

Public Administration and the Development of Africa: A Critical Assessment

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Abstract

This article explores Africa's development challenges from a public administration service delivery capacity perspective. The paper contends that African countries lack a well-coordinated central policy making machinery of government which has the capacity to set major development objectives of government and ensure service delivery consistency. The paper further notes that an efficient public sector is a prerequisite to any meaningful development in Africa. Public bureaucracies are viewed as the vehicles through which the struggle toward development and national building can be achieved. The paper has relied on documentary sources and the contribution represents a modest attempt to shed some light on the ongoing debate on the efficacy of Africa's public management institutions.

Keywords: Public administration, Development, Sub-Saharan Africa, Service delivery

1. Introduction

As developing countries emerged from their colonial status after the Second World War onwards, the transition from dependent territories to independent nations was greatly facilitated by the existence of colonial civil service institutions. The post-colonial administrative machineries had to grapple with a new ethos, reflecting new aspirations demanded by their citizens. The inherited public administration system emerged as the natural choice through which the struggle toward development and national building could be achieved. This gave rise to the emergence of public administration as a field of study in post-colonial Africa designed to reverse the socio-economic and political imbalances created by colonialism (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2011).

A cursory examination of literature on developing countries' managerial capacity or incapacity leads one to speculate that most developing countries seem to lack a well-coordinated central policy making machinery of government which has the capacity to set major objectives of government and ensure their consistency. In other words, most developing countries lack an administrative body capable of responding to the needs of accelerated development (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2012). The central government machinery (central agencies, ministries and departments) in developing countries have tragically failed to initiate and maintain the economic development the people seek despite its rapid expansion over the years. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2011:238) explains that:

Most African countries have experienced the crisis of political turmoil, intolerance and harsh dictatorship; others have a military regime with highly centralised government processes. To name a few, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Libya, Ethiopia and Uganda are in dire straits, resulting in a marked degree of social disintegration and economic stress throughout the continent.

Against this background, Otenyo (2006:2) highlights the need for African countries to prioritise development administration, nation building, and change management. The debate on why Africa is still rich in terms of natural resources but poor in terms of net worth bank balances is intriguing and has led some to highlight the lack of capacity in Africa to exploit the given natural resources in a beneficial manner. Some have even argued that managerial capability in some African countries have declined. Academics and consultants have tried, often painstakingly to explain why this paucity of managerial skills is rampant in the developing countries despite the massive increases in the number of management institutes and public service training centres in the various countries (Ojagbohumi, 1990).

Tragically, the feeling of failure of developing countries management institutions is pervasive in the "poverty belt" of sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America which today account for a large percentage of the world's population. According to Omoyefa (2008), Africa has a population of a billion people but its contribution to global trade is low. African economies are an outpost of underdevelopment with most of them experiencing structural repression and structural regression. Africa in particular, has been hard hit by a series of devastating shocks.

Politics has placed a premium on development (Gassama, 2008). There has also been devastating civil wars like the Rwanda genocide, the Darfur crisis, the Congolese war, the

Tuareg rebel uprising in Mali, the Renamo insurgents in Mozambique and the Boko Haram menace in Nigeria. Other civil wars in Africa include the Arab Spring of 2012 that saw the toppling of Libyan strongman Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, as well as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

This paper seeks to explore the trends leading to the sobering development outlook in Africa from a public administration service delivery capacity perspective. The paper discusses some of the possible explanations leading to this somber state of affairs. Various perspectives (Ikpe, 2000; Kelsall, 2011; Pitcher, Miran and Jonhston, 2009) have observed that patrimonialism has restricted the development of effective public sector institutions. The paper contends that an efficient public sector is a prerequisite to any meaningful development (Hughes, 2003). The essence of any modern society is its public administration (Omoyefa, 2008). Finally, the paper suggests that public sector reforms that are already in place in some Sub - Saharan States should be expedited. We do not pretend that we have solutions to the diverse problems of the sub - continent and so our proposals are therefore modest attempts to shed some light on the ongoing debate on the efficacy of Africa's public management institutions.

2. The Post Colonial State

In order to understand the present role of the "central government cluster" in developing countries some attention should be paid to the colonial nature of bureaucracy. The colonial form of government has been described as a ruling bureaucracy in the sense of government by appointed officials (Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2011). The major concern of this bureaucratic inheritance is the imbalance between the power of the bureaucracy vis-a-vis other political institutions. In the final analysis, the colonial bureaucracy is presented "as a monolith, unrestrained by 'the masses' who are subject to its authoritarian and paternalistic administration" (Smith B.C. 1988: 123).

The weaknesses of public institutions have, in turn, led to subdued legislatures and judiciaries which are essential to check on bureaucratic power. Bryant and White (1982) have called this phenomenon the paradox of development administration. Their thesis is that an effective administration is essential to accomplish development, and yet it is also that very effectiveness that can stifle and retard the political and social development of alternative centers of power. Political leaders are therefore put in an ambivalent position; whereas they need a capable bureaucracy to implement policies, highly skilled autonomous administrators are a threat to them. For that reason, politicians are reluctant to expend more resources on creating an effective and efficient bureaucracy (Helmsing, 2005; Awortwi, 2011).

Most observers of developing countries generally agree that bureaucrats are a strong pressure group because of their technical competence advantages over politicians. Their strength also stems from the permanent nature of their positions and their superior knowledge of government operations. In most countries, the minister and his/her political aides change with every change of government (Uwizeyimana, 2013). Career civil servants are therefore a key factor in maintaining continuity and consistency in the operations of public bureaucracies. The major factor undermining their powerful position is the undeveloped nature of public

administration as a profession which has failed to stand out amongst other disciplines. Furthermore, there is confusion between policy pronouncements which are the preserve of politicians and policy implementation which is regarded as the domain of public administrators. Professional public administration has been subordinated to politics in Africa (Mutunhu, 2011). The political leadership of government and its public servants are closely tied to each other by institutional arrangements and political interaction. Naturally, business of government is entrenched in politics. As Frederickson highlights, the effectiveness of a public seasoned administrator is predicated on their ability to comprehend the political environment they operate in and their capacity to manage the public programmes initiatives within that political context (Frederickson, 1989). Literature on public administration habitually treats the issue technically and as separated from politics. Politicians in power often take for granted that what they want will be carried out administratively in a kind of master-servant relationship. This myth of reasoning was for a long time associated with the name Woodrow Wilson, that policy and politics can be purely instrumental. However, in reality it is not.

3. The Sub-Saharan State

It is now generally agreed that the results of the first forty years of independence in sub-Saharan Africa have belied the optimism of the decolonization period and of the early years of independence. In the view of Kauzya and Balogun (2005) and Vyas-Doorgapersad (2011), of all the developing regions of the world, sub-Saharan Africa faces the most serious development crisis. The World Bank's (2015) Doing Business Report alludes to the fact that lack of real output growth has resulted in a continual steady decline in living standards and a decline in per capita income in Africa. The World Bank (1989: xii) summarised development crisis in sub-Saharan Africa as follows:

A root cause of weak economic performance in the past has been the failure of public institutions. Private sector initiative and market mechanisms are important, but they must go hand-in-hand with good governance – a public service that is efficient, a judicial system that is reliable, and an administration that is accountable to its public. And a better balance is needed between the government and the governed. Underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance. By governance is meant the exercise of political power to manage a nation's affairs. Because countervailing power has been lacking, state officials in many countries have served their own interests without fear of being called to account... Politics becomes personalized, and patronage becomes essential to maintain power.

The state in Africa is a fragile institution that is still in the early stages of state formation and cohesion. Not to be ignored by leaders seeking consolidation of their tenuous hold to power are demands for political patronage by party supporters and other individuals linked to the ruling elite by kinship or regional ties (Otenyo, 2006).

In both wealthy and poor nations, the majority of the population expect that their economic well-being should steadily improve to a higher standard of living. Therefore many have come to judge political leaders and institutions by the extent to which that economic

improvement takes place. Fatile and Adejuwon (2010) argue that the private sector in Africa consists of people who may be unable or unwilling to act in ways that stimulate rapid, internally integrated, self-sustaining economic growth. The country's rural population is often too close to the margin of survival to the point where mobilization of a high volume of domestic savings becomes a challenge (Mutahaba and Kiragu, 2002). The multinational corporations (MNCs) at the other end of the scale often control large segments of a poor country's private sector. The MNCs are often preoccupied with the export of commodities and profits than to the overall employment needs of the local population. The indigenous firms are small in terms of their contribution to the national output and lack the expertise and experience to manage their own productive enterprises in an efficient and effective manner.

It becomes tempting under the above conditions for a developing country's rulers to adopt policies that rely on direct government intervention as they have very limited choice. For a host of powerful and other mutually reinforcing reasons, a poor country's government is often faced with no option, other than adopt a greatly expanded public sector as a necessary condition of development (Omoyefa, 2008). Government interference is coupled with policies that closely monitor the activities of the "weak" private sector which more often than not operates under an atmosphere of hostility from its environment.

The question that confronts us is why Africa's public management institutions, despite their technical superiority over political operatives have failed to deliver on the development front. It is appropriate at this point to delve into some of the possible causes. The discussion of these causes is carried out fully cognisant of the heterogeneous nature of Sub - Saharan Africa.

4. Administrative and Management Capacity

It has become rather obvious to state that the development of administrative and management capacity is necessary for the carrying out of social and economic policies and the achievement of socio - economic goals of development. The development process encompasses a concern with the production and growth of the economy. It (development) necessarily implies that the state must pay attention to its 'capacity'. What then is capacity? Bryant and White (1979) have looked at a variety of symptoms of administrative incapacity in the developing countries. To them, administrative incapacity would imply that:

- (i) Few of the skilled administrators can be spared to work in the rural areas where the greatest need exists.
- (ii) Capable administrators are constantly shuffled between tasks and ministries.
- (iii) Most ministries, agencies and department are highly centralized and unresponsive to field offices' demands.
- (iv) Local level institutions are undermined by centralized agencies and acute staff shortages.
- (v) Administrators are alienated from the public due to differential access to education and resources.

(vi) Those lacking regular access to decision makers resort to bribes; corruption becomes part of the process and undermines the respect and legitimacy that the administration need.

(vii) National governments make few demands on the public because of their own fragile legitimacy. This phenomenon has been termed the soft state syndrome.

These symptoms lead to a situation in which the state struggles to respond to the needs conveyed by citizens. The net result is a bureaucracy encumbered with formalistic procedures that delays service delivery and program implementation. Moyo (1992) explains that public administration in Africa suffers from a chronic lack of ‘*implementisis*’. He further notes that African governments are good at craft competence but lack craft literacy. Administrative capacity necessarily entails the facilitation of adaptive organizations which are responsive to the needs of the beneficiaries thereby providing opportunities for participation and mobilization of resources and support from the environment (OED, 2005). The administrative capacity of a country to design, implement and evaluate developmental policies and programmes should be regarded as a key component in the process of development. The above discussion can fairly lead one to conclude that what probably holds developing countries back is their failure to establish competent organs of public administration and their incapacity to develop durable and enlightened social and political institutions that are capable of making demands on the state.

The discussion on capacity would not be complete without looking at some of the causes why the above symptoms tend to be prevalent in public sector management institutions. There are several reasons that have been suggested to explain the paucity of public sector managerial skills in Africa. They include, among many others; the rapid expansion of the public service through the increases of poorly executed development programmes; disruption resulting from national revolutions and conflicts; a tendency to focus on technical and professional education training rather than administration and management; the brain drain to the private sector and abroad ; the nature of public sector systems in which ethnic, political and personal considerations act against sound management; the inability of the education and training institutions to produce capable managers (Maphunye, 2009).

These are important issues which deserve greater analysis. The paper will critically analyse these causes with a view to determining whether they can be used as major explanatory variables for the administrative incapacity of most Sub - Saharan states. As the discussion unfolds, it is apparent that greater emphasis has been placed on personal rule and the lack of effective capacity building initiatives.

5. Administrative Capacity Constrains

5.1 Political and Personal Considerations

Berger et al. (1973) has eloquently argued that the various stages of modernization have produced a certain degree of disorganization, anomie and "homelessness" on society as they have been responsible for eroding traditional cultures and social structures. As a result of the modernization wave, social relationships are increasingly being derived from economic status and professional occupations. These developments have contributed to the gradual erosion of

old social categories based on traditional loyalties.

This change is hardly devoid of tension and conflict. The African elites who have emerged are linked to large networks of social obligation. The egalitarianism of pre-colonial African society and the meritocratic character of upward mobility in the early periods of independence periods have resulted in African leaders and managers being entangled in a web of social relations that often involve a large number of poor rural and urban relatives who look up to the elite for assistance. The value of the social exchange systems that peasant communities employed to ensure themselves against the risk of modernization are still strong (Hyden, 1983).

African elites, it could be argued, are forced by their patronage and social obligations to assist their poorer kith and kin. This patronage and the strength of moral pressure which they feel to fulfill them partly explain why state organizations are used in Africa to pursue informal, personal goals rather than collective ones that are formally proclaimed (Hyden, 1983; Ayee, 2009). The net result is personal rule - a situation where most actors expect to use governmental agencies to achieve personal and other extra organizational goals first and formal goals second. This gives rise to corruption, bribes and graft.

5.2 Capacity building

The training and development of effective public service managers is now accepted to be a major contributor to organizational performance in most countries. Since the beginning of the 1940s, the number of schools, institutes and faculties of public administration has grown at a tremendous pace. One of the few surveys done shows that there are many such institutions throughout the world with the majority being based in the United States (Jewson, Felstead and Green, 2015; Mutahaba and Kiragu, 2002). This rapid expansion does not seem to have left an indelible impact on management institutions in Africa. Why? Igberaese & Onyeaghalaji, (2009) and Hanson, (2011) have observed that several qualitative problems related to inadequate training methods have been identified.

- Training is often treated as a discreet event, rather than a part of an overall programme of organizational improvement;
- Bureaucratic politics and patronage play a more important role;
- Competent trainers are scarce as training is not a profession in high demand;
- Training curricula and materials are based on borrowed models which are rarely updated - little effort is made to generate indigenous materials;
- Classroom based, academic style teaching unrelated to actual work environments still dominates most training programmes;
- Evaluations of training programmes are rare and if instituted often go little beyond taking attendance and assessing the happiness levels of trainees; and
- Most training institutions are poorly financed and managed, except for a few centres of excellence found in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The poor financing of institutions in Africa could of course be explained by the lack of a strong financial base in these countries. Part of the problem can be attributed to the fact that the elites who are in charge of the allocation of resources are perhaps reluctant to encourage the emergence of effective training institutions that could eventually challenge the status quo. This view tends to be supported by the paradox of development administration syndrome discussed earlier. The argument in short is that the frayed political institutions in the developing countries are wary of an effective bureaucracy because of its threat to the evolution of alternative centres of power in society. Politicians are unlikely to expend resources on an institution they view ambivalently. It would be safe to argue within the same vein that public management training in Africa may have been neglected or has been obstructed by the elites for the same reasons.

Decisions on the installation of a new management practice are inevitably political in that the introduction of a new system often threatens the internal balance of power within the institution. The more radical the administrative reforms are, the greater the opposition as they are viewed as threatening the status quo. It has been noted that implementation of public service reform programmes are by "common experience in many political contexts frequently frustrated by obstruction hesitation and simple misunderstanding" (Kavran Report, 1989: 159). Such a view would be strongly denied, yet it is difficult to understand or to explain the subtle resistance to initiatives in any other way. Another controversial analysis offered by Gonchkar (2012) is even more intriguing. He argues that national administrative staff training colleges have become symbols of national progress alongside national airlines and other prestigious projects often referred to as "white elephants." These institutions often have the personal backing of the Head of State. This personal backing and a desire to control the institution undermines its authority. Instead of acting as instruments of change, they degenerate into conformist tools for the ruling elites.

5.3 Brain drain

The state of management institutions has also been linked to the brain drain syndrome. The brain drain syndrome is the loss of highly trained high quality manpower to rich countries. Put simply, the brain drain phenomenon refers to an environment in which one country's loss is another country's gain. It is a well-known fact that the difference between a first rate university or a public sector bureaucracy and a mediocre one lies in a relatively small number of outstanding people who set the criteria and lend the output tone. When such outstanding people leave, the likelihood is that the loss has an adverse impact on the quality of that country's particular institution.

5.4 Education Standards

Closely tied to the brain drain syndrome is the fact that as more qualified people leave the country the education institutions suffer. A Burmese economist gave an account of how a University is run in a typical developing country. Myint (1971: 228) notes that, "University education has degenerated into giving lectures to huge overcrowded classes with hundreds of students, lectures being frequently given at dictation speed so that students can get complete lecture notes which they learn by heart to be reproduced in examinations... [O]wing to

shortages of textbooks and to students' difficulties in understanding them, few students read anything beyond their lecture notes... [T]he meagrely stocked libraries are used as places where students can memorize their lecture notes." This type of education does not accord well with the normal conception of a university as a centre of excellence for learning and teaching at high levels. Intellectual excellence must be nurtured in schools and universities. When the university fails to churn out highly qualified and professional manpower that match the employment needs of the public sector, the net result is deterioration in the quality of government not only in terms of performance standards but also in terms of delivery standards. Further research needs to be done on the state of African Universities before such a generalization can be made.

All these views are greatly limited by their lack of empiricism. Although some views appear cynical, they are rational arguments that could be used as basis for further empirical research and could very well explain the paucity of managerial expertise in sub-Saharan Africa.

6. Lessons from Botswana

So far we have managed to establish possible causes of state incapacity that could very well explain why the administrative agencies in Africa have failed to respond to the needs of accelerated development. The picture painted so far is a bleak one.

However, developments in Botswana have inspired us with confidence that given the right "atmospherics" countries are capable of running their public sector in an efficient manner. The experiences of this southern African country could prove invaluable to sub-Saharan African states as they seek to untangle themselves from their economic woes.

In Botswana, the political leadership has been committed to the conception that proficient management of the economy depends on the quality of the public service. To achieve their development objectives, the political leadership made efficiency and effectiveness their major overriding goal. They set out to build a strong nucleus of top and middle level managers. Botswana's system of public management has been commended as one of the most successful in Africa. Since its independence in 1966, the government of Botswana adopted various reforms in the form of decentralization, computerization of personnel management systems and human resource development under the ambit of New Public Management (NPM) (Dzimhiri, 2008). This led several studies to conclude that although Botswana is still a developing country, its bureaucracy stands out in several aspects (Hope, 2002; Dzimhiri, 2008; Marobela and Boy, 2012). Botswana has been commended for establishing a sound democratic system, separation of powers clearly specifying lines of authority, accountable bureaucracy and a strong foundation for prudence in the management of public finance.

Concerted efforts were also made to build locally based human resources to replace the expatriates. In line with this endeavor, various reform initiatives such as the Organisation and Methods and job evaluation systems were initiated to improve the performance of the public sector (Hope, 2002). Anti-corruption reforms were also introduced and this saw the establishment of the Directorate of Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC) in 1994 (Dzimhiri, 2008). This initiative played a crucial role in curbing corruption and because of

such initiatives, Botswana is rated among the least corrupt countries in Africa. The government of Botswana also introduced various institutions to facilitate the implementation of public sector reforms such as the Performance Improvement Committee, Directorate of Public Service Management, Ministerial Performance Improvement Committee and the Botswana National Productive Centre among others (Marobela and Boy, 2012).

All in all, what stands out in Botswana is the political leadership's commitment to the emergence of an efficient bureaucratic class armed with sound managerial techniques. The country has managed to establish competent organs of public administration first as a prerequisite to economic development.

7. Conclusions

It is heartening to note that African leaders have come to realize that something has to be done about the problems facing the continent. There have been attempts to address economic stagnation in a large number of African countries. The World Bank has been a leading actor in determining the nature and form of various country structural adjustments. The bank has found out over the years that one of the many factors contributing to project failure in SSA is the limited institutional and administrative capacity of the SSA states. A comprehensive plan that became known as The Joint Program of Action for sub-Saharan Africa was launched in 1984. It called upon African governments and the international community to help SSA meet the daunting development challenges facing the continent. There was a genuine consensus that three main issues needed to be tackled as a matter of urgency and these were:

1. That SSA countries should undertake policy reforms that provide a framework for sound economic growth. These policy reforms should include greater reliance on market forces and reductions in bureaucratic controls that stifle development.
2. That the quality of public and private investment expenditure be improved in the short term. This would require the rehabilitation and maintenance of infrastructure, services, and enterprises.
3. That there was a need to assist governments increase their capacity to manage their own economies through the development of human resources and institutions (World Bank, 1989).

Two important issues stand out. Africa's problems arose from a combination of two basic factors: internal mismanagement in general; and a series of external shocks such as the oil price increases and some natural (such as climatic catastrophes). The latter had the effect of sharpening the effects of the former, and it is only when the former problems are addressed that Africa will be able to regain the road to prosperity. We therefore feel that African countries need to devote their energies on building competent organs of public administration.

The thrust of our argument is that African countries lack well-coordinated administrative agencies that can initiate and maintain the economic development the majority of their people seek. In the course of our discussion we have established the major causes that have

weakened the growth of effective managerial capacity in these countries. These encapsulate political and personal considerations that result in autocratic patrimonial states; inadequate training facilities; brain drain; low education standards brought about by the lack of qualified manpower and poor financing of institutions. All these factors lead to the development of incapacitated soft states that struggle to implement policies essential for the economic well being of their citizens.

Botswana is a clear illustration that economic prosperity is indeed possible if the political leadership is willing to effect the necessary changes. The broad lesson from the Botswana case study to other African countries is that the secret of economic development does not only lie in 'sensible' politics but also in good public administration.

There is a need for African countries to implement various administrative reforms that are essential in addressing the capacity of the institutions. Administrative reforms must have a long term perspective and should not be undertaken in a reactive manner that addresses short term needs.

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