2006, appointed a consultant, CoEn Ltd. Its terms of reference are listed below: develop a pay regime that is fair, transparent and equitable; design a Pay Policy Framework that is sustainable; that includes all Public Service institutions and employees on a unified Grading and Pay Structure; and design a Pay Structure for implementation over the medium term which could attract the requisite skills and competencies to the Public Services and be managed within the national budget.

The Consultant conducted an initial review which revealed the lack of a pay administration framework with mandated responsibility and authority to implement pay reforms, as one of the weaknesses in achieving pay reforms. It also grouped Public Service institutions based on the similarities of jobs in terms of requirements for education, skills and training to perform their work and other institutional roles. In addition, the Consultant conducted Job Analysis and Evaluation exercises in all Public Service institutions under Article 190 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, including the Public Services, namely the Civil Service, Judicial Service, Audit Service; Education Service;

Prisons Service; Parliamentary Service; Health Service, Statistical Service; National Fire Service; Customs, Exercise and Preventive Service; Internal Revenue Service; Police Service; Immigration Service; Legal Service and Local Government Service.

The Job Evaluation determined the value of all Public Service jobs, established internal relativities across and within service classifications with the object of enabling government to reward its employees in accordance with the principle of “equal pay for equal value” consistent with Article 24(1) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and Sections 10(b) of the Labour Act, Act 651.

The result of this exercise provided the basis to begin placing Public Service jobs into a Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS). The ultimate goal of the SSSP is to ensure equity, fairness and transparency in Public Service Salary Administration as well as enhance performance and productivity. The specific objectives of the Pay Policy are to:

- place all public sector employees on one vertical structure
- ensure that jobs within the same job value are paid within the same range (ie “equal pay for work of equal worth”)
- allow government the ability to manage the wage bill more efficiently
- ensure compliance and ease of monitoring the pay structures of self-accounting institutions
- minimize industrial-relation tensions related to low pay and distortions across the Public Services
- link pay to productivity

The government in the White Paper accepted, in principle, the recommendation that the SSSP serves as the basis for Public Service Pay with January 2010 as the effective date for its implementation. Before then, the government had promulgated the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission, Act 2007 (Act 737). The commission was to serve a dual purpose of providing an institutional home for Public Service Pay implementation and a legal backing to deliver on its mandate.

Also in the White Paper, the government consented to the 25-Level Grade Structure designed for Public Service jobs. Recognition was also given by the government to the four (4) categories of allowances that was proposed.

Findings and recommendations

The research made a number of findings which are as follows: First it was established that the government's piecemeal approach to implementing the salary review bodies' recommendations had not been very helpful. Second, the study identified that the lack of political will on the part of government as another cause to the problem. The will or ability of government to commit adequate financial resources to implement the recommendations is usually not there. The study also found out that there is no match between compensation and skills, efforts, risks and qualifications.

To address the problems the paper wishes to make the following recommendations: In the first place, the government should take the issues of public labour compensation seriously and commit adequate financial resources to it. Also, compensation should be matched with both physical and mental efforts spent on jobs, skills and qualifications brought to the work and risks associated with jobs. This will remove the perceived distortions, inequities and anomalies in the public sector pay regime. It will also minimize the occupational mobility of labour and the labour attrition recorded in the public sector.

Conclusion

After barely three years of the SSSP implementation, pockets of labour unions have continued to express their dissatisfaction with the regime through strikes and threats of strikes. In any case, in spite of the laudable objective of ensuring equity, fairness and transparency in Public Service Salary Administration and the substantial increases in emolument granted to employees of some public service institutions, some labour unions continue to complain of distortions, inequity and disparities in the new compensation system. The Ghana Medical Association (GMA) in April 2013, embarked upon a protracted strike in which they withdrew emergency services over non-payment of

the conversion difference. In that same month, other labour unions in the country's health sector, including the Government Hospital Pharmacists Association of Ghana (GHOPSAG), Ghana Registered Nurses Association (GRNA), were also voicing their concerns with the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC) over some issues in the implementation of some aspects of the salary regime that affected them. Labour unions in the education sector-the National Association of Graduate teachers (NAGRAT), Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), Concerned Teachers' Association of Ghana (CTAG), Teachers and Educational Workers' Union (TEWU) and University Teachers' Association of Ghana (UTAG) to mention but these few, have all expressed concerns with some aspects of the pay regime. Several other labour unions are on the sidelines waiting for a ripe time to launch their onslaught. Looking at the spate of labour conflicts for reforms or a complete replacement of the SSSS regime, it will not be surprising if in the near future a new pay regime is introduced. Only time will tell. It is now clear that the much talked about SSSS, which was given a lot of hype and was anticipated to be the panacea to the age-long problem of distortions, disparities and inequities, has failed to live up to expectation. In fact, it became outmoded at the very time it was introduced; being welcomed with a spate of labour conflicts in the very month of its implementation. In expression of their utter disappointment at the "Messiah" that never was, Ghanaian workers in a good-humoured fashion declared that "the single-spine salary structure could not suffice to support the Ghanaian worker to stand on their feet, perhaps it is only a double or a multiple spine which can come to their rescue".

There seems not to be no ray of hope at the end of the tunnel even as the implementation of this much anticipated panacea to problems bedeviling salary regimes is in the third year of implementation. So the question is, if the much anticipated Single Spine Pay policy has also failed just like its predecessor salary regimes, then what next? Do we turn to a Double Spine Salary Structure (DSSS), where some categories of workers such as the health workers will be placed on a salary structure, which is different from that of the other unions, or seek refuge in a Multiple Spine Salary Structure, in which employees in different sectors will be put on separate salary structures? Only time will tell.

The apparent lack of political will to fully implement the recommendations made by the various salary review bodies has been the bane of the protracted government-labour struggle. To overcome the challenge, the government needs to engage labour in wage negotiations to know the acceptable placement levels for the various unions on a salary structure instead of the usual top-down approach which has always been adopted. The incessant protests by pockets of labour unions for momentary changes to be made in their income levels during the period of implementation of a particular salary regime gives ample evidence that their involvement in wage negotiations has been very minimal, to say the least. The government's unilateral and arbitrary salary reduction in 1978 which led to the introduction of a new pay regime in 1979 and her apparent indifference to public sector compensation matters typifies the position of the elite theory upon which the research is anchored. The governing elites take the masses for granted thinking that apathetic, ill-informed and passive as the non-elite masses are, they do not show any interest in what goes on in the political arena and by the virtue of their apathy they, the elites can take advantage of them and make any decision without consulting them. This may be true to some extent but not on salary matters. The labour force will not budge on policies which adversely affect their income and will use the weapons available to them to get their due, hence the lingering situation.

A lasting solution to the age-old problem will not be found until a serious commitment is demonstrated by government that it really cares about the plight of the workers and that the recommendations of a salary review body will be implemented in its entirety. Partial and piecemeal implementation of wage policies, as well as unilateral decisions by the government to abolish a regime and its replacement by another have not helped much. The storms of protests in the labour front will not end until the government changes its negative and indifferent attitude towards public sector wage issues.

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