

Enhancing the Capacity of the Public Sector in Core Functional Areas of Administration: African Perspective.

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1. Introduction

Under normal circumstances the core functional areas of Administration should be the same in Africa as in other countries. The Public Sector everywhere is expected to perform a number of key functions though effective governance and promoting socio-economic development. The functions include designing and formulating economic and social policies; designing and implementing public programmes; raising revenue; and managing accountability. It also delivers services, and produces goods to citizens, organizations and other levels of government.

However, in Africa, the public sector over the years has not been able to perform its functions effectively. Neither has it been efficient leading to general dissatisfaction amongst citizens and the private sector. This incapacity has partly led to the inconsistencies or fluctuations in Africa's growth path. A feature of this trend is that Africa was not able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals leading to the perpetuation of wide spread poverty and inequality in many African countries today. The principles of effective governance such as accountability, transparency, participation and reduction in corruption have also been compromised in several ways because of the incapacity of the public sector to improve on policy integration and efficient service delivery .

I do not want to sound negative concerning the ability of Africa to successfully implement the SDGs and making transformative impact on its

people ,however, I believe we have to look at Africa and for that matter developing countries with a different lens, when we are discussing the issues of governance and capacities. The SDGs have made the issues more complex regarding the interdependence of the goals that calls for horizontal and vertical inter relationships of public sector actions. It has also given Africa the opportunity for critical introspection of our public sector models and to reengineer the way governance principles are practiced at all levels. Yes, some countries have linked their development plans with the SDGs but how far are implementation moving in our precarious governance environment ,fraught with endemic corruption, increasing poverty, inequality and exclusion of the vulnerable with gender based violence rising out of proportion.

Therefore, for Africa to successfully implement the Sustainable Development Goals at par with the rest of the world, and in order to implement the principle of leaving no one behind, extraordinary efforts have to be made to strengthen the capacity of the public sector around the Goals and instill in the leadership of the public sector the principles of effective governance, innovation and creativity. This is important within the context of ever-changing work environment of advanced technology for service delivery. The proliferation of fast changing advanced technology for public service delivery is pushing Africa's development far behind the rest of the world because of the inability to catch up with the pace of technological advancement not necessarily because they do not want to accept it but more so because of affordability and sometimes resistance to change by public servants.

This is coupled with the age old issues of corruption and the inability of Governments to punish corrupt officers. With the existing attitude to

corruption, promoting equality, fairness, social justice, participation, inclusivity, collaboration and socio-economic development is a far cry.

Against this backdrop, I have suggested some strategies that can be devised to enhance the capacity of the public sector in core functional areas of administration in Africa and how they can be leveraged to build a more effective and efficient public sector that can spearhead the implementation of the SDGs and beyond.

However, it must be noted that the functional areas are vast and complex and yet complementary and mutually reinforcing. Given their complexity, there is the need to have adequate and consistent human and financial resources, capacities to address the challenges.

It is instructive to note that the provision of core public goods needs an effective public sector or authority; hence the importance of the public sector in Africa as it serves as the “midwife” for delivery of the public goods and services. The need therefore for a capable public sector in Africa is bigger now than ever, if Africa is to achieve the SDGS.

To enhance the capacity of the public sector in the core functional areas, one needs to examine to what extent had these functions be performed ?

The state of the performance of the core functional areas in administration
Even though the average African public sector has not collapsed, its capacity to provide order and security, to devise and implement policies for growth, to adopt and enforce laws, to regulate markets, to control its borders , to creditably engage in social and economic development is generally and

comparatively weak. In other words, the average developmental capacity of Africa's public sector is weak.

In some circles the public sector is perceived as an obstacle to development as it is plagued by low productivity, low remuneration, poor staff morale, absenteeism, moonlighting , difficulty in recruitment and retention of professional staff, weak professionalism, ineffective or no performance management systems , politicization and corruption. These problems sometimes make it difficult for even well-intentioned public officials to be effective.

Strategies to enhance capacity in core functional areas of administration

To enable the African Public sector realize the SDGs and Agenda 2063: a number of strategies and approaches, must be adopted to support capacity enhancement initiatives:

- (i) The building of strong and effective state institutions with adequate capacities to recognize corruption and adopt zero tolerance to corruption. This calls for Govts. To allow independent Public sector organizations to function as prescribed by their various National Constitutions . In addition the public sector must be sensitized to change its attitude to work and uphold its values in the performance of the regulatory, administrative, and technical functions based on the principles of (a) flexibility and competence; (b) change in managerial roles in which managers will be encouraged to take risks and be innovative both in policy making and implementation; (c)

strong government, private sector and civil society relationships, that is, building networks among the various policy actors into viable communities and strengthening the networks nexus among the communities. Such a network will help in the development and implementation of developmental goals by facilitating interchange of development ideas; (d) meritocratic and career-building public service. Meritocratic public service will also ensure that people with the right caliber are employed in the public service through competitive public service selection processes, while at the same time insulating state agencies from the whims and caprices of political authorities and avoid the patronage systems that have characterized state agencies in Africa; (e) well developed and functioning human resource management system to serve the needs and career of public servants; and (f) ensure high ethical standards, which should include among others, the inculcation into public servants with the ethos of public service and interest.

- **African Governments must invest massively in building competencies and strengthening systems, and processes in policy entities such as economic planning and finance units and those responsible for social development, such as health, and education strategies. Equally important is strengthening the capacity of accountability and compliance entities, such as anti-corruption and audit units. The SDGs implementation has raised the importance of data collection and analysis, and the deployment of advanced**

technologies. To be able to strengthen evidence -based policy designing , implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting , African countries should be fully opened to Big Data concepts and earmark dedicated budgets for developing leadership capacity in data management, and in other competences including electronic and digitalization of records, automation of services etc.

Despite competing priorities and poor economic conditions in many African countries, this investment is important because having a sustained budget for leadership capacity development, especially in advanced technology such as big data management will improve human and other resources management for the advancement of Africa's development in the long run. Budgeting for this purpose is a strategic decision to enhance prospects for Africa's development and good governance and the match towards the achievement of the SDGs and the Agenda 2063. This brings into sharp focus the need for resource mobilization capacity. Internal or local resource mobilization is important as it promotes sustainability of available resources and engenders ownership of programmes. This notwithstanding, it is unavoidable to mobilize extra resources from the international community line with SDG 17 revitalizing global partnership for sustainable development.

It is also very important for development partners, to design and implement targeted capacity development interventions that are tailored to the strengths and weaknesses of individual African

countries, among both the top performers in Africa on the African Capacity Index (ACI), published by the ACBF and the low performers. For example, in the 2016 ACI report all the top performing countries still score poorly on capacity development outcomes. Thus, targeting policy recommendations to improve capacity development outcomes would be most advantageous for poorly performing African countries. However, Initiatives on capacity building supported by development partners need to take into account the context within which African countries operate. Many capacity development initiatives have been unsustainable because of a failure to ensure country ownership.

In this way the African continent will not be left behind in realizing the impact of the successful implementation of the SDGs.

- **Encourage more partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector and other non-state actors**

Partnership with NGOs and other non-state actors is not well recognized and acknowledged in most African countries. Even though there are public private partnerships frameworks, their implementation in most African countries is weak.

To enhance the capacity of the public sector in the implementation of the SDGs calls for the multi-stakeholder approach in designing and implementing social and economic delivery standards especially for the hard to reach populations.

- **Encourage, improve and deepen e-governance and e-government and the use of information technology**

This entails the provision and the enhancement of better interface with customers by using information and communication technologies for developing “one stop/non-stop” service centres and public information systems that deliver seamless services and provide timely information to citizens. Only a few countries in Africa have set up these new technologies to provide useful services to their population. Most African countries, are still struggling with the provision of the infrastructure which is the backbone for ICT.

- **African countries must Internalize the “New Public Service”(NPS) Approach, which places citizens at the centre of public administration.** That is a public Sector that is focused on delivering service to the citizens be they in business, cities and rural areas, be they poor, marginalized, vulnerable, young or old, male or female, will help its country implement the SDGs, with appreciable success of leaving no one behind. The principles of effective governance should be internalized and become the drivers for the attainment of the SDGs.

Conclusion: Policy recommendations

Enhancing the capacity of the public sector in core functional areas of administration in Africa is not an easy venture given the current **deep rooted practices, corruption, favoritism, discrimination etc** that have rendered the public sector ineffective and inefficient. Additionally, the situation in Africa, of inadequate financial resources for capacity building will make it difficult for

the public sector to make a strong impact on the core functional areas of administration to propel the implementation of the SDGs, Therefore, enhancing the core functional areas of the public sector to support the implementation of the SDGs will need the following:

- (i) African Governments must acknowledge the inadequacy in the capacity of the public sector and make conscious efforts to commit to adherence to good governance practices in consolidating and guiding leadership in other spheres of society.
- (ii) African countries are at different stages of capacity development, reflecting their diverse histories, culture, politics, economies, societies, and geography. Accordingly, strategies must be based on each country's context, but with emphasis everywhere on excellence, adaptation, and sustainability and above all citizen centric.
- (iii) While countries have done well in putting in place formal policies and strategies for development in the public sector in the functional areas of administration, there is room for improvement in internalizing the SDGs and their targets to bolster ownership and consensus among citizens. Most African countries are yet to reach their populations especially at the local levels with the SDGs and their implementation strategies.
- (iv) Last but not least, there must be available financial resources to develop leadership capacity, establish workable modern ICT based

systems that place development of efficient and effective service delivery to citizens as the focus of the public sector.