

ANTI-CORRUPTION COMMISSION



REPORT

PAYROLL VERIFICATION EXERCISE IN THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION YOUTHS AND SPORTS

June 2008

INTRODUCTION

The Minister of Education, through the Permanent Secretary, invited two officers each from the office of the Accountant General and the Anti-Corruption Commission to observe the payroll verification exercise at the Ministry's Headquarters and the District Headquarter towns. This exercise was a response to the need to eliminate corruption in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, specifically by removing the names of ghost workers from the Ministry's payroll.

The two officers nominated to represent the Commission as observers were Mathew Roberts and Samuel Marah, both in the Systems and Process Review Department. However, the invitation letter only reached the Commission a day before the commencement of the exercise, which we consider extremely short notice to enable us discharge of such an important state function. To enable the Commission to participate in any activity of this nature, we must be actively engaged at the preparatory stage of the exercise. This would give us an opportunity to suggest appropriate strategies and requirements needed to facilitate the verification process.

The payment exercise commenced on Tuesday 3rd June 2008, at precisely 12:08. The Pay Team was divided into two groups, the first responsible for paying workers at Youths and Sports, with Samuel Marah representing the Commission, and the other paying Education workers, with Mathew Roberts as the Commission's representative.

A total sum of Le 73,145,000 (Seventy Three Million One Hundred and Forty Five Thousand Leones) was to be paid to 253 workers in both the Headquarters and in the Western Area. As of Friday 6th June 2008, 232 members have been paid, while 21 workers remain unpaid.

RATIONALE

The exercise was conducted to expunge ghost workers from the payroll and thus reduce corruption in the management of state resources.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATION

The exercise was very impromptu due to the insufficient notice to both the staff and the team for the commencement of the exercise.

Terms of Reference

1. There were no clear, codified terms of reference for the exercise, which meant the Deputy Minister of Education, Youths and Sports, Dr Lansana Nyallay, at times had to use his discretion to order payments. This practice is undesirable as it can lead to favoritism if staffs without adequate documentation are allowed to collect salaries, and it defeats the purpose of the exercise.
2. As mentioned above, allowing a team to pay salaries without any codified terms of reference results in the use of discretion in paying workers. For every such activity, therefore, the Terms of Reference must be prepared in a reasonable amount of time before commencement of the exercise. Failure to do so may lead to wrong decisions in the verification process.
3. Almost halfway-through the exercise, the Minister of Education, Youths and Sports, Dr. Minkailu Bah, said that only workers with appointment letters should be paid salaries, indicating that there were no codified terms of reference to guide the verification exercise.
4. The exercise, which was only supposed to last for two days at the Headquarters, extended to four days, due to inadequate preparation in terms of funding and to the lack of a specific strategy for the exercise in the provinces.

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Transfers

5. Staff transferred to other Ministries still collect salaries from the Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports, since their names have not been posted to the vouchers of their new Ministries. Such categories of staff need to be identified so as to avoid the possibility of double payment.
6. Staff whose names appear on vouchers out of their duty stations pose serious administrative problems, which could create opportunities for corruption. Payment Officers could be paying ghost workers who are actually staffed at other stations. Hence, vouchers must be organized such that staff of Makeni, for example, must be paid on the Makeni Voucher.
7. There are staff who were attached to projects that received salaries from the Ministry. Some of these projects have closed (e.g. French Pedagogical Centre and the School Health Scheme), yet these staff still receive salaries from the Ministry for doing nothing. It is likely that such staff would have taken appointments with other schools and are also receiving salaries from those schools. This increases the burden on government with regard to the payment of salaries.
8. Most of the staff who received salaries on the headquarter vouchers are actually working in other government institutions, such as in Schools, at Teacher Training colleges as watchmen or as Bursars, Security guards, cleaners, etc. Such workers need to be paid by the institutions they directly work for and not by the Ministry. It places an unnecessary burden on the Ministry to pay such workers while its headquarters experiences shortages of junior staff.

Retirement

9. Most staff on the payroll have reached the age of sixty, which suggests the need for them to retire. Similarly, there were some workers, with disabilities such as blindness, who claimed to be working for the Ministry attached to other institutions, such as Government printing. Retaining workers above the retirement age in government services disadvantages qualified and able youths who are trying to find employment.
10. It was also discovered that staff who have retired continue to collect salaries from the Ministry, of which Mohamed Badamasi Alharazin is an example. Receiving salaries illegally wastes the government's meagre resources.

Human Resource Management

11. Some staff (Secretaries), who had been on working experience at the MEYS, were subsequently co-opted into the Ministry. Their names have been posted on the payroll with pin numbers but without any appointment letters from the Establishment Secretary's Office (ESO). This violates employment procedures and creates the possibility of distorting employment records at the Establishment Secretary's Office.
12. Staff files are not updated and do not have photographs of staff members. Without updates on individuals' performance, decisions regarding employees are difficult to make.
13. There was a serious salary discrepancy among professional staff of the same rank, and, along those lines, some junior staff seem to have higher salaries than their senior colleagues. This calls for investigation, because some junior staff may pay extra fees to officers at the Accountant General's office to inflate their salaries at the expense of their senior colleagues. If such a practice is occurring, it reduces the morale and efficiency of the employees.

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Ghost Workers

14. Mr. Godwin Samba contested Mr. Brima B. Koroma's employment with the Ministry as a Driver (pin code 101936), even though he carried with him a letter of appointment. This matter must be addressed immediately. If it is not, the potential for ghost employees to multiply is high.
15. There were some instances where workers who were either on sick leave or otherwise engaged sent others with letters of authority and their appointment letters and staff ID cards to collect salaries on their behalf. Though the practice is acceptable in exceptional cases, there remains the possibility that ghost workers might use the opportunity to defraud the state of public funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. All employees of the Ministry must have appointment letters from the Establishment Secretary before their names are posted on the vouchers and before they are allocated pin codes.
2. Every Ministry worker, in both the Headquarters and the Districts, must have his or her name on the Vouchers of his or her location.
3. In instances of transfers to locations either within the Ministry or outside, Officers in charge of the payroll should ensure the transfer of the name on the vouchers to that of the employee's new location.
4. The names of all retirees should be provided for deletion from the payroll to avoid ghost workers.
5. For any subsequent similar activity (payroll verification), a comprehensive plan of action must be prepared to guide the process with a specific budget set aside to support implementation.
6. The Ministry should ensure that new identification cards are issued to all its workers with a clear validity period.
7. All staff members who have attained the retirement age must be sent on leave to retirement.
8. In order to have a harmonized voucher system for staff of the Ministry, it would be appropriate for the Ministry to provide sample vouchers to the Directorates and staff locations. This would be done jointly with both the Accountant General and the Establishment Secretary.
9. Regarding salary discrepancies, there is a need for investigation with a view towards correcting the anomalies where possible.
10. Bursars, watchmen and cleaners attached to schools and other institutions must be paid by their employers and not by the Ministry.
11. Staff attached to projects that have closed must either be relocated to the Ministry or schools for other assignments or else have their services terminated.
12. It is completely unacceptable, not to mention unethical, for staff who have not been officially approved and appointed to positions to have their names on salary vouchers with pin codes. For a staff member to be duly recognized, either the Ministry or the Establishment Office must have given the staff an official appointment letter.