



Ministerial Reshuffling

A Necessary Evil of Government.

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Introduction

Ghana since independence has witnessed the reshuffling of ministers in various regimes/governments in the 60 years of handling her own affairs. These reshuffles have been in the form of demotion, dismissal, promotion and change in position of the affected minister. The president is vested with the constitutional power to reshuffle his ministers based on reasons best known to him and his cohorts, leaving the populace with rumors and speculations. Typically, the Ghanaian president does not come out to the public with reasons for the reshuffle; however, affected ministers may include; cabinet ministers, ministers of state and regional ministers.

Ministerial reshuffling is the periodic change in composition or position of members of the ministerial team by the head of state (Ayee, 2008). This may be to create, abolish or reassign responsibilities among ministers. Ghana can boast of a varying range of ministerial reshuffles over the years, differing in; the duration of ministerial tenure, the frequency of reshuffles within one tenure of office of a government, the effect in governance and the reason behind the reshuffle.

Motivation for the reshuffle

Some changes in ministerial team may be inevitable, in the advent of illnesses, death, scandals and sudden resignation. There are various reasons for these reshuffles but it is difficult to determine precise reasons behind each reshuffle. However, prior to a ministerial reshuffle announcement, nervousness shrouds the ministerial sphere as rumors begin to circulate. Ministerial reorganization sometimes has unforeseen consequences for ministers and their offices, this makes everyone nervous and civil servant begin to pull away from the minister.

Reshuffles can have a positive effect on policy making and delivery, depending on the quality of the reshuffle itself. Reshuffles meant to replace underperforming ministers, who have become

unproductive in a particular position for long; it becomes necessary for changes to be made for fresh input by other able persons in government. This gives room for new appointments and promotion, where young able personnel can rise up to a ministerial position. In April 2006, Joe Ghartey, the Deputy Attorney General and Minister of Justice was promoted to the position of Attorney General and Minister of Justice in a major ministerial reshuffling by Former President John Agyekum Kuffor.

Ghana is a country of ethnic and group passion and it extends into our political landscape as well. Accordingly, some reshuffles are based on satisfying ethnic, regional and group interests. During political campaigns towards election some parties promise Ghanaians that every region/group will get a fair share of the national cake; this translates into ministerial appointment that reflect a fulfillment of the promise. It is believed that the last minute ministerial reshuffle in 2016 by the NDC led administration that saw the appointment of Mr. Abdallah Abubakari Abuba and Mr. Kenneth Wunjagi as Northern Regional minister and Deputy Chief of Staff respectively was to influence the support of Northern people during the 2016 election. This is because many Ghanaians vote on ethnic lines so political campaigns capitalize on it.

Unlike countries in Europe, where our governance process was mostly adopted from – ethnocentric political dialogues are not indulged. However, in UK just as in Ghana, ministerial reorganization is the Prime Minister's primary instrument in dealing with crisis brought on by a ministerial indiscretion, death, illness, failure to perform, or a means in troubled times of reasserting the PM's authority and maintaining the balance of political forces.

At some point in time it becomes necessary for the president to maintain political and regional balance, by rearranging the ministers, it gives ministers a strong reminder that they must stay in line with the president's ideology and vision for the nation. It helps to strike a balance between old and new party members, as well as to establish a gender balance in the ministerial team. Reshuffles can be a power play within the presidency when there is a change in policy direction or a need to restructure government; this is used as an opportunity to punish those who challenged or condemned decisions of the president in some cases. It gives the appointing authority the opportunity to 'purge' the government off ministers who are corrupt, unproductive or have been engaged in a scandal that has tarnished the image of the ruling party.

Public and Media Backlash

In the wake of some ministerial reorganization comes public outcry over what is perceived as a ‘wrong’ appointment. This is case where the public believes the individual appointed is not qualified to hold that office based on academic qualification, professionalism, personal conduct over the years and the lack of experience in a public office or field of specification to the office. An instance was the appointment of Victoria Hammah as Deputy Minister of Communication (2012) who many believed was not qualified to hold the office but alleged that she was appointed due to her “hips and beauty”, this appointment did not last due to a scandal which led to her dismissal. The public took to radio, television and other online/media platform to register their views and criticisms.

Displeasures associated with ministerial reorganization are amplified on various media platforms by those in opposition and the general public. In the heat of the moment, public outcry become the topic of morning shows and others may take to social media to rage insults or make their own analysis on the appointee with or without evidence to that effect. Activist and credible institutions may add their voice to the public to register their dissatisfaction at the appointment as well as put pressure on the president to reorganize his ministers in due time.

Many groups and individuals on the other hand may express their disgust borne from the fact that a new portfolio has been created and a minister has been appointed. Public outcry is justifiable when they believe the portfolio created is completely unsatisfactory or unnecessary. January, 2017 was confronted with the creation of 6 ministries which according to the President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo was to ensure the restructuring of the governance system in the country. The public, opinion leaders and opposition however were not convinced that some of these ministries were necessary.

New Ministries are created due to changes in policy direction/focus but in reality, other facts come to play; it could be to create more jobs for financiers, lobbyists, family and friends who want to be ministers; because they contributed a great deal to the president’s success. In addition, it offers the party in power the opportunity to give ministerial appointment to deserving party members before “outsiders” are even considered.

Effect of Ministerial Reshuffling

Ministerial reshuffles have become a necessary process of the Ghanaian government, rolling over from the military regimes to the 4th republic of the constitutional regime established presently. However, the scope and frequency have adverse impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of government policy formulation and implementation.

First of all, it disrupts the development of effective and coherent ministerial teams in the affected ministry or department. The relation between minister and civil servants is essential to the effective functioning of the ministry; civil servants in each ministry work under the leadership of the minister to implement initiatives that will lead to the realization of government policies. When a good relationship is not established, civil servants tend to thwart the implementation of initiatives that may be of importance to the minister.

When ministers know that their tenure is going to be short lived, they have the tendency of focusing on short term initiatives that will yield favorable results and publicity for the expected praises in parliament and the media respectively. The frequent reshuffles create short tenures for ministers which prevents them from building expertise in a particular ministry; to be able to offer advisory service after tenure of office.

Reshuffles also hampers policy assessment and accountability of the minister/ministry. The delay caused by reshuffles in ministerial team is associated with the time it takes for a minister acting in a new capacity to become conversant with the new roles. Even the most able minister needs time to become familiar with new responsibilities and this will come at a cost of handing over material and briefing as well as resources for ministerial training when necessary. This makes it difficult for ministers to stand before a parliamentary committee to account for policy directives of the ministry, especially when they cannot defend a predecessors' initiatives. It therefore have a negative impact on the effectiveness and timeliness of policy implementation. Aside that, it stalls accountability when ministers are reshuffled frequently within one government's tenure of office.

Role of parliament

Per the 1992 Constitution of Ghana (Article 78), the President, with the approval of Parliament, appoints ministers for each region, department and agency. The parliamentary vetting of ministers confirms their appointment; however, their role becomes redundant in the frequent reshuffles that surface in every government. During vetting, ministers outline and defend initiatives they have planned during their tenure, but these initiatives do not see the light of day. Within less than a year of settling into office, he is transferred, dismissed or promoted with new responsibilities which he must now familiarize with. It becomes more difficult for Parliament to hold the responsible minister to account for policy failures or for an incoming Minister to account for decisions made by his or her predecessors.

Ministerial rearrangement interferes with the smooth operation of parliament, it is sometimes a sudden process that requires parliament to approve new appointed ministers. It therefore delays law making process and other equally important functions of parliament; causing citizens to wait on their policy/law makers to effect changes and decisions that will influence their wellbeing.

Conclusion

The president's prerogative to work with a set of ministers is in the best interest of the country. However, the manner and timing of ministerial reshuffling will either have a positive or negative impact on governance. It therefore stands to reason that, there should be much more transparent criteria to reorganizing ministers other than the president's displace of unlimited power of the president in selecting minister who serve under his administration. Criteria such as a credible performance assessment and timeliness of a reshuffle as against the progress of work by the minister should ideally be prioritize when considering a reshuffle.

There will be times when a fresh perspective is useful in a ministry/department, but on the other hand most government policies will benefit from having continuity of Ministers within a particular ministry for a tenure of office or more. When able and well performing Ministers are left in place for a sufficient length of time to know the responsibilities of their portfolio in more detail, they will be in a position to offer policy suggestions for future office holders based on experience. It is however feared that, ministers left in a ministry for a longer period of time find a

lucrative way of cheating the nation by making money out of the loopholes that manifest in the ministry.

Reshuffles are distressful to all, especially when reasons behind these reshuffles cannot be pinpointed, an additional worry is the inability of being saved from the wrath of a reshuffle since the president's power to do so is uncensored by either the legislature or judiciary. As we have entrusted this power to government we believe it should be used in the best interest of the nation; in a government where reshuffles have come to stay. If successive governments are able to make constructive reshuffles that will minimize the negative impacts of reshuffle, reshuffles will be more welcoming and beneficial to ministers, civil servants and the nation as a whole.

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