

Cruelty to older citizens

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Just how cruel a nation can be to its citizens, especially its older citizens, was exemplified in the manner Mr Gabriel Olofinlua, a retiree of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing has been treated since his retirement in June 2003. Pa Olofinlua had dropped his retirement notice in March, and this was duly acknowledged and accepted “with effect from June 22, 2003 when you would have put in 35 years meritorious service.” Olofinlua was about 60 years of age then but he had put in the mandatory 35 years in service. For someone whose retirement notice was accepted and who was said to have put in 35 years meritorious

service, one would have expected that his benefits would be promptly paid to encourage others in the civil service to aspire to such lofty heights

However, 15 years after, Olofinlua, now 75, who retired as an Assistant Chief Superintendent of Works is still awaiting the fruit of his labour. His wife, Ayotunde, narrates what her husband has been passing through since he was paid his gratuity about three years after his retirement. Having waited in vain for the pension without success, Pa Olofinlua is now bedridden. “By 2010, he suffered a stroke and could not go anywhere again. Some people advised us to get a lawyer or somebody in the ministry to help him follow it up. We got one of his friends in the ministry. Unfortunately, the man died and we could not get anybody again,” the wife said. She added: “One of our relatives working in a law firm in Abuja assisted us to follow it up to a certain stage. She later said the pension office said he should wait for another verification exercise and that he would be paid. That was in 2017. We waited and didn’t hear anything.”

They are still waiting.

Regrettably, Pa Olofinlua is not the only pensioner going through such ordeal. His plight is what many pensioners in the country go through daily. There have been countless reports of pensioners slumping on pension verification lines all over the country. Many of them have died due to accumulated debts that they could not pay. As at today, only a few state governments are able to meet their obligations to their present workers not to talk of those who have retired.

Yet, Nigeria has undertaken several pension reforms that have ended up reforming nothing. As a matter of fact, some people are beginning to be apprehensive that even the present contributory pension scheme may suffer the same fate despite the apparent fool-proof legal frameworks that went into its preparation. They may be right, given the fact that pension delays usually occur due to corruption, otherwise referred to as the 'Nigerian factor'.

Suffice it to say that it is experiences such as Pa Olofinlua's that make many civil servants to steal while in service; thus helping themselves when they still can, instead of leaving their fate in the hands of a system that does not care a hoot whether they live or die after retirement. This is not to justify such actions, though.

But, in essence, in the long run, it is the country that suffers the consequence of denying pensioners their due. So, if we want to reduce the rate of stealing in the public sector, then we have to find a way of ensuring that those who had served meritoriously in their prime promptly get their entitlements when they can no longer work. The letter accepting Pa Olofinlua's retirement reportedly signed by one Mrs. E.A. Sadare acknowledged that the man served meritoriously during his 35 years in the civil service. If someone who served the country meritoriously for that long period can be treated this badly, then what would have been his fate if he did not serve meritoriously?