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**Enhancing the capacity of the public sector in core  
functional areas of administration**

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## **Enhancing the capacity of the public sector in core functional areas of administration: African perspective**

This conference room paper was prepared by Committee member Bridget Katsriku in support of the Committee's deliberations on enhancing the capacity of the public sector in core functional areas of administration.

### **1. Introduction**

Africa's public sector, as in other developed or developing countries, is expected to perform a number of key functions that will promote good governance and socio-economic development. The functions include 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 (World Bank 1997; Schacter 2000; Olowu 2011).

However, in Africa, the public sector over the years has not been able to perform its functions effectively, especially since the middle 1970s to date. Neither has it been efficient leading to general dissatisfaction by 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 good 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 service delivery and socio-economic development.

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, efforts have to be made to strengthen the capacity of civil servants and the broader public sector workforce around the Goals and instill in the leadership of the public sector a sense of commitment, innovation and creativity. This is important within the context of ever changing work environment using advanced technology for service delivery. More so, the leadership must enhance their capacity to abhor corruption and punish corrupt officers. This will promote equity, equality, fairness, social justice, participation, inclusivity, collaboration and socio-economic development and reduce, if not eliminate provision of public services only to the highest bidders and the privileged few.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines the strategies that can be devised to enhance the capacity of the public sector in core functional areas of administration in Africa. Specifically, it assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the key strategies and how they can be leveraged to be able to build a more effective and efficient public sector that can spearhead the implementation of the SDGs and beyond.

The paper is divided into six sections. Section 1 defines capacity enhancement. Section 2 defines public sector capacity. Section 3 deals with the core functional areas of administration in Africa. Section 4 discusses the state of the performance of the core functional areas. Section 5 addresses the strategies to be designed for capacity enhancement in the core functional areas. Section 6 highlights some policy recommendations.

## **2. Capacity enhancement defined**

There are several definitions of capacity enhancement (CE). Generally, it refers to the development of formal and informal institutions and organizations — that is, changes in the rules of the game and organizational behavior that lead to improvements in service delivery to the public and in the country's investment climate (World Bank Institute 2003). Its ultimate purpose is to leave behind better skilled and oriented individuals, more responsive and effective institutions, and a better policy environment for pursuing development goals (Binkerhoff 2010). At the policy or institutional level, CE has the following three main ingredients:

- (i) The country's resources and capabilities (human, finance and natural resources, infrastructure, technology and intersection of linkages)
- (ii) An enabling institutional environment (political and bureaucratic leadership; administrative capacity, economic, social and stakeholders)
- (iii) Motivations and incentives/pressures that promote and help to sustain behavioral change (financial, merit, competition, reputation and public voice) (Grindle 2007).

## **3. Public Sector Capacity**

Public sector capacity is the ability of the state through the public sector to deliver or procure goods and services, design and implement policies, build infrastructure, collect revenue, dispense justice, and maintain a conducive environment for the private sector. It promotes development through several channels: it expands the financial resources available to provide public goods and services (including security, justice and law enforcement, health and education, and infrastructure), it strengthens the government's stake in the country's economic development (which brings in a larger tax revenue) (IMF 2015).

Public sector capacity also influences the two categories of causes of violence. On the one hand, it increases the repressive capacity of states, thereby increasing the cost of rebellion and reducing its feasibility. On the other hand, it increases the power of states and their public sector to address grievances that could potentially cause conflicts (Brinkerhoff 2009).

And yet the capacity of the public sector is seen as an intangible form of public capital, which is accumulated by investing resources in its development and depended on political factors and the level of institutional and economic development. Furthermore, there had been the tendency to invest in physical capital like infrastructure while an intangible initiative was relegated to the back burner.

#### 4. The Core Functional Areas in Administration in Africa

It is true that the public sector plays a vital role in socio-economic development in Africa through policies and programmes designed and implemented to improve the lives of the citizenry. Widespread poverty forces most of the population to look to the public sector and the government for that matter for basic services, which are often lacking. Moreover, the extreme centralization of service delivery makes effective coordination by the public sector critical.

The core functional areas in administration in Africa represent the three core dimensions of the state, that is, “what is it that builds the state”. First, there is **functional authority**, which is the ability of the state to govern its territory effectively, reach all citizens regardless of their location, maintain law and order and protect citizens from predation and violence. It is the ability of the laws and rules of the state to trump all other laws and rules. Some of its indicators are secure borders, absence of significant organized political violence, no civil war, no ungoverned spaces, limited communal or ethnic violence and strife, low levels of criminality, limited serious organized crime, effective systems of dispute resolution, a disciplined security force and effective police service (Grindle 2007; Brautigam 1996).

Second is **institutional capacity**, which is the ability of the state to deliver goods and services, procure goods and services, design and implement policies, build infrastructure, collect revenue, dispense justice, and maintain a conducive environment for the private sector. Some of its indices include the prevalence of the rule of law; basic services delivery; i.e. education, health, water, transport; reasonable public infrastructure; functioning banking system; reasonable fiscal and policy environment for entrepreneurship (Brautigam 1996; Skocpol 1985).

Third is **domestic political legitimacy**, which refers to the extent to which citizens feel that their system of government is somehow appropriate, and the incumbent regime has the right to rule. Some of the indicators include a broadly agreed “political settlement”; relatively free media; citizens enjoy a modicum of civil and political liberties; no exclusion of significant minorities from power and the political process; reasonably ‘free and fair’ elections; trust in/ respect for political and legal institutions; tolerance of dissent; civil society has voice and organizing ability (Englebert 2000)

These three core dimensions of the state reinforce Brautigam’s four dimensions of state capacity, namely, (i) regulatory capacity which involves the ability of the state to establish and enforce rules that guide, or regulate, societal behavior; (ii) administrative capacity which is the routine ability to manage the personnel and resources of the state to enforce accountability and efficiency in service delivery; (iii) technical capacity which includes the expertise and knowledge required to make and implement technical decisions (science, engineering, medicine) and the policy tools and instruments necessary to implement those decisions effectively; and (iv) extractive capacity which denotes the ability of the state to raise revenues it needs to pay for the expenses of implementing its policies and goals (Brautigam 1996).

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, which, alas, are grossly inadequate in Africa.

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 next section addresses the current status of the performance of the African public sector.

## **5. 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 and its public servants, to credibly 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 (Ayee 2008). As rightly pointed out by Englebort (2000: 43), “Africa’s development crisis is indeed a crisis of state capacity”.

Olowu (2010) perceived the public sector as an obstacle to development as it is plagued by poverty, politicization and corruption. The capacity building literature identifies a litany of problems with Africa’s public sector. They include low productivity, low remuneration, poor staff morale, absenteeism, moonlighting and daylighting, difficulty in recruitment and retention of professional staff, weak capacity, weak professionalism, ineffective or no performance management contract and strong incentives to accept bribes. These problems sometimes make it difficult for even well-intentioned public officials to be effective (Owusu and Ohemeng 2012).

Of course, some of the problems of the public sector are rooted in Africa’s colonial and post-colonial political economy. For instance, the colonial governments in many countries did not develop the capacity of the state; rather, they established only the minimum state and bureaucratic capacity to help maintain law and order and facilitate resource extraction. In addition, institutions were created without any systematic attempt to relate them broadly to the problems of the country or even to other existing social structures and institutions. They also failed to prepare many countries for self-governance and simply rushed them to independence (Adu 1969).

At independence therefore, many African countries inherited an ineffective and under-resourced public sector – without enough people with the knowledge, skills, and experience to lead such efforts. To address some of the challenges, post-independence African leaders embarked on Africanization of small, inherited colonial civil services, while rapidly expanding the youthful and unseasoned service (Ayee 2005). In many ways, this rapid Africanization of the sector laid the foundation for capacity problems. Development partners and academics also emphasized human resource development, including, education, training and scholarships, heavily influenced by notions of knowledge transfer from the North to South (Ayee 2005; Brautigam 1996).

The severe economic crises in the 1970s and 1980s undermined whatever capacity the public sector particularly the civil service had been built since independence. The condition of the public service across Africa was pathetic. It was not only bloated in terms of numbers of institutions and employees but also faced serious capacity and resource challenges and

therefore proved incapable of effectively implementing structural adjustment programmes. Consequently, there was a renewed sense of urgency for creating an effective public sector in African countries at both the continental and national level (Economic Commission for Africa 2004). This led to the experimentation of various public sector reform strategies since the 1980s by many African countries with the support of development partners (DPs). These strategies ranged from the “quantitative” first generation (e.g. reduction of wage bill and retrenchment) and “qualitative” second generation reforms (e.g. making public sector employment attractive while reducing its size through remuneration and promotion policies) of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s and 1990s to the current “service delivery” third generation reforms of the post-Washington Consensus (World Bank 2003). At the same time, there were parallel sets of public sector reform policies; under the banner of the New Public Management (NPM), which draws on a model used in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and attempts to apply market principles to governmental administration.

Despite these reforms, the public sector in many African countries continues to be beset by inefficiency, ineffectiveness and remains incapable of performing basic functions. There has also been an increasing realization in the international community that public sector reform in Africa must include building the capacity of state institutions, rather than just equipping them to create an enabling environment for the private sector. Public sector policies have continued to be influenced by neoliberalism and the preference for market principles over state building and effective intervention (Ayee 2008; Owusu and Ohemeng 2012).

## **6. Strategies to enhance capacity in core functional areas of administration**

The limited success of Africa’s public sector has led to the search for alternative strategies and approaches to address the problems of the sector to enable it to realize the Agenda 2030: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want. A number of strategies and approaches, even though not exhaustive are proffered in the paragraphs below.

- (i) ***Reorient the objectives of the state and the public sector:*** This entails fostering development first – along the lines of the developmental states in East Asia that effectively transformed their impoverished countries into what are now referred to as the “Asian Tigers”. Johnson (1995) describes this as the developmental state process. This refers to a government with sufficient organization, interest in and power to achieve its development goals. Consequently, Africa needs a developmental public sector that is capable of helping the developmental state implement its policies and programmes. It embodies the building of strong and effective state institutions with the capacities to perform effectively the regulatory, administrative, technical and extractive functions.

Some of the principles of creating a developmental public service are (a) flexible but competence public service; (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-business-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. Well performing public sector organizations share two characteristics: better incentive systems; and open and competitive recruitment procedures. Such a career-based public service differs from what is advocated by neoliberals, which is

based on transferable skills. Meritocratic public service will also ensure that people with the right calibre are employed in the public service through competitive public service examinations, 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 (Owusu 2006; Owusu and Ohemeng 2012).

- (ii) ***Concentrate on the differential performance of organizations within a country.*** Even though public sector reform policies have been based on the premise that all public organizations are ineffective, there is evidence that not all public sector organizations have performed poorly since one can identify some that have performed relatively well (Ayee 2015). These are sometimes called as ‘pockets of productivity’ (Daland, 1981; Leonard, 2010), ‘islands of excellence’, ‘islands of effectiveness’ (Bebbington and McCourt, 2007, among others) or ‘positive deviants’ (Andrews, 2013) in government organizations in developing countries (Roll 2014). Consequently, an analysis of the causes of differences in performance in the public sector could have a significant impact on policy. In addition, the concept of organizational culture needs to be flagged as every organization has a culture and therefore any strategy for reform should include efforts to change the culture (Owusu 2006).
- (iii) **Governments must invest massively in building competencies in their public services.**

Capabilities, systems, and processes must be strengthened 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 the ombudspersons and anti-corruption and audit units. The SDGs implementation has raised the importance of data collection and analysis, which most African countries are not good at. To be able to strengthen data driven policy making, implementation, monitoring 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. Despite competing priorities and dire economic conditions in many African countries, this investment is important because having a sustained budget for leadership capacity development, especially in 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 (Ayee 2012) and the match towards the achievement of the SDGs and the Agenda 2063. This brings into sharp focus the need for resource mobilization. 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.

It is also very important for development partners, especially Capacity coordinating institutions such as the African Union (AU), UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), African Development Bank (AfDB) and African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) to design and implement targeted capacity development interventions that are tailored to the strengths and weaknesses of individual 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 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 these countries. It might be instructive for the AU, UNECA, AfDB and ACBF to take a special interest in the countries that are most challenged in capacity development and champion their capacity needs. 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 do so and 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.

**(iv) 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 opening up of areas of public service in selected core functional areas for participation of NGOs etc. while generally adopting the multi-stakeholder approach in designing and implementing social and economic delivery standards especially for the hard to reach populations.

**(v) 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. Even though these have been set up in some countries, their efficacy and sustainability are in doubt.

**(vi) Internalize the “New Public Service” (NPS) Approach**

The NPS, defines the role of public administration in the governance system as that which places citizens at the centre. It is one which will “serve rather than steer” and enables the public and public servants to help articulate and meet their shared interests rather than attempt to control or steer society. It is built on work in democratic citizenship, community and civil society, organizational humanism and discourse theory (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000). 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.

## **7. 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 that have rendered the public sector ineffective and the diversity of the functional areas. 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 enhance leadership capacity for accelerated realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite some progress in capacity development in some countries, more needs to be done. African countries need to show more commitment and support to capacity development initiatives. Political and bureaucratic leadership must commit to adherence to good governance practices in consolidating and guiding leadership in other spheres of society to achieve concurrence on how to develop capacity in each African country.
- (ii) Because capacity development outcomes are the most pressing issue, the capacity development initiatives of the African Union Commission and the ACBF should be deepened and sustained to ensure needed coordination and guidance for greater success to enable the public sector to undertake the core functional areas of administration.
- (iii) 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.
- (iv) 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 plans and the vision strategies to bolster ownership and consensus among citizens and across the political spectrum. This will ensure the continuity and sustainability of the plans and vision strategies when governments change.
- (v) Last but not least, there must be available financial resources to develop leadership capacity, establish workable modern systems that place development and efficient and effective service delivery to citizens as the focus of the public sector.



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