

Repositioning the African Public Administration for the Realization of Effective and Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Public administration is instrumental in its operation, and is expected to carry out politically determined goals and values. It is part of the web of governance, deriving its form and substance from public policy. Thus, the most important attribute of public administration is its place in the political system. But in Africa the important role of the realisation of sustainable development has not been accomplished. The paper notes that public administration systems in many countries of Africa were characterized by high degree of inefficiency and ineffectiveness. They were unable to effectively implement national development plans. The paper argues that public administrations in Africa are required to act on several fronts at the same time: in the face of increasing financial constraints and the burden of the public debt, they are required to do more with less resources. In an economic environment in which change has become the rule and stability the exception, they are also required to adjust their missions and structures to the new role of the State, to control the effects of economic liberalization and globalization and to contribute to the improvement of the performance of the national economy. However, the paper states that much still needs to be done in terms of addressing the challenges that would appropriately enable public administration systems to play a vital, effective and instrumental role toward designing and implementation of national development visions and medium term strategies in African countries. It is our hope that the package of necessary capacity or success factors which we have suggested in this paper might contribute significantly toward elevating the efficiency and effectiveness of not only sustainable development but also that of public administration systems in Africa.

Introduction

Public administration remains the pre-eminent locus and responsible guarantor of the public interest and a vital player within public management and governance. To support the role of the state and ensure that its goals are fulfilled, public administration continues to evolve, absorbing new methods and improving and adapting practices according to social and technological progress, internal and external pressures and cultural and contextual challenges. As public administration continues to provide the foundation for maintaining confidence in the stability and continuity of the state, efforts to enhance its professionalism and integrity and buttress its impartiality, legality and transparency are critical to the fulfillment of the

state's overarching goals. Professionalism, impartiality, integrity, ethics, respect for rules, procedure, and due process can only be ensured by the human resource in the public service.

The primary role of the public administration in any country is to ensure that government can provide an enabling environment for sustainable socio-economic development. Such an environment if made available may not only lead to increased inflows of foreign investments, but also generate economic growth, which would in turn facilitate the provision of basic goods and services to the general population. However, the performance of the public administration in promoting sustainable human development in Africa has been pathetic to say the least. The main reason for this sorry state of affairs has been the all-pervasive scourge of corruption, which has plagued public management on the continent (Tangier, 2002).

In most countries and especially in developing countries public administration is vital to the optimum performance and development of the economy. This is especially true in Africa where in many countries the public sector dominates the economy. It is, therefore, essential that the public sector is managed efficiently and effectively (Lekorwe, 2010). The purpose of public administration is to promote a superior understanding of government and its relationship with the society it governs, as well as to encourage public policies more responsive to social needs and to institute managerial practices attuned to effectiveness, efficiency, and the deeper human requisites of the citizenry (Henry, 2004). Assessing the need for public administration reform in African societies is further complicated by the fact that these countries differ substantially in the status of government. The types of public administration reforms that are needed may also be affected by the status of the country. The underdevelopment of developing countries and the attempted overcome of the latter are at heart of international debates ever since development politics began gaining ground in world politics in the 1960ies. Today, African states receive special attention in regard to possibilities of an amelioration of their economic status quo.

The major challenge facing Africa's academics and policy makers is to restructure public administration in order to promote sustainable economic development. Since independence Africa has been caught within the trappings of rising expectations and destructive frustration-hope or despair. For over 50 years the continent has been swimming in the waters of dependency, exploitation and marginalization (Forje, 2009).

Repositioning public administration is a crucial reform for governments in African countries. Although reforming public administration is a crucial aspect of post-conflict reconstruction, it is also one of the most complex and difficult aspects of restoring governance. The success of public sector reforms has been mixed, even in countries with legitimate, stable, and mature governments. Restructuring bureaucracies and reforming the civil service has usually been a politically contentious long-term process, frequently moving by fits and starts, achieving some objectives and failing at others. In both developing and Western countries, more often than not public administration reforms end in disappointment for those advocating systemic change (Rondinelli, 2006).

Conceptual Issues on Public Administration and Sustainable Development

Within the disciplinary parameters of social sciences, the concept of public administration like other concepts has not been free from definitional disputations. In fact, the discipline has undergone various metamorphoses in the quest for a definitional unanimity. This has been largely due in part, to the indispensability of the bureaucratic procedures and processes, and the extension of governmental role from its traditional maintenance of law and order to the performance of socioeconomic roles through regulatory activities, provision of infrastructure and other services which brought with it complex asymmetrical goals;

aspiration and interest that cannot be ignored by any reasonable definitional elucidation of the concept of public administration (Agagu, 1997).

Adebayo (2000) asserts that when administration is qualified by the word "public" it simply means the practice of administration in a particular segment of society; that of the public sector. Public administration traditionally defined denotes the implementation of government policies. Specifically, it is the planning, organizing, directing, coordinating and controlling of government operations. Corson and Harris (1963) define public administration as "... decision making, planning the work to be done, formulating objectives and goals... establishing and reviewing organizations, directing and supervising employees ... exercising control and other functions performed by government executives and supervisors. It is the action part of government: the means by which the purposes and goals of government are realized" Nnoli (2000) defined public administration as:

the machinery as well as the integral process through which the government perform its functions. It is a network of human relationships and associated activities extending from the government to the lowest paid and powerless individual charged with keeping in daily touch with all resources, natural and human, and all the aspects of the life of the society with which the government is concerned. It is a system of roles and role relationships which defines in as clear and practicable terms of possible and in as much detail as possible the intentions and programs of governments the means available internally and externally to accomplish them, where, when and how. They are to benefit from them, and finally, it is a system that causes those intentions and programs to be realized in real life. It is pattern of reutilized activities, involving decision making, planning, advising, co-ordination, negotiation, conciliation, arbitration, commend and data gathering through which the government carries out its responsibilities.

Pfiffer and Presthus (1967) described public administration as a field mainly concerned with the means for implementing political values. This probably grew out of Wilson's (1887) classical conceptualization of public administration as the most obvious part of government and, as the government in action. And it probably explained why it has been argued that public administration deals with the study of the institutional framework of government, its socio-economic and political environment and the behavioral inclination of those who man the bureaucratic machine (Presthus, 1975).

From the above definitions, one thing is clear. Public administration has to do with the policy process in general, and policy implementation in particular. However, there is no single definition so far of the concept except that it is government in action. It therefore becomes both a government as well as a public machinery of operation. Public administration is thus identified with the administrative side of government as opposed to the legislative and judicial sides. Therefore, the traditional view is unduly restrictive as an explanation and does not fully capture the scope of public administration. It emphasizes the locus but not the focus of Public Administration.

The concept of sustainable development can be seen as an idea, a philosophy, or political conviction or school of thought, based on a set of defined basic principles. Sustainable development principles tend to assume various definitions, but their message is always similar. Sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development in human society is not a one sided process rather multi-sided issues; individuals perceive development as increase in the skill and ability, it is viewed as

maximum freedom, the ability to create responsibility. Sustainable development according to Seer (1977) cited in Keeper (2010) involves capital accumulation and economic growth only but the condition in which people in a country have adequate food, job and income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is the process of bringing fundamental and sustainable changes in the society. It encompasses growth and embraces the quality of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the democratization of development processes.

Todaro and Smith (2003) define sustainable development as a “pattern of *development* that permits future generations to live at least as well as the current generation”. Elliot (1994) points out that the concept encompasses the interdependent goals of (various aspects of) development and environmental conservation. The Brundtland Commission defined sustainable development, as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This automatically subsumes some notion of fairness of access to basic resource needs for all populations, both in the present day and in the future. While the debate still lingers on how to develop appropriate indicators for measuring the concept, there is a consensus that sustainability is the capacity for continuance into the future (Emaboye, 2002). The implication of this conclusion is that while ensuring the welfare of all, a sustainable path of economic and social development should not seek to maximize gains for this generation if in so doing, it reduces the capacity of future generations to provide for their own needs.

The Nature of African Public Administration

Public administration in developing countries is administration in transformation. In many countries in Africa, managing the public sector implies a continuing quest for good governance for organizations, institutions and policies that best fit the needs of modernizing societies. In order to speed up the process, scholars and practitioners of public administration in Africa borrow ideas, concepts, institutional designs from all over the world, but mostly from the highly developed countries in Western Europe and America (Josephat et al, 2011).

Within the African context, the public administration systems are strong in the wrong way and cannot operate within the rhetoric of rolling back the state and the adoption of private sector management practices. The revenues when collected and properly utilized gives the administrative structure the capacity to raise and utilize public resources to finance the bailouts through deficit financing. The African administrative system should operate like their counterparts in the developed world to provide technical advice and guidance to the political leadership regarding the most appropriate ways and means to address and contain crisis; and forge ahead with development related activities. The administrative system is not doing so because of political leadership; Political leadership that fails to implement the basic tenets of the democratic principles – open and inclusive governance, trust, legitimacy and accountability to its constituencies (Forje, 2009).

African bureaucracy cannot be compared with their western counter part on efficiency, not because African bureaucrats are inefficient, but because the work environment is not the same, the motivation is not the same and the office automation is not the same and the overall socioeconomic environment is not the same. All these are crucial variables for enhancing performance. In Africa, it should be acknowledge that governments do almost everything - providing goods and services, and the infrastructure necessary for socio-economic development. All these are done in the face of inadequacies - limited facilities with de-motivated staff. With its independence from British colonial rule, countries like Ghana inherited a system of public management that fulfilled tasks of “assuring the continuity of the state and maintaining law and order” (Adamolekun, 2005). However, the civil service was doomed to re-orientate after independence in order to follow national interests instead of the

ones of former colonial rulers. The African Development Bank thus asserts that an enormous expansion of the civil service took place until the grave economic decline at the end of the 1970ies leading to a full-scale development crisis (Adamolekun, 2005). Lack of commitment can be dismissed as a possible inhibiting factor to a successful development of African public administration.

In addition to internal weaknesses and institutional limitations, the weak performance of the public administrative systems in Africa was also due to increased dependency on donors for implementation of development plans. As regards performance of African public administration systems, it is evident that it leaves a lot to be desired in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Africanization and politicization as measures undertaken to address one of the critical challenges at independence in many African countries i.e. acute shortage of people with necessary technical skills who would constitute public service personnel, did not bring good results in terms of developing professional, efficient and effective public personnel. In Africa there has been a conventional belief that governments, driven by nationalism, redistributive interventions, and the need to assert centrist impulses, have tended to be unduly state-centric, and that as a consequence, they have tended to compromise their ability to be efficient and effective. At the same time they have tended to compromise the broader governance needs of their societies. Hence, there have been calls for the reform of the public sector primarily aimed at making the state or government institutional apparatus market friendly, lean, managerial, decentralized and ‘customer’ friendly, in the hope that it would better meet its societal objectives of good governance as well. This has been the preoccupation of one strand of the ‘New Managerialism’ or the ‘New Public Management’.

Causal Factors of African Public Administration and Poor Performance

In the colonial and immediate post colonial period, it was fashionable for governments in Africa to restrict themselves to maintenance of law and order, tax collection and provision of limited social and infrastructural services. Public administration was not developmental. Issues of socio-economic development were presumably left to the private sector, which was weak and under developed. It is generally believed that public administration in Africa is unsatisfactory, services, instead of improving, are deteriorating, and constant administrative reforms notwithstanding. While reforms are taking place, government services are expanding, unfortunately without corresponding expansion of their resources. Thus, unsatisfactory services are inevitable. These may not be the only problems. Others have contended that inadequate supervision of public agencies and lack of initiative by citizens to demand better services from such agencies have compounded the problem by limiting the agencies responsiveness to the public and their motivation to improve services even within the limit of available resources.

The problem in Africa can then be stated to be as follows: the socio-economic situation has been degenerating while the external environment has not been facilitative, but governments have tended to view the situation in non-crisis terms and have continued to stick to bureaucratic approaches imbued with micro-politics. As a consequence, governance has been compromised at the same time that the capacity of the state to address the problems at stake has also been weakened. The resulting situation is a vicious cycle or trap in which there is paralysis in governance, public administration and public sector reform, all leading to a failure to promote sustainable human development and to an atmosphere highly conducive to instability. As observed by (Mukandala, 2000) the following issues are proposed as major challenges confronting public administration in Africa: The crisis of institutions; Continued domination of the colonial logic in public administration; Poor or non-implementation of legislated policies; Persistent and endemic corruption; and The articulation of structural adjustment programs with privatization and civil service reform.

The current civil service structure in Africa is effectively a bureaucratic oligarchy with very strong connections to critical power centers; it can neither be effective and efficient in preparing for eventualities nor in reacting to sudden changes like the current economic meltdown. Therefore drastic changes or in depth public service reforms are needed to restructure and make the African Public Administration Systems effective and efficient to prepare, react and manage crisis. Since the state is at the fore-front of the recovery and development efforts, the state must equally undergo structural changes to meet the exigencies of the period. Only when the state undergoes constructive restructuring can state bureaucracy and the private sector adopt a management role and practice in addressing (under)development problems (Forje, 2009). The civil service proper was weak as an institution for development management. At independence the training and socialization of this institution was to enable the administration to continue, as far as possible, unchanged but with Africans instead in charge. “The values as well as the administrative practices taught were those of the colonial administration. African countries inherited an administration that had characteristics that inhibit instead of promote change (Leys, 1970; Kiragu & Mutahaba 2006).

The African Public Administration System has remained grounded on the runway, acting even worse than the colonial civil service which was not designed to grapple with the development needs of post independent Africa. The general preoccupation of the administration systems throughout the colonial era was focused on “system maintenance”. Institutions that were well developed were those responsible for the maintenance of law and order.

The Prospects of African Public Administration

Developing public administration in Africa should not only be an academic exercise but a conscious effort that takes into consideration the topical needs and challenges confronting the development process on the continent at local, national, regional, and global levels as well as the challenges that are likely to confront Africa’s future generations. As once remarked by Martin Luther King, Jr. “If you want to move people, it has to be toward a vision that’s positive for them that taps important values, that gets them something they desire, and it has to be presented in a compelling way that they feel inspired to follow”. The question that needs to be answered here is the following: To what extent is the background, outlook, knowledge, skills, attitude network, etc of public administration official at local level aligned with the needs of the local communities the Public Administrators are expected to develop?

The African public administration requires their freedom, sovereignty from the aprons of unsheltered governments to free the public administration from the dictates of centralized authoritarian system. Public administration system should go with loaded obligations, responsibilities and articulate interest to bail out the people from the burden of slavery, Close the gates of ‘no return’ (Elimina Castle – Ghana). Open the doors of constructive and inclusive participation for the common good. Let the people be part of the evolving process of socioeconomic transformation, Also, African countries have to cooperate more with each other. Our reckless rule over the bottom billion will have to give way to the recognition that taking charge of our destiny and that globalization entails interconnectedness and cooperation as the only route to sustainability and survival (Forje, 2009). African public administration systems, must cease being an extended bureau of the political party; establish and regain its sovereignty and independence; exhibit and maintain the ethics and professionalism; restore hope, trust and confidence in the people; and operate on the golden principles that governments come and go but the civil service remains the nightingale of society.

Developing countries such as Africa needs information to fight administrative difficulties. Obtaining better value for internally generated revenue, knowing the correct census of citizen and indeed effective operation of Government requires solid information systems. The public service is complex with red tapism creating delays and corruption resulting in slow and ineffective output. A large cargo of unproductive clerks and Administrators doing routine jobs that ICTs would provide better solutions to also exists. E-Governance has been suggested to play a key role in enhancing government business (Emaboye, 2002). Efforts must be made to identify the functional areas in every government organization to initiate the process of computerization. This should extend to choosing appropriate hardware platforms and software applications for the cost effective delivery of public services.

Public Administration System should be seen as the "nightingale" for defending, protecting and promoting the rights of the poor and disadvantaged in society. Ake (1995) advocates for the creation of a "Public", legitimizing the state and transforming it alongside African politics. Dia (2009) calls for the move away from a conservationist orientation on the part of African institutions, toward renovation. In the same vein, Mukandala (2000) calls for a change in the "logic" that drives African bureaucracies. He calls for the subordination of bureaucracy to society's cultural and political institutions, to become an instrument of governance, not a governing instrument.

For Africa emphasis now must be put on building the capacity of public administration to foresee, prevent or at least manage economic, financial and other crisis. Emphasis must be put on preparing public servants who are capable of managing tomorrow today. The needs to be addressed by public administration must not be assessed in terms of only today but especially in terms of many years ahead to be able to prepare against any crisis. Because when one comes to think about it, if public administration exists to cater for the needs of today only, then who caters for the needs of tomorrow? If Africa's Public Administration keeps on paying attention to the needs of today only, then it will only be addressing the crisis that hits Wall Street in Manhattan and the ripples from it that hit the streets of African cities. In this case, then who will address the crisis that originates from Africa such as food crisis in many countries, drought, environment degradation, energy, HIV/AIDS, security, etc.? Public servants must be masters of strategy and change management so that they steer the change that will ensure Africa's development (Kauzya, 2009).

Effective reconstruction requires governments to create a strong state quickly and in such a fashion as to strengthen the capability of the governing authority, not only to provide security, eliminate violent conflict, protect human rights, generate economic opportunities, but also to extend basic services, control corruption, respond effectively to emergencies, and combat poverty and inequality. Past experience suggests that what is most needed is some degree of political stability and legitimacy and respect for law, which requires not only strengthening the legislative and judicial systems, but the executive branch as well. An important requirement in restoring governance in Africa is to create or strengthen mechanisms for widespread participation in governance and public decision making. If we are to lift Africa from its current circumstances and predicaments, the African Public Administration System must geared towards creating jobs for fighting poverty; the current global economic crisis is leading to millions of job losses and pushing many Africans deeper into poverty and nudging others into poverty for the first time (Forje, 2009). Among other important tasks that public administrators are called on to carry out in African societies are strengthening public information systems, stabilizing fiscal management, and re-establishing basic government services in all parts of the country. Local governance and administrative systems may have to be created, restored, or reorganized, and local government or sub-

national administrative units may have to be staffed with competent administrators (Rondinelli, 2006).

Improving the effectiveness of the civil service in Africa is urgent because of serious weaknesses in the capacity of public administration either to carry out government policies or to deliver public services efficiently and effectively. The weaknesses in public administration are similar across Africa and in different regions of the world. But, given the varieties of circumstances and needs in Africa and the differences in functions that governments must carry out, it is unlikely that any standard set of reforms will be applicable and feasible in all of them.

Give the Public Administration System its independence and sovereignty for it to fulfill its output functions in order to fight poverty and (under) development. A professional, effective and efficient public administration system devoid of political influences, patronage and intrics will be putting jobs and eventually bread and butter back on the table. For very poor people, employment is particularly important because the ability to work is their only real asset and they have few safety nets (Forje, 2009). The African Public Administration Systems need to exert its authority which must come from the existence of a functioning state system currently absent on the continent.

Conclusion

Ensuring effective and efficient public administration in Africa is at best not an easy task. In most developing countries' governments are major employers and service provider. Governments and public administrations in such countries play an important role in the pursuit for sustained economic growth and sustainable development. It is not surprising that the public administration system in Africa is in dire need of serious reform and effective implementation in the sense that it is often characterized by inadequate political and technical commitment to drive the process, absence of a central agency to coordinate the reforms and provide leadership to the whole process, inadequate capacity to implement policies and programs, weak strategic operational linkages among major public sector reform initiatives, absence of a communication strategy to share information and enlist support, and no stated standards to service delivery.

Although repositioning public administration is usually an essential part of restoring legitimate and representative government in Africa. At the same time, without efficient, effective, and competent public administration in the executive branch, governments face equally difficult challenges in carrying out essential reconstruction activities, implementing policies needed to strengthen governance and stimulate the economy, deliver social services, and extend infrastructure (Rondinelli, 2006).

It is evident from the foregoing discussion that the main vehicle of the government is the public service and personnel. Hence, it is imperative to harness this resource. Building of critical institutional capacities for good governance, economic growth, and development is a pre-requisite. Nonetheless, any reform to this end should be carefully formulated and implemented, taking into account the specific needs of the continent.

We have also cautioned Africa's public administration not to panic and get diverted from the crisis under which the continent has been living. On the contrary, Africa's leaders now need to take advantage of this crisis and place their public administration to assume its responsibilities, make strategies for rescuing Africa's people from poverty, bail out enterprises that are critical to the development and employment of the people and provide stimulus packages to stimulate investment in areas that are critical to the development of the continent and re-emphasize the provision of services such as health and education to populations that cannot afford them left on their own (Kauzya, 2009). Structuring the African

Public Administration System is a sine-quon-non to addressing the challenges and getting the continent out of its current malaise.

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