Challenges and Strategies to Strengthen Competencies for Agile, Inclusive and People-Centered Public Service Delivery: *Insights from Ethiopia*

Azeb Assefa Mersha (PhD)

Dean of Training Institute

Ethiopia Civil Service University

Background: The Context

- Ethiopia:
  - Population about 120 million
  - Federal System of Government
  - 12 National Regional States and two Federal City Administrations
  - About 2.5 Million Civil Servants

Background: Historical Roots

- Modern civil service began under Emperor Menelik II in 1907

- Emp. Haile Selassie era (1930 to 1974) registered modernization, but political patronage hindered professionalization

- Derge Military Regime (1974-1991)

- Post Derge Period
    - Adoption of Federal System of Government
    - Exhibited Significant Civil Service Reforms

Background: Contemporary Challenges

- Despite progress, the challenges

Systemic Challenges	• Inconsistent structure, non-merit recruitment, political interference, and impartiality issues persist.
Capacity Challenges	• Ineffective service, competency gaps among personnel, weak institutions, and tech gaps impede modernization
Governance Challenges	• Lack of transparency, corruption, non-compliance, and need for pragmatic leadership are critical.

- These issues hinder effective, efficient and inclusive public service delivery.

Background…

- The Federal Government of Ethiopia has initiated a **Public Service and Management Policy (2024)** structured around **seven key reform pillars** backed by strong political will and sustained commitment.

- The aim is: to professionalize the civil service, markedly improve public sector performance, and ultimately provide more efficient, effective and inclusive services to the public.

- Of the seven pillars, three directly align with the theme of today's discussion: **capacity building, inclusivity, and digitalization.**

1- Challenges: Competency Gaps

The lack of 21st-century skills among civil servants produces serious challenge, primarily stemming from outdated educational curricula and capacity development training programs that often fail to align with the demands of the modern digital era.

- Lack of Agile Methodologies in Curriculum Design
- Slow Adoption of Competency-Based Curriculum Design.
- Inadequate Focus on Innovation and Creativity.
- Neglect of Digital Competencies

Higher Education Institutes

- Insufficient Emphasis on Practical and Applied Skills
- Inadequate Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms
- Overreliance on Traditional Teaching Methods
- Lack of Alignment with Organizational Goals and Strategies

Capacity Building Training Programmes

2- Challenges: Digital and Technology Gaps

Limited Availability and Uneven Distribution of Digital Infrastructure

- Inadequate digital infrastructure hampers connectivity and service delivery

Limited Digital Literacy

- Both citizens and civil servants face challenges with digital literacy, slowing adoption

Digital Divide

- Following the socio-economical and geographical lines
  - E.g. gender digital divide; generational divide

3- Challenges: Issue of Inclusivity and Equity

- Representation within the public sector : ethnicity, gender, age, disability, geography and others

- Gaps in inclusive service design

- Competency gaps in social inclusivity
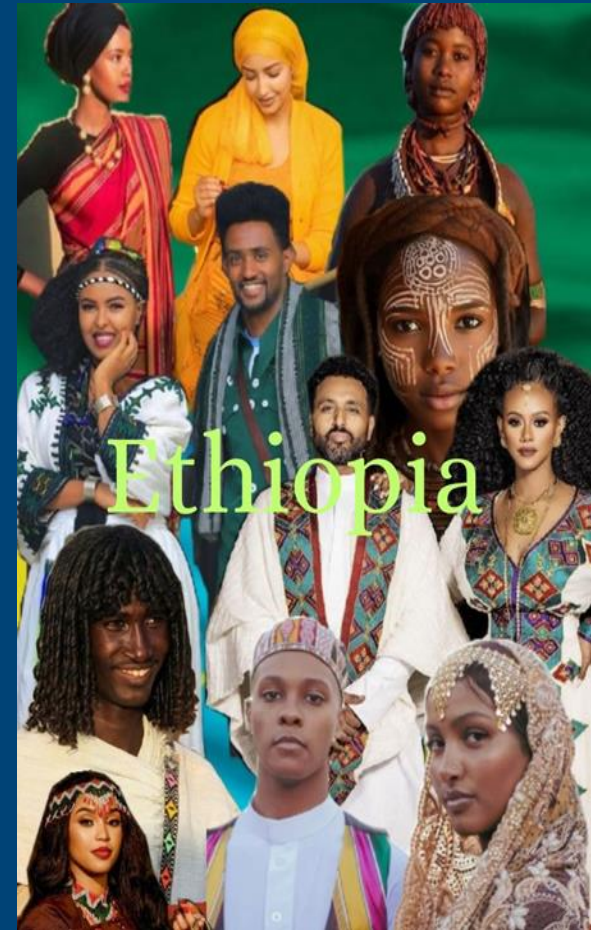
Strategic Responses

- Agile Bureaucratic Reform
  - Strengthening competencies of Civil Servants

  - Fostering cross-sectoral collaboration
    - E.g. **Mesob One-Stop Service Center**, which consolidates various public services under one roof
    - Also the reform promotes PPP

Strategic Responses: Competency-Based Human Resource Development

Competency Framework Development
(Behavioral and Technical Competencies)

- Competency Based Training Design

- Create Incentives for Learning and Innovation

HEI: The Assessment of graduates before joining Public service would strongly incentivize universities to:

- Align curricula with the actual needs and competency frameworks

- Adopt CB curriculum

Strategic Responses: Bridging Divides

Digital

- Infrastructure for e-government, data centre etc
- Strengthening civil servants' digital competencies

Inclusiveness

- Fair representation and participation of member of the public

- Nurturing culture of diversity in the work place

- Strengthening social inclusiveness competency among civil servants

Charting the Course Forward

- **Continuous HEI-Public Sector Alignment:**
  - Ensure education directly addresses evolving public service needs.

- **Holistic Inclusivity:**
  - Focus equally on: **workforce diversity and truly accessible**, citizen-centered **service design.**

  (A representative workforce alone doesn't guarantee inclusive services; deliberate cultivation of competencies and processes is vital)

- **Our Collective Imperative:**
  - Build a public service that effectively serves *all* its people, leaving no one behind.

Thank You!