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Sedimentation of salary supplements within the Congolese civil service: case studies in the Ministry of Finances and Ministry of Budget

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Abstract

Using the negotiated statehood framework, this paper delves into the dynamics of accumulating salary supplements within the Congolese core civil service departments that have benefited the most from these practices and where they initially emerged in recent decades, before extending to other ministries. The principal findings of this study, derived from data from the Payroll Department of the Ministry of Budget and the Department of Treasury and Funding Resources of the Ministry of Finance, reveal that none of the bonuses paid in the analysed departments adhere to the Civil Service General Statute's requirements. This statute delineates the permissible number of bonuses and the conditions for instituting new bonuses, restricting their total to two-thirds of the base salary. These departments have adeptly transformed their routine duties into bureaucratic norms to negotiate new bonuses, facilitated by informal accountabilities between senior civil servants and the ministerial authorities.

Introduction

Since the 1970s, salary supplements¹ were increasingly favoured in many Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, as a response to declining civil servants salaries due to economic crisis (Wescott, 1999, p. 147; Sahn, 1992). As salaries fell below poverty levels and were often delayed (Goldsmith, 1999, p. 543), civil servants sought extra income through non-salary benefits and occasional payments (Mbembe & Roitman, 1995, pp. 347-48; Charmes, 1996, p. 500). Falling salaries led to a decline in work effort, absenteeism and demotivation of personnel (Lienert & Modi, 1997, p. 7); and negatively impacted the functioning of the civil service, which had difficulty in fulfilling the most basic tasks (Savina & Boidin, 1996, pp. 855-56; Crook, 2010, p. 481).

Declining salaries was associated with state fragility in many SSA countries (Tareke, 2020, pp. 18-22; Chuku & Onye, 2019, pp. 1105-06), which struggled to set up propitious conditions to drive economic development (Seyoum, 2020, pp. 46-47) and maintain security for their populations (Tusalem, 2016, pp. 451-52). The objective of this paper is to trace the formation of salary supplements investigating how they emerged.

Salary supplements took a variety of forms (Stevens, 2005, p. 9), especially the extensive recourse to cash allowances which were widely used to hide payroll issues in compliance with the requirements of international financial institutions seeking to ensure fiscal stability (Lundgren, 2010, pp. 2-3), as well as the growing pay inequalities between civil servants (Rogger, 2017, p. 9). This increasing use of salary supplements could be analysed from several perspectives.

Some scholars stated that pay in public administration is purely ascriptive - lacking any relationship between work and payment - and therefore based on political (Mbembe, 2001, p. 45; Mbembe & Roitman, 1995, p. 349) or patrimonial (Boshab, 1998, pp. 747-48) considerations. While this ascriptive perspective is one possible way of conceptualizing salary supplements, it remains insufficient to explain their importance and their unequal distribution among civil servants.

Another way of approaching salary supplements is to explain these as the result of the operationalization of the principles of New Public Management (NPM), which promote performance-related pay (PRP) schemes in public sector (Olowu D. , 2010, pp. 642-43). Introduced in the 1990s, PRP would improve the efficiency of the public sector and positively impact employees' motivation by linking performance to financial incentives (Schay & Fisher, 2013, pp. 360-61; Weibel, Rost, & Osterloh, 2010, p. 388). Performance can be linked to qualitative

¹ In the Congolese civil service, the term "prime" is often used to describe any additional payment to base salary. In this paper, the terms "prime", bonus, allowance and salary supplement are used interchangeably.

evaluations or quantitative measures of inputs, outputs or outcomes (Hasnain, Manning, & Pierskalla, 2012, p. 1). According to this view, the most efficient civil servants would receive more bonus. In the DRC, these ideas slipped into salary policy through the logics used by donors in justifying salary supplements, notably for civil servants directly linked to the implementation of externally induced reform programs (Maini, Mounier-Jack, & Borgh, 2018, p. 2).

While the PRP is theoretically very powerful, its fair and reasonable implementation remains a challenge. Often it leads to injustices between civil servants, privileging some categories over others (Hughes, 2003, p. 161). Furthermore, measuring objectively the performance of a civil servant is challenging. Additionally, the PRP tends to lead to an escalation in remuneration, with employees unwilling to perform unless PRP is granted (Cardona, 2006, pp. 2-3). The public sector presents specific features that recommend contextualizing the success of the PRP, making its implementation challenging to transfer from one organization to another (Weibel, Rost, & Osterloh, 2010, p. 388). In the case of the DRC, NPM-practices can also hardly be considered a sufficient explanation for salary supplements, as many of them pre-date NPM (Bloch, 1986, p. 13), and as most salary supplements are also hardly related to (improved) performance. So, a broader framework is needed to understand them.

While we acknowledge that ascriptive and performance-based criteria can account for certain specific bonuses, this paper proposes an interpretation of salary supplements through the lens of negotiated statehood. This perspective conceptualizes salary supplements as outcomes of negotiation and offers a coherent heuristic framework for their analysis, facilitating an understanding of the resources and actors that have contributed to their negotiation process (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010, pp. 543-46; Doornbos, 2010, pp. 757-760; Risse, 2012, pp. 10-23). This framework underscores the state as a site of contention, both among competing actors and organizations and between competing normative ideas (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2014, pp. 5-6), and provides a framework to comprehend the pathways of access and exclusion of certain groups of civil servants in the distribution of bonuses (Lund, 2017, p. 2). Consequently, bonuses emerge from arenas of negotiation where civil servants employ various symbolic repertoires to secure their access to state resources (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010, p. 550). These repertoires comprise diverse norms derived from multiple poles of power within and beyond the bureaucratic apparatus itself. Negotiating statehood offers a broader framework to elucidate the emergence of bonuses in public administration, within which the other two perspectives can be situated alongside other types of explanations.

Bureaucracies function as arenas of negotiation, deeply embedded in the social relationships among rival groups and defined by their specific temporal, spatial, and informal contexts. They constitute a broader political domain where power and authority dynamics are exercised (Hagmann & Péclard, 2010, p. 550). Bureaucracies, manifested through offices and the documents utilized within them, represent complex fields of social practices and interactions involving numerous actors and competing normative frameworks. Within these bureaucratic arenas, social actors, norms, and social logics contend over shared issues, leading to the formation of strategic groups of actors who are likely to adopt similar stances when their interests align. The heterogeneity of bureaucratic arenas is further characterized by their normative registers, which are occasionally contradictory and competing, and are generated at various levels of the bureaucratic-legal order (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2021, pp. 7-9).

Salary supplements in public administration represent a significant issue impacting various actors, including civil servants, politicians, and donors. These groups may form strategic alliances based on their specific interests, thereby reshaping the bureaucratic norms governing the allocation of these bonuses. By examining the evolution of these bureaucratic norms over time, the bureaucratic arena can be understood as a product of its historical context and a series of successive reforms, as evidenced by their sedimentation (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2021, pp. 11-12).

This study focuses on the dynamics of negotiating bonuses in the Congolese civil service. Bonuses, which are intended to supplement salaries, represent the most significant part of remuneration, sometimes exceeding 95% of the total compensation for some civil servants. They are unequally distributed among administrations and benefit a small group of people who have the ability to accumulate them (Moshonas, De Herdt, Titeca, & Balungwe Shamavu, 2024, pp. 14-17; World Bank, 2008, p. 4). The following research question is posed: How did bonus practices affect the functioning of Congolese core departments?

To address this question, we examine civil servants employed in ministries that benefited most from the central administration's bonus (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020). Specifically, we focus on two strategically significant and well-funded departments: the Treasury and Authorization Department (*Direction du Trésor et de l'Ordonnancement-DTO*²) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Payroll Department of the Ministry of Budget (MoB). The MoB was formerly part of the MoF until its establishment in October 1986 (RDC/Ministère du Budget, s.d.). According to the Public Administration Reference File (FRAP) of the Ministry of Civil Service, in 2020, 84,763 civil servants were working at the central level, accounting for 16.67% of the country's total civil-service workforce. The MoF and MoB employed 2,212 and 1,812 civil servants, respectively, representing 2.61% and 2.14% of the central-level civil servants (RDC/Ministère de la Fonction Publique, 2020, pp. 12-14). These departments were among the first to undergo several administrative reforms, both in terms of their specific functions, such as the public finance reforms initiated over two decades ago with the computerization of the expenditure chain in 2003, and those affecting the civil service in general, including the civil service reform (CSR), where they were among the five pilot ministries selected (Mukanga, 2008, p. 101; RDC, 2010, pp. 12-13). Ultimately, these two departments are strategically positioned to attract the interest of politicians through their interactions with various state services and external donors.

As part of our doctoral research, semi-structured and informal interviews were conducted with civil servants between November 2021 and March 2025. Additionally, personal observations and experience as a former civil servant facilitated access to a network, former colleagues, familiarity, and the ability to obtain information that would have been inaccessible to outsiders. Information on salaries and bonuses, collected from various sources (interviews, reports, unpublished documents, and decrees), was converted from Congolese francs to US dollars using the Central Bank of Congo's exchange rate for the relevant period. In April 2022, the MoB provided a database of civil servants' payrolls from January 2016 to March 2022, which was used to verify some information on bonuses. Information was also cross-checked among several informants and triangulated with other written sources and online newspapers. Given the sensitivity of the topics examined, participants were anonymized, and only the names of their departments were disclosed. Pseudonyms were used where necessary.

The next section explores the trends of the civil service pay structure over the last three decades, with a special focus on bonuses. The remainder of the paper is structured into two parts, each emphasizing the influence of different stakeholders in the creation of the bonus system: first, senior civil servants who leverage their positions, and second, unions that advocate for the recognition of their administrations.

Recent trends in the pay landscape of the Congolese Civil Service

In the DRC, bonuses gained significance as real salaries diminished due to the economic crisis and austerity measures from structural adjustment programs (Young & Turner, 1985, p. 71). By 1983, the real salaries of civil servants had decreased to less than one-sixth of their value eight years prior (Bloch, 1986, p. 1). This era saw a significant shift in budget allocation, prioritizing debt servicing over remuneration (Peemans J. , 1997a, pp. 270-71; Yuma Kalulu, 2013, pp. 10-11): Despite the centralization of civil servant management in 1982, following the re-establishment of the Ministry of Civil Service (MoCS) in 1980; some ministries retained exceptional pay scales, a remnant of the 1973-82 decentralization period, which were implemented alongside the general scale (Bloch, 1986, p. 6).

However, the current pay landscape of Congolese civil servants is qualitatively different, as the rise to power of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (*Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaïre-AFDL*)³ led to a complete overhaul of the salary supplements system. In Mobutu's last

² The department is now called the Department of the Treasury and Funds Resources (*Direction du Trésor et Moyens de Financement-DTMF*). This new name is part of the reform aimed at creating the Directorate General of the Treasury and Public Accounting (*Direction Générale du Trésor et de la Comptabilité Publique-DGTCP*), which was first introduced by *arrêté* No. 013/ME/MINFP/ of the Minister of Public Service on 4 August 2017, granting provisional approval of the framework and organizational structures of the General Secretariat for Finance. On 31 March 2022, Decree No. 22/12B of the Prime Minister created the DGTCP, placing it under the direct authority of the Minister of Finance, contrary to the *arrêté* of the Minister of Public Service, which placed it within the General Secretariat for Finance. On 14 October 2024, the Prime Minister issued another decree No. 24/15 establishing the DGTCP. We have chosen to use this former name (DTO) because, despite these reforms, its missions have not changed in terms of its day-to-day operations.

³ The *Alliance des Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Congo-Zaïre* (AFDL) was launched in the fall of 1996 by Laurent Désiré Kabila's military coalition with support of neighboring countries including Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi. In May 1997, after a few months of fighting,

years, even the salaries of civil servants were frozen. The new Government agreed to pay the salary arrears, which were very low due to high inflation (Peemans J.-P. , 1997b, pp. 19-20; Maton, 1998, pp. 18-19), but suppressed all civil servants' bonuses.

Minister of Finances Mawampanga, who served from May 1997 to January 1998 and from March 1999 to November 2000, implemented a policy to eliminate all bonuses for civil servants, with the exception of those employed in fiscal administrations. He believed that civil servants, in general, did not warrant such bonuses. Concurrently, the AFDL Government pledged to ensure regular salary disbursements, necessitating that payroll processing departments work extended hours to meet payment deadlines. Within this framework, Kangundia, the head of the Authorization Division (*Division de l'Ordonnancement*) of DTO from 1995 to 2001, appealed Mawampanga for a bonus for his staff to facilitate consistent work performance. Consequently, the *Prime d'Encadrement de la Paie* (PEP), colloquially referred to as “*makolo*” (meaning feet in Lingala) by civil servants, was established for the staff of the Authorization Division⁴.

Despite the limited domestic revenues available to the AFDL Government (Collins, 1997, p. 596), Mawampanga was compelled to reinstate bonuses to incentivize civil servants to resume their duties. As noted by Stevens (2005, p. 15), within the context of significantly low salaries, African governments often resort to awarding bonuses to civil servants to motivate them to perform tasks of interest. Ensuring the payment of civil servants' salaries was essential for a nascent government seeking to break away from Mobutu's era of dictatorship (Reed, 1998, p. 21); PEP was instrumental in maintaining the involvement of a few civil servants in payroll processing.

Table 1 : Base salary in Congolese civil service in USD

N°	Grade	1992	2000	2004	2008	2012	2016	2020	2024
1	General Secretary	107.0	71.0	...	32.4	91.3	114.5	97.6	143.2
2	Director	79.0	34.6	35.8	30.1	89.1	112.0	105.0	138.4
3	Head of division	...	28.3	35.3	29.7	86.4	108.9	102.8	132.4
4	Head of office	70.0	18.5	33.7	28.4	84.2	106.4	101.2	127.1
5	Administration officer 1st class	...	15.2	29.3	25.0	80.0	101.7	98.1	120.6
6	Administration officer 2nd class	...	13.0	27.5	23.6	78.3	99.7	96.8	115.5
7	Administration agent 1st class	32.0	...	26.1	22.4	76.9	98.1	95.8	110.2
8	Administration agent 2nd class	...	...	25.2	21.7	76.0	97.1	95.1	105.5
9	Auxiliary agent 1st class	...	8.5	24.0	21.2	75.3	96.3	94.6	100.4
10	Auxiliary agent 2nd class	...	7.8	23.9	20.7	68.1	88.1	89.2	93.4
11	Clerk	11.0	7.0	22.5	19.6	62.0	81.2	84.7	88.3

Author based on data from Payroll Department, World Bank (2007) and Moshonas, et al. (2024).

Civil servants' salaries have not improved much over the last three decades, despite the expansion in domestic revenues, which rose from US\$78.7 million in 2000 to US\$10.1 billion⁵ in 2022 due to economic growth (Herderschee, Kaiser, & Mukoko Samba, 2012, p. 24). Most of these budgetary resources were captured by politicians, granting themselves numerous benefits, while civil servants were left (CNPV & UNIS, 2025, pp. 25-27; Kabuya Kalala & Mbiye, 2008, pp. 279-281). This is shown by the evolution of the base salary in Table 1, which rose for a head of office from US\$70 in 1992 to US\$127 in 2024 in current US dollars. Salaries remain very low compared with the cost of living in major cities like Kinshasa, where the average monthly household expenditure varied between US\$326.6 and US\$1,330.6 in 2010 according to residence (Lebailly & Muteba, 2011, pp. 65-66). In addition, the difference between senior civil servants and clerks is minimal. In contrast, the growth in public expenditure was reflected in the increase in bonuses from 2004 onwards (World Bank, 2007, p. 26). Bonus play a key role in the remuneration of civil servants, giving some the possibility of accumulating more while others do not have access to them (Moshonas, De Herdt, Titeca, & Balungwe Shamavu, 2024, pp. 11-12).

they took power, ending Mobutu's 32-year reign. Just one year after the AFDL came to power, a second war started on 2 August 1998, which went on for more than four years before ending with the Sun City Agreement in December 2002, setting up a transition period that began a few months later in 2003 (Reyntjens, 2007).

⁴ Interview, MoF civil servant, 23.03.2023

⁵ The data presented are derived from the executed expenditure budgets as documented in the annual reports of the Central Bank of Congo.

Table 2 : Trend of bonus in US\$ for a mid-level civil servant at DTO of the Ministry of Finance

N°	bonus	Magnitude per month				Beneficiaries	Who allocates	Funding source
		2012	2016	2020	2024			
Bonus connected to the management of the state's financial transactions								
1	<i>Prime de contrôle et vérification DTO called Prime DTO</i>	1,316	1,198	654	444	Paid only to civil servants working in DTO since 2012	The DTO Director liaises with the Payroll department to request the inclusion or removal of beneficiaries of this bonus in the payroll. In parallel with Payroll department, he also establishes another list for civil servants who are not on the payroll, using the remaining funds of this bonus. The beneficiaries on this parallel list are mainly newly affected personnel, and the amount of bonus they receive can vary from US\$20 to US\$150.	Public Treasury wage bill
2	<i>Prime cadre de dépense à moyen terme (one of the inter-ministerial commissions with bonus)</i>	...	495	270	183	Paid to DTO civil servants involved in the work of the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework of the MoB	Allocation of this bonus is decided by the General director of the Directorate General for Budgetary Policy and Programming of the MoB to all members of the medium-term expenditure framework committee.	
3	<i>Prime Frais de Fonctionnement (Prime FF)</i>	761	327	227	154	Combining several bonuses linked to different tasks depending on the division, specifically double-entry accounting, IT, statistics, liaison between the minister's office and the Treasury, control of payment files	The DTO Director determines the list of beneficiaries who will receive this bonus. He adjusts the bonus amount according to the number of beneficiaries for the month. Because the bonus budget often remains constant for many years, the amount tends to decrease for each additional beneficiary.	
4	<i>Prime de production de brochure des statistiques des finances publiques</i>	.	.	594-918	403-623	Paid to DTO civil servants with a preferential rate to some people actively involved in the work of the department	The DTO Director prepares the list of beneficiaries when preparing the request for payment of these bonus. This list will constitute an integral component of this payment request in all four steps of the expenditure chain.	Operating budget of the ministries
5	<i>Primes heures supplémentaires</i>	...	...	594	403	Paid to civil servants to remunerate work done outside normal working hours		
6	<i>Prime de régularisation des dossiers</i>	.	.	.	142-807	Paid to DTO civil servants with a preferential rate to those working on the processing of payment files		
7	<i>Prime de la chaine de la dépense</i>	...	...	314	213	Paid to departments working on the computerized expenditure chain	The list of beneficiaries is prepared by the Director of the DTO, who presents it to the Director of Interministerial IT Coordination, responsible for the bonus.	
8	<i>Prime Plan de Trésorerie</i>	...	...	...	...	Paid to civil servants who are members of the Cash Flow Planning Committee (<i>Comité du Plan de Trésorerie</i>)	List of beneficiaries is drawn up by the Office of the Minister of Finance, which chairs the Cash Flow Planning Committee, of which some DTO staff are members.	
9	<i>Autre prime liée à la tâche (par exemple prime FMI)</i>	500-2,000	...	...	...	Paid to those involved in the work during the IMF mission		
	Sub-total	2,077-...	1,525-...	2,383-...	1,356-...			
(Of which bonus connected to the management of civil servants' payroll operations)								
1	<i>Prime d'encadrement de la paie</i>	33-49	30-45	313	213	Civil servants working in the departments involved in processing civil servant payrolls at the MoF and MoB, later extended to those of the General Secretariats.	Allocation of these allowances is carried out by the Director of the DTO, who decides on the rate to be applied to each beneficiary and, in some cases, excludes others.	Public Treasury wage bill

2	<i>Prime de conciliation des chiffres</i>	.	416-1336	227-729	154-495	Paid to DTO civil servants with a preferential rate to those involved in reconciling the payroll figures from commercial banks with the lists produced by the payroll department of the MoB.		
3	<i>Prime Institutions</i>	.	.	243-972	165-660	Paid to civil servants working in the Authorization division and extended to all DTO civil servants in 2024		
4	<i>Prime d'élaboration, d'exécution et de suivi de l'état liquidatif</i>	.	480-1683	262-918	178-623	Paid to DTO civil servants with a preferential rate in the authorization division		
Sub-total		33-49	446-3,064	802-2,932	545-1991			
Bonus fixed after trade unions actions								
1	<i>Prime spécifique</i>	152	139	324	220	Paid to all MoB and MoF civil servants on the same scale since 2017	Allocation of these bonuses is decided by the Secretary General of the MoF, who operates through the Human Resources Department. This department works closely with the payroll department to regularly add or remove people from the list of bonus recipients.	Public Treasury wage bill
2	<i>Prime de rétrocession</i>	278	253	292	198			
3	<i>Opération Paie</i>	.	.	594	403			
4	<i>Prime spécifique DTO</i>	.	.	594	403	Paid to all civil servants in the Ministry of Finance since 2019	This bonus is allocated by the Secretary General of the Ministry of Finance, who acts through the Human Resources Department. The latter prepares the list of beneficiaries, and the bonus is based on the amount of the mining royalties.	Revenue based on retrocession
5	<i>Prime de redevance minière</i>	.	.	82	56			
Sub-total		430	392	1,886	1,280			
Bonus fixed in the framework of the civil service rejuvenation program								
1	<i>Prime de performance</i>	1,100	1,100	257	285	Paid to civil servants recruited through the young professionals program	Allocation of these bonuses is performed by the Ministry of Civil Service to civil servants recruited through competition from the civil service rejuvenation program.	Public Treasury wage bill
2	<i>Prime des administrateurs civils</i>	.	.	461	917	Paid to ENA graduates admitted to the corps of civil administrators after their training		
Total		2,540-...	2,363-...	5,071-...	3,181-...			

Author based on data from Payroll Department and interviews

The trade unions' demands of the early 2000s, sanctioned by the Mbudi agreements of February 12, 2004, between the government and the trade union (Radio Okapi, 2005b), which provided that the clerk was to receive a base salary of US\$ 208 and the General Secretary US\$ 2,080 from October 2004 onwards, contributed significantly to reshaping the current civil service pay landscape (Ravez, et al., 2019, p. 64; Kabuya Kalala & Mbiye, 2008, p. 277). Indeed, in the face of the government's inability to honour these commitments (Radio Okapi, 2005a), various civil servants' corporations began to negotiate their ministerial bonuses separately (Radio Okapi, 2007).

The current civil service pay structure has been molded by successive governments since the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries completion point was achieved in July 2010 (IMF, 2010), granting the Congolese Government fiscal flexibility. Prior to the advent of bonus practices, being a civil servant was often equated with poverty and hardship⁶. Administrations that have attracted particular political interest have notably benefited from bonus, particularly those involved in public financial management, with a focus on the public expenditure chain payments. Public finances are a crucial component of the secular arm of politics, as one Ministry of Finance civil servant noted: '*...The wealthiest people are those who live close to the river, which represents the secular arm of politics*'⁷.

This is reflected in the increasing number of bonuses created in the administrations involved in the public expenditure management process, as illustrated in Table 2 below for a mid-level civil servant⁸ of the DTO, where, of a dozen cumulable permanent bonuses currently available, only three existed before 2012. A mid-level civil servant⁹ received a base salary of US\$55, plus three permanent bonus (PEP : US\$33, *Prime spécifique*: US\$152 and *Prime de rétrocession*: US\$278), amounting to US\$463. A decade later, six other permanent bonuses were added to these first three, amounting to more than three times as much. Furthermore, if this civil servant was recruited through the civil service rejuvenation reform program, he receives an additional bonus linked to this program of US\$285 or US\$917, depending on whether he is a JPO¹⁰ or a graduate of the National School of Administration (ENA-RDC). If this civil servant also benefits from the permanent bonus paid in other administrations, his monthly remuneration package can reach several thousand US\$, especially for senior civil servants (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020).

Although the bonuses shown in the table above are not exhaustive, considering that some civil servants could get paid bonuses from other departments and there are task-related bonuses, Table 2 illustrates how the bonus system has developed over the last few years. Of the 20 bonuses identified, 12 are permanent, compared to only three before 2012. Permanent bonuses come from the Public Treasury's payroll and are an integral part of civil servants' pay packages, which they receive monthly along with their base salaries. They are processed by the MoB's payroll department. They differ from non-permanent bonuses, which are expected to be paid occasionally for specific tasks and come from the operating budget. Of the nine new permanent bonuses created since 2012, five are linked to departments (department-specific permanent bonuses). The next section focuses on the resources mobilized and the competing strategies used by different categories of civil servants to reshape the bonus system over the last two decades

Senior civil servants in negotiating bonus in the Congolese civil service

Senior civil servants play a key role in negotiating bonuses in the Congolese civil service. Directors, whose departments are represented in the Finance Act, have the ability to leverage their budget allocations, including those earmarked for bonuses. In the DRC, budget execution often diverges significantly from budget allocation, with some departments consistently overspending while others struggle to fully utilize their funds (DT Global, 2020, p. 15). The directors' ability to negotiate, which involves harnessing all available resources and employing

⁶ Interview, MoF civil servant, 19.01.2023

⁷ Interview, MoF civil servant, 24.02.2022

⁸ The ATA-1 would match mid-level civil servant. It is the highest rank for collaborative civil servants (category B) before advancing to the rank of head of office. It is also the rank where ENA graduates are recruited after completing their training. However, ATA 1 is also the grade where many civil servants end their careers, since they are unable to progress to the grade of head of office, which requires the involvement of the minister's office.

¹⁰ JPO is the term used to refer to young professionals who were recruited in four waves since 2010 in the context of the civil service rejuvenation program, the first two of which were mainly appointed to the Ministry of Finance

diverse symbolic repertoires, is essential for capturing greater budgetary resources in the form of bonus. This process requires obtaining approval from their supervising ministerial authorities to commit these bonus, garnering support from the Ministry of Budget's services, particularly the payroll department, for their implementation and sustainability, and engaging the Ministry of Finance's services for payment. Only senior civil servants who successfully establish coalitions within the bureaucratic apparatus can capitalize on these practices. The following paragraphs analyze the department-specific bonus negotiated by some directors using the positioning of their departments, highlighting the state's financial transactions, including those linked to civil servants' pay.

Bonus connected to the management of the state's financial transactions

In the Congolese civil service, departmental responsibilities have consistently been emphasized by civil servants during bonus negotiations. This negotiating leverage is particularly enhanced when duties are associated with the management of public expenditure and state financial transactions. Such responsibilities strategically position the MoF and the MoB, especially the DTO and the payroll department, in proximity to the public treasury and political stakeholders (Moshonas, De Herdt, Titeca, & Balungwe Shamavu, 2024, pp. 22-23). The departments engaged in these functions were affected by administrative reforms, including those supported by donors, such as the program with the International Monetary Fund in 2002 (Kabuya Kalala & Mbiye, 2005, p. 20), the computerization of the expenditure chain in 2003 (De Herdt, Marivoet, & Muhigirwa, 2015, p. 26), and the reform of the DTO in 2005 (Cassimon, Kabuya Kalala, & Ntomono-Nzuzi, 2008, p. 326; RDC/Ministère de la Fonction, 2005). These reforms facilitated bonus negotiations as they not only introduced new work practices but also established new power dynamics within departments.

The enhanced powers granted to the DTO and the payroll department transformed them into distinct parcels of power for their senior civil servants, as noted by Moshonas (2019a, p. 30), setting them apart from the rest of the public administration. This empowerment has also endowed these departments with an additional set of norms, enabling them to capitalize on state resources through bonuses. Each new assignment undertaken by the department enhances its normative framework and offers an opportunity to negotiate a new bonus with the ministerial authority. In the case of the DTO, more than a dozen task-related bonuses have been negotiated over the past two decades, including *Prime de contrôle et vérification*, *Prime de conciliation des chiffres*, *Prime de production de brochure des statistiques des finances publiques*.

The *Prime de contrôle et de vérification*, referred to as *Prime DTO*, is notable for being one of the earliest permanent bonuses associated with the department (direction). *Prime DTO* was adeptly secured by Baraka, the Director of the DTO, owing to his close ties with the Minister of Finance. The Minister strategically placed his trusted senior civil servants within the payment expenditure processing system. Baraka, originating from the Minister's cabinet, highlighted the critical nature of his staff's responsibilities and advocated for a bonus to ensure their full dedication to their roles. The *Prime DTO*, worth US\$1,316 for a mid-level civil servant in 2012, equivalent to three times the combined primes spécifique and rétrocession paid to all civil servants at the MoF, was established by a decree from the Minister of Finance¹¹. Such a decree is uncommon for a departmental bonus within the MoF and MoB. As Therkildsen (2014, p. 136) noted in the context of Uganda, regarding the opportunities afforded to policymakers by the coexistence of legal and rational practices alongside patrimonial practices, the allocation of the *Prime DTO* was attributed to Baraka's privileged access to the Minister of Finance. The Minister sought to transform the ministry's image by differentiating it from others and organizing individuals from his inner circle within it to exert greater control over the public expenditure payment chain (Moshonas, De Herdt, Titeca, and Balungwe Shamavu, 2024, pp. 24–25). The initial instance is predicated more on an ascriptive logic, intended to favor a category of civil servants due to their belonging to a department led by someone close to the minister. This is corroborated by interviews with several civil servants, such as: “*Before Baraka, the DTO was seen as a department of minor civil servants*” or “*Before Baraka arrived, things were a nightmare*”¹²

Baraka used to incite civil servants to hunt for opportunities of non-permanent bonus in his department. Once these opportunities were found, he guaranteed to follow the case through to payment, thanks to his ease of access to the Minister of Finance and his cabinet¹³. In front of the Minister's cabinet, the narratives were based

¹¹ Interview, Baraka, 02.03.2023

¹² Interviews, MoF civil servants, 12.12.2022 and 05.03.2023.

¹³ Interview, MoF civil servant, 28.02.2023

on the praising the quality of the work done by his team, and took the opportunity to negotiate their payments. “*Baraka gave civil servants the desire to feel useful to society. They would go to the minister's cabinet to provide technical advice. Baraka was the driving force behind the DTO's connection with the Cabinet*” stated a former member of the cabinet of the Minister of Finance¹⁴. It is important to note that these non-permanent bonus are usually paid within the operating budget of the MoF, which many other departments struggle to access¹⁵ (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020, pp. 20-23). In many administrations, operating expenses are limited exclusively to the minister's cabinet¹⁶

The Minister of Finance's power to grant bonuses to DTO is linked to his position within the government. He alone holds the sole power to authorize all expenditures paid by the Public Treasury¹⁷. This position gives him enormous leeway in choosing which expenditures to pay and allows him to maintain a privileged relationship with the President of the Republic. Moreover, over the past twenty years, most Ministers of Finance have come from the presidential party, even in the context of coalition governments. This allows the Minister of Finance to initiate payments that circumvent the annual budget law, a practice that has been regularly criticized by the Court of Auditors (RDC/Cour des comptes, 2024, pp. 6-7) and civil society organizations (ODP, 2019, pp. 28-29; Nsaka, 2024).

The Minister of Finance's choice to prioritize the DTO resulted in the establishment of a department distinguished by significant bonuses, setting it apart from other departments within the MoF through its focus on duty. This preferential treatment has sparked frustration and disputes, as highlighted by the reform of the General Directorate of the Treasury and Public Accounting (Direction Générale du Trésor et de la Comptabilité Publique-DGTCP). This reform redefined the responsibilities of the MoF, including the DTO, which was restructured as the Department of Treasury and Funding Resources (Direction du Trésor et Moyens de Financement-DTMF)¹⁸ within the DGTCP. Tensions over the control of bonuses paid to the DTMF have been publicized by supporters of both the Director General of the new DGTCP and the DTMF director. The former criticized the discriminatory nature of the DTMF bonuses (Tamusa, 2023), while the latter condemned the interference of the General Director in the duties of the DTMF (7sur7.cd, 2023). These tensions underscore the heterogeneity of Congolese public administration as a site of contention, where various actors and normative frameworks confront each other to exploit bonus practices. The Director General of the DGTCP, who joined the public administration upon his recruitment in February 2023 (Opinion-info, 2023), emphasized official norms to negotiate bonuses as the hierarchical head of the DTMF, which involves committing all expenditures of DGTCP departments, including the DTMF, while disregarding the complexities of bureaucratic norms governing bonus practices. The IGF had previously noted that the DTMF and payroll department circumvented the hierarchical control of their administrations by engaging directly with their ministers' cabinets (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020, p. 23). The DTMF justified the bonuses by citing the diversity of bureaucratic norms that necessitated their negotiation, particularly in relation to its tasks. To circumvent the Director General, who now possessed the authority to initiate the commitment¹⁹ of remuneration spending for the DTMF, the Director of the DTMF arranged for these commitments to be made through the Ministry of the Budget (Malukisa Nkuku, 2025, pp. 34-35).

¹⁴ Interview, former adviser of Minister of Finances, 05.03.2023

¹⁵ The DRC budget operates on a cash basis, which is a system recognizing expenditure when it is paid and income when it is received. This system implies that spending is limited by the available cash, and the Ministry of Finance often tends to slow down the payment process, which results in expenditure arrears for line ministries (Potter & Diamond, 1999, pp. 39,47). In the DRC, this system has led to significant payment arrears, where budget allocations are not respected and major expenses are incurred outside the budget (DT Global, 2020, pp. 18-19). The politicization that results from access to ministerial credit lines leads some ministries to over-execute their budgets and others to be fund-starved. The 2020 DRC PEFA report highlighted that only a few entities—such as the Presidency, the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Budget—decide how the budget will be used (DT Global, 2020, p. 15).

¹⁶ Interview, MoCS civil servant, 09.12.2021.

¹⁷ Law No. 11/011 on public finances of July 13, 2011 provides that line ministers authorize their respective expenditures (particularly under Article 103). However, the full implementation of its reforms, which was initially scheduled for January 1, 2019, was postponed to 2024 and then to 2028. This came after two moratoriums were granted by Parliament to the Government, taking the form of revisions to the said law (L'Interview.cd, 2023).

¹⁸ The DTMF continues to exercise the missions of the DTO, in particular the authorization of expenditure, pending the effective implementation of the decentralization of authorization of expenditures in line ministries in accordance with Article 83 of Decree No. 22/12B of March 31, 2022 relating to the creation, missions, organization and operation of the General Directorate of Treasury and Public Accounting.

¹⁹ The chain of public expenditure consists of four steps: i. commitment (*engagement*), performed by the line minister, is the act by which the State creates or recognizes an obligation that will result in a debt; ii. verification (*liquidation*), carried out by the Minister of Budget, is to verify the existence of the debt and determine the exact amount of the expenditure; iii. issuing the payment order (*ordonnancement*), performed

Despite their similarity to NPM principles as reflected in their various names, most recipients of these task-related bonus are not involved in performing the tasks for which they are rewarded. In addition, a task performed by one person or a group of a few people may benefit all the civil servants in the department and beyond. In the end, these bonus, which were initially non-permanent, became permanent (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020, pp. 22-23). This occurs through operating expenses paid regularly without any obstacles on the expenditure chain or by integrating them into the payroll budget managed by the Payroll Department. However, the same realities that are used to support these bonuses in the MoF and MoB departments do not apply in other administrations. A good illustration of this is the overtime bonus, the payment of which is regulated by the circular implementing the Finance Act for the year (RDC/Ministère du budget, 2023, pp. 25-26). Many departments have never benefited from this bonus, even though some civil servants work overtime. In the Payroll Department, the overtime bonus is included in civil servants' monthly pay package²⁰, and in the DTO, this bonus is regularly paid to all civil servants, including those who are not required to work late.

The tasks in which politicians are interested, such as processing public expenditure payment files or producing and analysing the state's financial transactions, have often been carried out perfectly since cooperation with the international financial institutions resumed in 2001. As Stevens (2005, p. 15) noted, these tasks are particularly significant in negotiations with institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, and are essential for maintaining the flow of donor funding, thereby justifying the high remuneration of key personnel involved. In contrast, other tasks that are equally important, such as the reform of double-entry accounting, are marginalized. Political cabinets show little interest in producing balances of the state's accounts, as these are neither legally mandated nor required for communications with external partners. Consequently, civil servants engaged in these tasks are frequently among the lowest paid. A pertinent example is the *Division de la Centralisation de la Comptabilité du Trésor* (DCCT), established in 2005 with IMF support, whose personnel were selected from the most qualified staff of the DTO based on their academic background. However, for nearly two decades, DCCT has been unable to produce reliable financial statements. This shortcoming is acknowledged even by civil servants, as illustrated by the following statement: "*I believe the Cabinet never considered the balances of the state's accounts produced by the DCCT, which was consistently referred to as stillborn*"²¹. Despite this, the reform of public accounting remains crucial for generating high-quality financial information for the state and enabling the Court of Auditors to conduct more detailed analyses of certain operations.

To successfully negotiate bonus in the MoF and the MoB, senior civil servants mobilize their close relationship with ministers or their cabinet to overcome bureaucratic barriers, their access to information on the State's financial situation to choose the right opportunity and moment, their mastery of payment practices to overcome budgetary constraints, and the knowledge and technical expertise of their team to prepare payment requests more effectively. These strategies are specific to these two administrations, as their ministers can commit their own expenditures until payment. Other administrations can hardly replicate them, since line ministers must first negotiate their own payments with their colleagues from Budget and Finance. The ministers of Budget and Finance are responsible for verifying and authorizing payments for all public expenditures.

Bonus connected to the management of civil servants' payroll operations

The so-called "*bancarisation*" of civil servants' pay reform initiated by the Government in 2011 (Ponyo & Tsasa, 2020, pp. 240-242) – whereby civil service pay was transferred via the banking sector, instead of the system of public accountants – created an opportunity for civil servants in DTO and Payroll Department to successfully negotiate a number of bonus from their ministers. Matata Ponyo was the champion of this reform (Faujas, 2014), and his successors have continued to support it, strengthening the positions of the directors of these two departments.

Baraka was the first director to secure a permanent bonus tied to the '*bancarisation*' reform for his department's civil servants. He noticed that the banks involved in '*bancarisation*' were compensated based on the number of civil servants registered by the payroll department, rather than the number they actually paid. To address this

by the Minister of Finance, involves giving the cashier the order to pay the State's debt; iv. payment (*payement*), done by the Central Bank, is the act by which the State discharges its debt (RDC/Ministère du Budget, 2015, p. 7). It's important to note that the reform outlined in Law No. 11/011 of July 13, 2011 (Article 103) was intended to bring the first three steps of expenditure chain back to the line minister.

²⁰ Interview, MoB civil servant, 23.03.2023

²¹ Interview, civil servant of MoF, 23.03.2023

discrepancy, he established a team to reconcile the invoices received from the banks with the payroll execution reports, uncovering an over-invoicing of US\$2 million, which constituted 27% of the invoice from the Congolese Association of Banks (*Association Congolaise des Banques-ACB*)²². The ACB²³ played a pivotal role in the 'bancaisation' reform, facilitating the opening of over a million bank accounts for civil servants within a few months in 2011. The ACB had a protocol agreement with the government that specified, among other things, the payment terms for its services (Radio Okapi, 2012). Baraka leveraged these findings to request a task-specific bonus, which was approved and distributed among all DTO staff²⁴. Since then, he has successfully obtained a mandate for his department to review bank invoices prior to payment. Reconciling the figures between the DTO and the banks involved in the civil servants' payroll has become a permanent responsibility for the department and is now part of its structural framework (RDC/Ministère de la Fonction Publique, 2017, p. 103). Known as the '*prime de conciliation des chiffres*', Baraka effectively negotiated the conversion of this non-permanent bonus into a permanent one.

At the payroll department, its former director Maëlys focused on the reorganization and computerization of payroll procedures, choosing to use SYGECPAF²⁵ in the payroll, which allowed to create a single database of all employees and civil servants paid by the State budget²⁶. The new work organization not only reduced the division's latitude to add fictitious people or services into the payroll file²⁷, but also facilitated data exchange with the commercial banks involved in the '*bancaisation*' reform²⁸. However, SYGECPAF features many weaknesses that allow duplication of entries in the payroll database, such as the lack of a unique ID for each paid civil servant. The ID used is linked to different benefits, but cannot avoid that a person may have several IDs (Pandamadi, Kebe-Kenza, Olonga, & A Djondji, 2020, pp. 2-3). As such, SYGECPAF was unable to tackle completely the problems of ghost workers or the risk of embezzlement of remunerations; instead, it has reshaped the political economy of civil service payroll management (Moshonas, 2019b, p. 11).

Following the implementation of SYGECPAF and the economies achieved by the new work organization, as well as the support of the Minister of Budget, Maëlys negotiated several permanent bonuses for the payroll department²⁹. Non-permanent bonuses were granted during payroll preparation, but only a limited number of staff received them. Maëlys then secured two permanent bonuses for all payroll department staff : *Prime d'encadrement de la bancaisation* and *Prime d'élaboration, l'exécution et le suivi de l'état liquidatif*³⁰. Alongside these two bonuses, Maëlys negotiated with the Minister of Budget's cabinet for a specific bonus associated with individual offices or tasks, such as the *Prime institutions* for the *Bureau Institutions*³¹ in charge of paying the political institutions³². The payroll of political staff used to be handled by the Minister of Budget's cabinet, before being transferred to the Payroll Department during Maëlys' tenure.

Joel, a successor to Baraka at the head of the DTO, successfully negotiated the extension of certain newly introduced bonuses from the payroll department to the DTO. He fostered positive relations with the Minister of Finance and his cabinet, who were receptive to his proposals. To further negotiate the extension of the permanent bonuses from the payroll department to the DTO, Joel adopted a confrontational approach towards

²² Interview, MoF civil servant, 11.03.2023

²³ The ACB is the professional body representing all commercial banks operating in the DRC. ACB issues invoices to the government on behalf of its members who are involved in the payment of civil servants' salaries.

²⁴ Interview, MoF civil servant, 28.02.2023

²⁵ *Système de Gestion Centralisée de la Paie des Agents et Fonctionnaires* (SYGECPAF) was developed by the MoB in 2013 with support from BSC-ERCTOOL (Business Soft Company Engineering Reseaux et Communication Tool, a local firm specializing in the design and implementation of IT solutions) to improve the reliability of government employee payrolls, which were affected by the multiplicity of databases, each with a different configuration. SYGECPAF had replaced the PTS (*Procédure Transitoire Simplifiée*) introduced with the 2003 computerization reform of the expenditure chain, and with the support of French cooperation, then its continuation with local expertise following the French cooperation's departure after 2008). The PTS system functioned under MS-Access, but its processing ability encountered growing problems as payroll entries approached the one million mark. The new piece of software introduced, the SYGECPAF, operates on the basis of MS-SQL Server 2012, superseding the limitations of the previous software and coming closer to the production of a unified database (Moshonas, 2019a, p. 46).

²⁶ Interview, Maëlys, 23.03.2023

²⁷ Interview, MoB civil servant, 23.02.2022

²⁸ Interview, Maëlys, 23.03.2023

²⁹ Interview, MoB civil servant, 19.02.2023

³⁰ Interview, Maëlys, 23.03.2023

³¹ *Bureau Institutions* ensures the payroll of political institutions, in particularly members of political cabinets and public establishments. It was created in the Payroll department when Maëlys was director and was transformed into a *Division* in 2021.

³² Interview, MoB civil servant, 20.03.2023

Maëlys by halting the processing of payroll staff salaries during their transfer to the Central Bank of Congo. He justified his actions by pointing out irregularities in the bonus increases implemented by Maëlys. Joel leveraged his position to influence the negotiation process, emphasizing the discrepancy between the practical norm in the payroll department and the official norm. Typically, the remuneration of a department or individual can be increased with only the approval (called a *quitus*) of the Minister of the Budget. This practical norm contradicts the official norm, which requires that any pay increase follow the standard procedure for awarding bonuses from the relevant line minister to the end of the entire expenditure chain process. Consequently, two bonuses—*Prime d'élaboration, l'exécution et le suivi de l'état liquidatif* and *Prime institutions*— were extended to the DTO³³ using this practical norm. This situation illustrates the heterogeneity of the bureaucratic arena as a battleground, despite the DTO and payroll departments being regarded as privileged administrations. They frequently encounter common issues, which can lead them to act as a unified strategic group in negotiations. However, when their interests diverge, they are prepared to confront each other. This underscores the complexity of Congolese public administration, where actors engage in confrontations, each wielding a distinct set of norms to negotiate bonuses.

Baraka and Joel leveraged the technical skills of their team to intercept and demonstrate the overcharging of banks for their services or the increases of bonus in the payroll department, the bureaucratic capacity of the DTO to access and advise on payment-related issues, and the influence they enjoyed through their confidence in the Minister of Finance. The *prime de conciliation des chiffres* was negotiated within the scope of a PRP scheme: a share of the amount recovered from the overbilling³⁴. However, this NPM³⁵ principle could not ensure its sustainability, which was expected to decrease as the banks adjusted their billing to the verification mechanism set up at the DTO. To secure the *prime de conciliation des chiffres*, Baraka negotiated a monthly fixed amount, bypassing the NPM principle. Also, this bonus is paid to all DTO staff, even though it is a small team that is involved in performing the tasks it is intended to reward³⁶.

During Maëlys tenure, non-permanent bonus linked to specific tasks requiring the contribution of civil servants from several ministries (inter-ministerial commissions) were converted into permanent bonus awarded to civil servants from different ministries. Civil servants involved in the payroll, particularly those in the Payroll Department and DTO, were thus included in the permanent bonus of other departments. Bonuses related to inter-ministerial commissions are supposed to be paid punctually in the operating budget and should follow the expenditure chain procedure for each payment request (RDC/Ministère du budget, 2023, pp. 25-26). However, putting these bonuses into the remuneration budget managed by the payroll department changes their fundamental nature. This shift redefines the power structure in the payment process for these bonuses, making the payroll department a key actor that guarantees their permanence. It also allows the bonuses to escape the prior control that should be carried out by other departments involved in the spending chain for each payment request. This new bureaucratic norm, which has been condemned by IGF, has been supported by the government (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020).

The accumulation of bonus by civil servants involved in the payroll was highlighted by a press release by the IGF on 27 April 2023, stating that 961 (Mulegwa, 2023; Masamuna, 2023) staff in charge of processing the payroll of other ministries were on their payroll lists. Even though the names of these people were referred to the judicial authorities (Kabakila, 2023), accusations were quickly dropped. According to people involved in payroll processing, bonus are defined in the relevant acts establishing them, and should be examined within the confines of these acts. Maëlys stated that “an expert can be from the MoB, and participate in the work done by other ministries... The bonus compensates the services provided in different departments”³⁷. This view was supported by the Minister of Budget in his briefing note presenting the payroll status of public workforce at the ninety-seventh meeting of the Council of Ministers on May 5, 2023, and responding to the IGF report in these terms “...it should be noted that there is a difference between the payment of salaries, which is a one-off payment, and

³³ Interview, MoB civil servant, 10.06.2023

³⁴ Interview, MoF civil servant, 11.03.2023

³⁵ NPM focuses on economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Its principles consist of: i. a focus on hands-on and entrepreneurial management approach, ii. explicit standards and performance measures, iii. an emphasis on *output controls*, iv. the importance *disaggregation* and *decentralization* of public services, v. promoting competition in the provision of public services, vi. an emphasis on private sector management methods and their superiority, vii. the promotion of discipline and parsimony in the allocation of resources, viii. the separation of political decision-making from the direct management of public services (Vienažindienė & Čiarnienė, 2007, p. 45).

³⁶ Interview, MoF civil servant, 28.02.2023

³⁷ Interview, Maëlys, 23.03.2023

bonus, which are linked to performance because of the involvement of an expert in several inter-ministerial committees where his expertise is required...". These practices of accumulating bonuses mean that some civil servants involved in payroll processing at the MoB and MoF can earn monthly incomes of several thousand US dollars (Malukisa Nkuku, 2025, pp. 34-35). How these bonuses are interpreted depends on the set of norms each group of actors uses, which highlights the competition between different norms and actors within the Congolese bureaucratic arena.

While some salary supplements connected to the management of the state's financial transactions, including the management of civil servants' payroll operations, were negotiated by emphasizing NPM principles, as indicated by their various names, it is essential to acknowledge that their effectiveness and sustainability depend on the informal accountabilities between senior civil servants and ministerial authorities. These informal accountabilities have allowed some senior civil servants to transform routine departmental duties into bonus opportunities. Consequently, NPM principles alone are insufficient to explain why certain tasks lead to bonus payments while others do not. In practice, it is challenging to correlate bonuses awarded in this manner with the performance of the recipients, with NPM principles serving as mere pretexts that are promptly disregarded once the bonuses are secured. Furthermore, members of ministerial cabinets who authorize the payment of these bonuses are occasionally among the potential direct or indirect beneficiaries, including ministers (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020, p. 17).

Ministerial trade unions in negotiating bonus

For years, many civil servants in the MoF and MoB, regardless of their department, received only the *prime de rétrocession* and *prime spécifique*. These bonuses remained stagnant during Matata Ponyo's government (La Prospérité, 2017) and lost their purchasing power due to the depreciation of the Congolese franc against the US dollar, which dropped from 983.76 in June 2016 to 1,507.78 in June 2017 (Banque Centrale du Congo, 2018, p. 120). Unions organized strikes and protests in both ministries, urging civil servants to demand adjustments to existing bonuses and the creation of department-specific ones, such as those in the DTO and Payroll Department³⁸. In October 2017, the scales for the *prime de rétrocession* and *prime spécifique* were harmonized between the MoB and MoF, increasing from US\$162 and US\$89, respectively, to US\$343 and US\$381 for a mid-level civil servant. These increases were facilitated by Kangudia, Minister of Budget from December 2016 to September 2019, who supported raising ministerial bonuses in the administrations he was interested in. As a former civil servant in the MoF, he had long-standing relationships with many of his counterparts, some of whom were his former colleagues.

To address the discrepancies in bonus that existed between MoB departments, some of which did not have specific-department bonus, Kangudia provided them with bonuses that highlighted their responsibilities. For example for a mid-level civil servant, the *Direction des Services Généraux*, which is responsible for supervising trainees, received the *Prime d'encadrement des stagiaires* of US\$699, while the *Direction de l'Intendance Générale* received the *prime permanente de certification des dépenses des charges communes* of US\$838. According to IGF, the average remuneration of a civil servant in the MoB at central level had risen from US\$649 in 2011 to US\$ 2,930 in 2019 (Ngumba & Bo-Lokonge, 2020, p. 11).

A similar trend was observed in the MoF, where union members were mobilized to push for their salary supplements to be aligned with those of the MoB. The approach had been to grant two additional bonuses to all departments at the same rate, with the exception of the Secretary-General's support services³⁹, which had a preferential rate. The first bonus, *Opération Paie*, had the same name for all departments, while the second bonus was named after the department concerned. Both bonuses, paid from July 2019, each represented US\$668 for a mid-level civil servant. They were nicknamed 'Merci Yav' by civil servants, in reference to the Minister of Finance Henri Yav Mulang, who had approved them.

³⁸ Interview, MoF Trade Union official, 12.02.2022

³⁹ The support services assist the Secretary General in carrying out his mission. In contrast, departments have specific missions and have a certain degree of autonomy in their day-to-day operations
This practice of creating bonuses does not comply with Article 49 of the Civil Service Act, which stipulates that the bonus scale must be signed jointly by the Ministers of Civil Service, Budget and Finance. However, in reality, most bonuses are created based on a scale signed by the line minister and the Minister of Budget.

In both ministries, the creation of permanent bonus started with the DTO and the payroll department, which negotiated substantial bonuses, as mentioned earlier. The extension of permanent bonus to other departments within the MoB and the MoF is primarily linked to the accessibility of the Minister of Budget, Kangudia, to union demands. As a former opposition member in a coalition government formed after the presidential elections were not held on time, he was keen to avoid the spotlight and the demands of civil servants during a tense social and political climate.

Like the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Budget also holds significant power in the public spending payment process, particularly regarding remuneration expenses. He consigns bonus scales with other ministers for their respective sectors and approves their implementation. For his own sector, he alone decides whether or not to grant a bonus. This power makes the Minister of Budget⁴⁰ a key player in the bonus payment system within the Congolese public administration.

The unions of the MoB and MoF requested an increase in their ministerial permanent bonus, which had significantly lost value due to the depreciation of the Congolese franc, and found a receptive audience in Kangudia. The unions also advocated for the establishment of new bonuses akin to those for the DTO and payroll department, justifying these requests by highlighting the importance of administrative duties. All civil servants of these two administrations were mobilized behind the unionists' actions. In addition, union leaders are sometimes senior civil servants who hold strategic positions. In their negotiation efforts, the ultimate phase is a strike, which aims to paralyze the functioning of the expenditure chain by blocking access to offices or preventing civil servants from entering them. A prolonged paralysis of the expenditure chain can have repercussions on payment operations, especially the payroll of civil servants. The ministers of finance and budget try to avoid such situations.

Unions were involved in the negotiation of bonuses in the MoF and MoB, but their granting was dependent on the will of the Minister of Budget and the Minister of Finance, who used their power of verification and authorization of payment of public expenditure. Contrary to other government members who have to negotiate with them to obtain bonuses for their departments, the two ministers are able to easily create bonuses for their own departments without the approval of a third party. To create a bonus, a pay scale must be issued by the line minister and approved by the Minister of Budget⁴¹. Subsequently, it must be allocated a specific budget in the Finance Act, and finally, it must be processed by the payroll department of the Ministry of Budget.

In addition to Kangudia's ties to the MoB and MoF administrations, the political cabinets of both ministries also had interests in creating these bonuses, since most of their members were (or had become) civil servants. Working in a ministerial cabinet offers an opportunity to join the civil service in the DRC. Most ministerial cabinets are often overstaffed, and the majority of their non-civil servant members use their position to enter the civil service. By granting these bonuses, they secure their income once the cabinet position is over. Equally, the recruitment of thousands of civil servants in 2017 and 2018 in the form of regularization allowed political cabinet members to massively recruit their relatives into the administration (Moshonas, De Herdt, Titeca, & Shamavu, 2022, pp. 526-527), to whom they had to ensure a substantial income.

Conclusion

This paper explored the dynamics of accumulating salary supplements in the Congolese civil service, using the negotiated statehood framework and focusing on the two departments 'where it all originated'. It highlighted the key actors, the resources mobilized and the registers of norms promoted to secure access to bonus.

⁴⁰ Since Mukoko Samba's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Budget in the Matata Ponyo government in April 2012, successive governments have seen the Ministry of Budget take precedence over the Ministry of Finance. His successors have held titles such as Minister of State or Deputy Prime Minister. For instance, Kangudia served as Minister of State and Minister of Budget. This prioritization of the Minister of Budget over the Minister of Finance within the government grants significant leeway in initiating certain actions, including those related to managing the remuneration budget.

⁴¹ This practice of creating bonus does not comply with Article 49 of the Civil Service General Statute, which stipulates that the bonus scale must be signed jointly by the Ministers of Civil Service, Budget and Finance. However, in reality, most bonuses are created based on a scale signed by the line minister and the Minister of Budget.

In the Congolese bureaucratic arena, the competition between different sets of norms is intense, particularly in shaping the dynamics of bonus negotiations. While the law⁴² specifies their number and the conditions for creating new ones, limiting their total to two-thirds of the base salary, none of the salary supplements paid in the departments analyzed comply with this legal requirement. Instead, they are established according to specific bureaucratic norms grounded in government-supported regulations. Some of these norms can be a priori explained by NPM principles, since many of these bonuses stem from the nature of the activities conducted in those departments. As such, they are a reward for results, as reflected in their names: "*Prime de conciliation des chiffres*" intended to incentivize individuals reviewing invoices from commercial banks involved in civil servant payments, and "*Prime d'élaboration, d'exécution et de suivi de l'état liquidatif*," for those engaged in processing civil servants' payroll. From the NPM perspective, performance is the output, defined as the completion of predefined activities.

While this perspective is necessary and could shed light on the existence of certain bonuses, it falls short in explaining their persistence and uneven distribution across departments. Many recipients of these bonuses are not involved in the tasks to which the bonuses are linked. Moreover, these activities are part of the departments' regular missions, which justifies their existence. Numerous other departments conduct their routine activities without receiving corresponding bonuses. The awarding of these bonuses seems to follow an ascriptive logic, favoring a particular category of civil servants based on their belonging to a department that serves the interests of ministerial authorities. This was the case of the '*prime de contrôle et vérification DTO*' granted in 2012 to DTO civil servants.

However, both of these explanations can be understood within the 'negotiated statehood' framework, where bonuses emerge from the negotiation process within the Congolese bureaucratic arena. The heads of the DTO and payroll department successfully transformed their departments' routine duties into bureaucratic norms to establish new bonuses, facilitated by the informal accountabilities between senior civil servants and ministerial authorities. Administrative reforms impacting the public expenditure payment process incentivized ministerial authorities to collaborate closely with certain departments, thereby isolating them from the rest of the administration.

These bureaucratic norms are specific to their context and challenging to transfer across different administrations. The success of using a set of norms to negotiate salary supplements largely hinges on the power dynamics of the actors involved, both within the administration and the government. The Minister of Finance and the Minister of Budget wield considerable influence over expenditure execution, as they are among the few actors who determine budget execution (DT Global, 2020, p. 15). Various reforms have shaped these bureaucratic norms, whether they pertain to the administration's routine functions, such as computerization or procedural changes.

Within the Congolese administration, significant rivalries exist among actors involved in the negotiation of bonuses. These rivalries manifest in the actors' ability to challenge or secure the approval of the norms governing bonus negotiations. The competition is further highlighted by the power to adopt norms used by others to negotiate their own salary supplements, as seen in the case of Joel, who successfully negotiated certain bonuses granted to payroll department by arguing that DTO also plays a role in processing civil servants' pay. A similar rivalry was observed between the Director General of the DGTCP and the Director of the DTMF over control of the DTMF bonus. The payroll department can expand its compensation envelope with just the 'quitus' from the Minister of Budget, contrasting sharply with other departments, which must first ensure their bonuses are incorporated into the budget law before negotiating its implementation with the Minister of Budget.

Resources and powers in the dynamics of negotiating bonus are unequally distributed among the actors in the Congolese bureaucratic arena. Administrative reforms carried out over the last two decades have reshaped the focus on specific services within the Congolese administrative apparatus. The DTO and the Payroll Department are among the departments whose roles have been strengthened, becoming key players in public expenditure management through their interaction with other ministerial departments and external partners, including international financial institutions. Unlike other ministerial departments, the directors of the DTO and Payroll Department interact directly with several high-ranking figures in the state apparatus, including ministers. Another

⁴² Article 48 of the Civil service General Statute

resource mobilized is access to information on the state's financial operations and knowledge of practical norms on the expenditure payment circuit, which civil servants used to negotiate bonuses.

In many administrations, civil servants often lack the resources needed to negotiate significant bonuses. Such bonuses are typically allocated to a limited number of civil servants employed within select central departments located in the capital. The Government is well aware of these disparities, and on April 24, 2025 (Radio okapi, 2025), initiated efforts to formulate a new salary policy. The preliminary draft of this policy, which remains undisclosed to the public, was presented to the government team, including the Ministers of Civil Service, Budget, and Finance, on July 7, 2025 (RDC/Ministère de la Fonction Publique, 2025). Given the principle of acquired rights⁴³ embedded within the Congolese administration and frequently cited by civil servants, eliminating bonuses for those currently receiving them will be challenging. The framework of negotiated statehood may be employed to examine the distribution of bonuses in other administrations, thereby providing insights into the potential success of a salary policy aimed at harmonizing bonuses within Congolese public administration.

⁴³ The idea of "acquired rights" in the civil service is, in principle, excluded because the relationship between a civil servant and the Administration is legal and regulatory, grounded in the public interest. The legal provisions of the civil service statute can be unilaterally modified at any time, and the employee cannot contest this by invoking acquired rights to their previous situation under former regulations. (Robinson, N'Duba, & Phuati-Umba, 1987, pp. 3.6-3.7). However, the Congolese Civil service general statute acknowledges the benefit of acquired rights (Article 6 of Law No. 81-003 of July 17, 1981, reaffirmed in Article 107 of Law No. 16/013 of July 15, 2016).

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