Building a Developmental Public Service in Africa

An Assessment of Five Decades of Effort[1]

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to provide an overview of the underlying causes behind Africa's current condition of public services. It is necessary to understand, diagnose, and place in a proper perspective any prescriptions meant to address the specific problems that characterize Africa's public services. This is with the view to making Africa's public services contribute effectively to building capable democratic and developmental states, which many of the papers presented during the 30th AAPAM Roundtable Conference, held in October, 2008 in Accra, Ghana, dealt with.

INTRODUCTION

This article is a longitudinal assessment of African countries' efforts to build capable public service systems, over a period of five decades. It identifies and explains the factors that have affected progress/success of those efforts, including the colonial legacy as well as developments in the internal and external environment, paying particular attention to political and economic situational factors. As part of the review, the article addresses various phases/episodes of public service reform over the five decades, paying particular attention to explaining differentials in success attained among countries, and between periods. To realise a democratic developmental state will require a public service system that has the capacity to organise elections; provide sound technical advice on measures needed to stimulate growth

and at the same time address inequality and reduce poverty; attract foreign investment but avoid over dependency. To realize a democratic developmental state will require a public service system that has the capacity to organise elections; provide sound technical advice on measures needed to stimulate growth and at the same time address inequality and reduce poverty; attract foreign investment but avoid over dependency and maintain national sovereignty as well as maintaining fiscal stability without overlooking issues of stimulating employment. At a mundane level, it is the public service that ensures that law and order on the street are maintained; children are taught in school; land ownership certificates are issued; roads and water supply systems are constructed and maintained; and wrong doers are punished. It is also the public service that mobilizes resources from the public (taxes) required to finance all the above mentioned functions in a modern state.

One characteristic of the *New Industrializing Countries* (NIC), besides impressive economic growth rates, is that these countries do well in meeting routine functions such as promoting property rights, individual safety, provision of electrical power, developing and maintaining good roads and provision of water. Many African countries have a long way to go before they can pass the test of undertaking effectively mundane functions such as those mentioned above. There are suggestions that a major reason for the poor performance of administrative functions by African countries is that most if not all countries have low institutional and administrative capacity (USAID, 2004). While there is a slight improvement in many countries' capacity compared to the situation obtained in the late 1980s and early 90s, which made one observer of the African public administration scene to describe it as *being in crisis,* the position is still not yet good(Mutahaba *et al.,* 1993).

In a background paper prepared for the 7th Africa Forum which took place in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso in October 2007, Oliver Saasa observed that there are a number of institutional and resource constraints that have continued to work against African countries developing a capacity to meaningfully design and implement their development interventions. He further asserts that capacity building and enhancement is at the centre of development and that without addressing the capacity issue even past achievements could be reversed.

While acknowledging that African countries have weak public administration capacities, experts are uncomfortable with generalizations to the effect that all countries are afflicted to the same degree on the one hand, and that they have all been in such a condition for decades, on the other hand. Concerning the former point, a critical review of African countries' public administration capacities would reveal that there are variations in their capacity levels. At one extreme for example – South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Cameroon, Togo, Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mali – have relatively higher capacities to undertake governance/administrative functions, but they too have a long way to go to meet the level of performance of the NICs. Countries such as Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, DRC, Liberia, Chad, Sierra Leone, Guinea-Conakry, Burundi represent **low state capacity**, while countries like Somalia, and DRC, at least up till 2006, represent **state failure.**

Concerning the latter point, i.e. the insinuation that the capacities of African countries' administrative systems have been on a continuous decline, it is argued that the countries have had their ups and downs and it is more meaningful to explore the changing fortunes of African countries' administrative systems over time.

It is argued that to properly diagnose problems afflicting African public administration systems and suggest measures for improving matters, there is a need to understand evolution

of these African public administration systems in historical perspective. This will also entail getting an understanding of the environmental factors that have shaped their character, capacity and capability. In this particular case, attention is paid to their developments during the colonial period, during the era of structural adjustment, and, in the period of economic pluralist reforms of the 1990s to date.

The article is divided into four sections besides the introduction and conclusion. In Section One the characteristics are reviewed of the colonial public administration systems and how this impinged on the capacity, capability and effectiveness of the public administration systems that emerged as African countries attained independence. In Section Two the measures (reforms) taken are considered by governments of the early independence period to develop the capacity and capability of the public administration to respond to the challenges of independence.

Section Three covers the period between the early 1980 and mid 1990s, when African public administration, like other jurisdictions world wide; faced a major crisis. In the section the characteristics are identified of the crisis, its causes and measures taken to contain/redress it. Section Four review the impact of globalization on Africa's administrative systems and *vice versa*. How is Africa coping with the *New Public Management* reform Agenda and where the ideas have been imbibed; what impact are they having on the capacity and capability of the administrative systems. The discussion is concluded by charting a way forward – the imperatives to realise a public administration for a capable, democratic and developmental state.

HISTORICAL LEGACIES

There is an ongoing debate concerning the extent to which Africa's current administrative malaise is a function of her pre-colonial legacy. On the one hand some scholars suggest that because Africans value kinships and tend to empathise with one another; Marx Weber's principles of bureaucracy do not sit well with them. Therefore one hundred years of efforts to graft Western derived public administration models on Africa have been a fruitless exercise (Onyemelukwe, 1975**;** Hyden, 1983). Others dismiss such lines of argument by asserting that colonialism has dented and in some cases completely destroyed the underlying foundations of African value systems, especially in so far as they relate to systems of government. Therefore, if the introduced Marx Weber-based administrative systems are not working the explanation may lie elsewhere, including perhaps having been introduced in a half-heartedly manner (Mutahaba, 1989).

While this debate is important, for purposes of this background, discussions on it will be deferred. Rather it will be noted that before colonialism, Africa had thriving governance systems that were well developed, with many of them having Marx Weber's attributes of a rational bureaucracy **(**Henry Barlow, 1984). Africa had empires and kingdoms like the Ghana Empire, the Songhai Empire, the powerful Fulani Emirates of Northern Nigeria, the strong kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Rwanda, and Bukoba; the democratically controlled Elders Councils in most of current Tanzania and systems of administration are based on age sets.

The colonial scramble for Africa indiscriminately cut across all these varying systems of administration and proceeded to rule and administer Africa in ways that were not only

different from indigenous systems, but were on the basis of whether the colonising power was British, French, German or Portuguese. Some of the colonising powers made some use of indigenous systems of administration, while others destroyed them or ignored them. For example the British colonial system of *indirect rule* was used by Lord Lugard in Northern Nigeria and Uganda in respect of the inter-lucustrine Kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Ankole and Toro. In Uganda, the Kiganda administrative system was imposed on the rest of Buganda. Buganda chiefs were used by the British colonial government to enforce the system. Where indirect rule was practiced, the ethnic groups on which it was applied had their native systems strengthened and entrenched giving rise to feelings of superiority and to demands for federal constitutions.

Irrespective of whether direct or indirect rule was used to administer the territories, colonialism, to a great extent, supplanted or suppressed the various traditional administrative organisations, and replaced them with administrative set-ups styled after the system in the mother country. Even then, invariably the emerging administrative infrastructure in most colonies was limited in scope, function and size, concerning itself mainly with pacifying the natives for purposes of facilitating exploitation of natural resources. Variations in terms of complexity of the administrative infrastructure in a given country depended on the requirements for pacifying the natives, on the one hand, and the structure and complexity of the economy and level of investment, on the other hand.

The goals of the colonial system naturally dictated the governance arrangement that were put in place. Given that the goals were to maintain *law and order* and collect taxes, the public administration system was highly legalistic, and invariably emphasized processes, procedures and precedence. Rules and regulations were the main instruments for eliciting compliance and discipline. The organisation was highly hierarchical, inhibiting lower level participation in decision making. It was also highly suppressive and did not respond to public demands. These attributes contributed to the evolution of an administrative culture that was conservative, unresponsive and antidevelopment in orientation. However, in so far as the interests of the colonial state remained limited to the goals mentioned earlier, on the surface the administrative systems seemed to operate effectively. The evolving public administration culture manifested itself more significantly in three important aspects: management styles, management of financial resources, and management of information. Personnel management systems were built on rigid rules with over revelation of personnel practices and policies; classification of personnel was usually in terms of duties rather than tasks, and people were paid for what they were rather than what they did. Furthermore, the systems were characterized by vague job descriptions, and performance appraisal systems that valued compliance more than productivity. The evolving financial practices were also deficient. Budgeting relied almost entirely on a line item approach, using the object of expenditure as the basis for resource allocation.

With regard to professional competence, colonial policy deliberately excluded natives from being appointed to professional positions, these were reserved for colonial officers or like in the case of Kenya and Tanganyika, Asians could be appointed to junior level professional positions. For that reason, little, if any, investment was put in tertiary education and training for the natives either in-country or by providing scholarships for training abroad. Thus, at independence all African public services suffered from a paucity of indigenous public service, personnel, a lack of other administrative resources, weak administrative

infrastructure, and potentially explosive relations between bureaucrats and politicians. (Mutahaba, 1989). The paucity of indigenous public service personnel is indicated by the following data. When Tanganyika became independent the country had a total of 68 nationals with university degrees, and it did not have a university. This was also the case in Zambia and Malawi. Similarly, education facilities at lower levels were equally underdeveloped. Using Tanganyika again as an example, the country had only 10 secondary schools with a total student population numbering 2 400 when it became independent. Thus, the pool of secondary school graduates from which to recruit even junior and middle public officers was very limited.

The capacity and capability of the public services in terms of size of the service in relation to tasks at hand; competence levels, and level of administrative penetration were very low. The low numbers of indigenous personnel occupying senior public service positions meant that senior levels of the public services were staffed by colonial/expatriate officers raising issues of whether the senior public service could be trusted. The enormity of this problem is indicated by the following data. In Nigeria, at independence in 1960, only 15 percent of established super scale posts were held by Nigerians, 0,7 per cent by other West Africans, and 83 per cent by Europeans. In Zambia, the composition of the upper civil service in 1964, when it became independent, was as follows:

Table 1 Compostion of Zambian Upper Public Service by Race, 1964

Division grade	European	African	Others	Total
I	1 256	39	3	1 298
II	2 692	1 882	11	4 585
Total	3 948	1 021	14	**5 883**

Source Mutahaba (1989:150).

In Swaziland, established posts stood at 3 062 at the time of independence and of these about 500 were senior civil service positions. Of the latter, Europeans accounted for more than 90 per cent, with Swazis accounting for the remaining 10 per cent. Futhermore many of the countries could not address the numbers problem by training potential public service personnel because of the absence of tertiary training facilities. Tanzania, Zambia, Swaziland and Malawi, to mention a few, did not have a university of their own. They had to rely on universities in neighbouring countries. Only Nigeria, of all the countries in English-speaking Africa, had an institute for training senior administrators.

The weakness of the service was moreover accentuated by shortcomings in the rules, regulations and procedures, all of which had been established for managing a public service with different objectives – a colonial service. Immediately it might not have been possible to change these rules; indeed the majority have not been changed, but there was a feeling on the part of those who had to operate them that these rules and procedures were not legitimate and this tended to undermine their efficacy. This was true for example of rules for hiring, firing and disciplining public service employees which might not have been strong enough to withstand pressures coming from the social and cultural milieu. Another major phenomenon indicative of and contributing to the shortcomings in the administrative system,

at the time of independence and beyond, was the relative youthfulness of the service. In the rush to Africanize the positions held by Europeans, many positions were filled by young men and women, sometimes below thirty years of age. In East Africa the average age at which Africans became permanent secretaries was between 33 and 35. In a few countries like Tanzania this may not have been much of a problem since the politicians were also equally youthful but in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Kenya there was a major age gap between the political class and the administrative class, which tended to reduce the latter's effectiveness. Moreover, this factor could also reduce the standing accorded to the civil servants by citizens who placed a high premium on age.

The internal weaknesses of the public administration system, which have just been reviewed, were compounded by turbulence in the environment of the administrative systems. First, the struggle for independence had generated a crisis of expectations on the part of the citizens, with nationalist poiliticians blaming the poor levels of public services on colonialism. This crisis reached its peak as independence was attained. Almost everywhere the new rulers were expected to respond to the demand for expanded educational facilities, health facilities, agricultural extension services and infrastructural facilities. During the early independence days the politicians fuelled these demands and looked up to the public servants to satisfy them.

As noted above, the public service had a major capacity problem even without these new demands by the citizens. The new demands further complicated the problems facing the public service and called the capability of the service into serious question. In Kenya for example, the first three years of independence witnessed the primary school system expand by over 30 per cent through unplanned self-help activity and the public administration system was expected to service the expansion (Okumu, 1970). In Tanzania the primary school system expanded through self-help programmes by 45 per cent during the three-year plan of 1961/1964. This called for a commensurate response from the public administration system. Resources in terms of teachers, finances to pay them and equipment had to be provided to complement the self-help efforts of the citizens. As noted earlier, it was not easy to provide them because of the limitation on the capability of the system and the resource constraints (Rweyemamu, 1970).

The second ecological pressure emanated from the absence of a definition of a proper relationship between the civil servants, notably the top cadres, and the politicians. Until independence there was no division between the political and administrative arms of the government; career officials were performing both functions in so far as there was any division at all. Independence saw the roles separated at the national level but since there was no tradition, there were problems to bear with. The argument by politicians was that they did not see how they could discharge their ministerial responsibilities without controlling civil servants who were responsible for the execution of their policies. They wondered how they could be held responsible for the official actions and conduct of civil servants if they had no part in their appointment, deployment and discipline. In support of their positions they cited the case of Great Britain, where a whole department is under the minister's control, including responsibility for promotions within it.

Whereas the minister in the colonial country (Britain or France) generally relied on the advice tendered by senior civil servants, the ministers in the newly indepedent countries were generally suspicious of the civil servants and they also interpreted ministerial control as

absolute discretion even in total disregard to established conventions (Nti, 1982). This sort of situation tended to breed conflict between, not only individual ministers and their top civil servants, but between the politicians as a group and civil servants as a class. In a number of countries, steps were taken to politicize the administrative system either by appointing political *commissars* to oversee the activities of governmental agencies, or as in the case of Tanzania, blurring the distinction between the politicians and civil servants by allowing civil servants to contest for political offices without loss of benefits, and by moving personnel back and forth. The position of the civil servant vis-à-vis the politician in those early days has been described most graphically by Chief Udoji who wrote:

> *A great deal of the status and prestige belonging to the service has been lost to the politicians. In the early sixties a permanent secretary was among the top brass of society and his appointment usually made headlines in local newspapers. It did not take long for the situation to be reversed…. The politician is not prepared to share his status and prestige with anybody, much less the civil servant. He is jealous of whatever respect and confidence the public may have for the public servant and he does not lose an opportunity in putting him in his place and exposing his shortcomings and magnifying his mistakes. The lack of regard and respect has hurt the pride of ambitious civil servants and driven some of them to frustration (Udoji, 1983).*

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES OF INDEPENDENCE

The attainment of independence had ushered in great expectations on the part of the citizens of the new independent states. Independence called into question the appropriateness of the entire machinery of government, which had been designed by the departing colonialists. There was an emotional attachment to the need for changing the colonial machinery even if only for its own sake. Also, the objectives, and consequently the functions, of government were to change considerably with the attainment of independence.

Thus government activities increased in number, scope, and size and the order of importance attached to the various activities also changed. The function that was completely new was the maintenance of sovereignty as this function had been exercised by the colonizing country. The furtherance of socioeconomic development, though previously part of the functions of the colonial government, was until then accorded low priority. It was now to be a major function of the newly independent governments, and the requisite machinery for this activity had to be devised. Another issue that till then had not come up was the maintenance of national integrity. During the colonial period, the different ethnic groups comprising the territory, were not committed to the colonial territorial unit for their linkage to it was a matter of administrative convenience. Independence transformed the situation: all ethnic groups falling within the boundaries of the newly independent state were claimed by it as its citizens, and they were expected to feel a commitment to it as their country a commitment transcending the one they held for their tribe. Machinery for carrying out this new activity had to be developed.

These new and expanded functions would tax any administrative system, let alone one that had been developed for purposes of shouldering less diversified and simpler functions.

Meeting all of them at once, in most uncertain circumstances and with no past experience as a guide, the newly independent states could only grope their way through, reacting to events rather than controlling them according to an overall master plan.

While it is true to say that there were variations with regard to the various countries' experiences with reforms in the early independence period, these can nonetheless be grouped into several discernible patterns (Mutahaba, 1989). On the one hand, the countries can be grouped according to their propensity toward reform; while on the other, they can be grouped on the basis of the types of reforms they adopted.

With regard to the former, four patterns can be identified. At one extreme are a few countries that showed little or no propensity toward reform. Such countries made no pretence at administrative reform at all, either because the inherited colonial administrative machinery were deemed adequate for the tasks thrust upon them, or because, like the departing colonial masters, they did not see the need for much change. A second group improvised reforms when the occasion warranted, adopting an approach that was pragmatic, relying on hunches and improvisation. Examples under this group include Malawi, and often Kenya is cited. A third group includes those countries that consciously planned reforms and established formal machinery for the initiation and evaluation of reforms. Such countries established commissions of inquiry or ministries of administrative reform or invited outside consultants to review overall administrative conditions. Examples of such countries include Tanzania, Zambia, the Sudan, Ghana, Nigeria, and at times Kenya. At the other extreme is the fourth pattern, consisting of countries that showed the greatest propensity toward reform. Many of these countries established completely new institutions and machineries of government mainly because the previous bureaucratic apparatus simply collapsed. Cases in point are Mozambique, Angola, Ethiopia in 1974, and Guinea. It is not in any way being suggested that these four patterns are tight compartments; they represent fluid positions on a continuum, and a country's reform efforts can indeed be grouped under more than one pattern.

For the countries that showed some propensity toward reform, the choice of reforms adopted could be divided into two broad approaches. The *first* category placed emphasis on undertaking major internal organisational changes and using modern management tools and techniques to improve performance. Under this approach administration tends to be defined narrowly: it is deemed to have its own internal logic, mal performance had to be corrected internally. Broad societal reform was not only considered irrelevant to administrative reform but there was also a bias in favour of maintaining the status quo in that regard.

Many African countries adopted this approach as an official doctrine both on their own initiative as well as through coercion or persuasion by donor agencies such as the United Nations and USAID. Public administration principles and practices were imported; many times wholesale from the developed world. Programme of technical assistance in development administration multiplied. U.S. government project funding in this field, for example, totalled $85 million between 1963 and 1970. Those funds went into setting up local training institutions in public administration, with staff, training philosophies, methodologies, and material being imported. It also included training top-level practitioners and their potential successors at Western based institutions. Liberally distributed scholarships attracted a whole generation of students from African countries for education in universities and specialized management institutions in America, followed by attachments in private and public organisations. In terms of outputs many countries were able to train large numbers

of professionals and by the mid 1970s dependency on colonial/expatriate personnel had declined significantly. The substance of most of the training reflected a public administration discipline based essentially on the *principles* enunciated by Woodrow Wilson, Luther Gulick, and Frederick Taylor. This point was articulated most succinctly by Milton Esman:

> It consisted of a set of politically neutral techniques that could produce economy, efficiency and effectiveness in implementing policies and programmes sanctioned by responsible political leadership. It was not addressed to the controversial substance of policy, to politics, but to the most efficient process for carrying them out. As codified in the PODSCORB framework, American public administration was a technocratic science (1) universally applicable to all cultures, and (2) committed to rationalizing structures and procedures within the bureaucratic institution of the state. (Milton, 1969)

In general, there was an optimism concerning the practical contribution of this approach to administrative improvement in the new states. This general optimism is underscored further by a document released by the United Nations in the early sixties:

> "In order to accelerate the pace of development a concerted advance on all fronts, Le., governmental organization and procedures, personnel management and training, budgeting and financial controls, fiscal policy and administration, etc., is more fruitful than a piecemeal approach on individual sections".

The *second* approach toward reform was adopted by those countries that placed emphasis on the need for broad societal development as opposed to the development of the administrative system. To this group, the administrative system is only a part of a wider system consisting of many interdependent subsystems. Each subsystem performs functions that affect and are, in turn, affected by the other subsystems.

The advocates of this approach believe that in the underdeveloped countries the administrative bureaucratic system is already overdeveloped in relation to the other subsystems and that it possesses a disproportionate share of skills and modern technology, which make it overshadow other social sectors. It is further argued that whereas in developed polities the increase in bureaucratic strength, which results from administrative improvements, is counterbalanced by strong extra-bureaucratic subsystems, the absence or weakness of such subsystems in new states require administrative improvements to reinforce the imbalance. In the absence of these balancing mechanisms, bureaucracies in these societies tend to behave unpredictably, and generally *irrationally*; irrespective of whether they have been reformed or not.

Under these circumstances, emphasis should therefore be placed on the development of extra bureaucratic institutions, such as a strong political system, organised interest groups, a healthy economic system, as prerequisites for the emergence of an effective administration. The first few years of independence saw some African countries take efforts to develop and institutionalise these sets of institutions. Most effort went into the development of the party system or, indeed, to be exact, the single party system (Mutahaba, 1989). Thus from Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Sierra Leone on the west coast, to Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, and the Sudan on the east coast, the ruling party became the sole political party; and

administrative bureaucratic institutions were subordinated to it. The countries where this was attempted with the most vigour, however, are those that attained independence following long periods of revolutionary activity and had during the struggle relied foremost on social mobilisation and the development of institutions for that purpose. The most typical examples were Mozambique; Angola; and, to some extent, Guinea, during the period of Sekou Toure.

Irrespective of the reform approach adopted, after two decades of reform most African public administration systems could be described as weak in terms of capacity and capability in relation to the tasks at hand, and some were in crisis. It is argued that, in as much as the continued weakness of the administrative systems could be ascribed to the inappropriateness of the reform measures that were adopted as well as the implementation strategies and methodologies, there were underlying external/environmental pressures which made the reform effort inadequate. As a result the capacity and capability problems of the public administration system persisted. These factors include: high rates of population growth and urbanisation; volatile economic performance; turbulent political environments; too large a public service; a tendency towards centralism and poor management of the human resource functions.

High Rates of Population Growth and Urbanization

One of the developments that stretched the capacity of the state during the sixties and seventies was high rates of population growth coupled with unparalleled growth of the urban sector. Statistics show that the urban population increased as follows: 1970, 8,2 million; 1975, 105 million; 1980, 137 million; and 1985, 177 million (AAPAM, 1986). The cumulative increase over the period 1970-85 was 216 percent. Simultaneous with the increase in population and urbanisation was the increase in the demand for education. The cumulative effect of all these developments was to increase pressure on governments to provide more goods and services, jobs for the growing number of unemployed youths, more schools and health facilities, and, at the extreme end, to cope with an increasing crime rate. These strained the capacities of the governance systems, many of which had not evolved adequate response capabilities.

Volatile Economic Performance

While the continent had witnessed economic growth during the 1960s and early 70s, towards the late 1970s and early 1980s it witnessed economic decline. Poverty, destitution, and famine became the order of the day. Whereas Africa is theoretically part of the developing world, in practical terms, Africa south of the Sahara (excluding South Africa) was developing far less rapidly than any other region in the same category. Table 2 compares the rate of growth in Africa south of the Sahara with countries in East Asia, the Pacific, North Africa, and the Middle East.

The data shows that between 1965 and 1986, Africa south of the Sahara lagged behind in terms of both gross domestic products (GDP) and GDP per capita. In 1981 a World Bank Report put the matter succinctly:

> The low-income countries of Africa south of the Sahara were the principal exception to the overall trend; their growth was so low that per capita incomes actually declined (World Bank, 1981a).

Table 2 Comparison of rates of growth of sub-Saharan Africa low-income countries, developing countries, and middle-income countries, 1965-86

Country Groupings	Average annual Growth Rates; Average annual GDP growth per capita: Grouping 65-73, 73-80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86; 65-73, 73-80, and 80-86									
	Average Annual GDP and Growth Rates Per Capital									
	1965–73	1973–80	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1965–73	1973–80	1980–86
Sub- Saharan Africa	6,4	3,2	-0,2	1,5	-1,7	2,2	0,5	3,6	0,3	-3,4
Low Income Countries	5,5	4,6	5,6	7,7	8,9	9,1	6,5	2,9	2,5	5,4
Developing Countries	6,5	5,4	2,1	2,1	5,1	4,8	4,2	3,9	3,2	1,5
Middle Income Countries	7,0	5,7	0,8	0,0	3,6	2,8	3,2	4,4	3,3	-0,3

Source World Bank. *World Development Report* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1987), tables A.3 and 2.6

The situation was to become worse over time. In *Beyond Recovery: ECA-Revised Perspectives of African Development, 1988-2008,* the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) reported:

> The period 1980-87 was a very difficult one for Africa. During this period the region passed through a series of repeated and unprecedented crises and growing social and political turbulence and economic imbalances. The prevailing economic rigidities during this period were further compounded by natural calamities and adverse external developments. The great African drought of 1983-85 constituted a real threat to the livelihood of millions of African people. The drought caused grave damage to agriculture, the mainstay of the majority of the population and the major source of external revenues.

The ECA document continues to observe that:

> … the slow growth in the world economy, the perverse developments in international commodity markets, and in the world's financial and monetary systems which culminated in depressed export earnings, reduced resource flows and an escalation of the debt-servicing obligations, all interactively brought the African economy to the brink of collapse (ECA 1988, 6).

The decline in production, compounded by a decline in the demand for primary products and a decrease in the value of exports, pushed many African countries into chronic balance of payment difficulties, forcing them either to resort to massive borrowing with stringent conditions, or to curtail their consumption and investments. Most countries initially chose the former alternative, which led to the escalation of the debt burden, or to a further decline in production, engineering the economic crisis.

A Turbulent Political Environment

Another issue that posed major challenges to the public administration systems in Africa during the period was developments in the African political arena. Many African countries were willed into being by the colonial powers. The arrangements for ensuring effective governance at independence, often written out in the form of constitutions, had little, if any, tradition or heritage to back them. The borders separating the various states cut across peoples of common ancestry, having been drawn up artificially by the colonial powers.

In the early years of independence the irrationality of the boundaries, as well as the fragility of the constitutions, tended to be glossed over. After all, the euphoria and goodwill generated by independence were still high. As the years passed, euphoria wore down, and it soon became apparent that peoples were conveniently lumped together into artificial nations with little love among them. When disputes arose over authority and power to determine resource utilization and allocation, there was little guidance from the constitution as to how such disputes could be resolved. In due course, authority tended to reside wherever power happened to be, and this was invariably where the instruments of coercion resided. That was the beginning of military interventions, secessions, rebellions, one-party states, and a host of other actions that infringed upon the inherited constitutions, thereby changing the environment within which public administration operated.

The political turmoil that ensued in many countries has, in turn, created other problems, including the exodus of people from their countries (refugees), disruption of production, neglect of infrastructure, and a host of other problems. A few countries such as the Ivory Coast, Kenya, and for some time, Senegal, have been spared these political problems. The positive result of their having been spared is clear: they have been able to register a consistent growth in GDP, and their infrastructure is still relatively intact.

The resulting turmoil took its toll on the administrative machine, throwing it out of gear by denying it the requisite resources. It is worth noting, however, that in some countries it is the public administration system that kept them going. A country such as Uganda was able to survive the political turmoil mainly because of the resilience of its public administration system. But even there, the scars of the political turmoil tell very clearly on the administrative machine. The present administrative system has little gear, little morale, and little competence, much of it having been lost during the days of Idi Amin and subsequent regimes. The result has been poor performance and low productivity on the part of the administrative system.

Too Large a Public Service

Many commentators on African public administration are suggesting that the public sector has grown heavily in the last twenty years of Africa's independence. The growth is indicated by big increases in the number of people on public payroll, the growth in overall public expenditure, and the percentage of GDP and GDP per capita consumed by the public sector. It is also indicated by the share occupied by the public sector in respect to the various sectors and activities of the economies.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa reports thus concerning the issue:

Each government in Africa has fingers in every pie. Its interests range from banking and insurance through oil refineries, air and road transport, to looking after agriculture and social welfare. Central government bureaucracies are no longer content with merely shuffling papers from desk to desk they now brew beer, distribute cement and sell meat (AAPAM 1986, 154).

Implicit in the observation is a feeling that the public sector has been growing too fast and too big, and that there is a need to check this growth. Available evidence supports the contention that there has been a growth in the public sector in Africa as shown in table 3.

Table 3 Growth of the public sector in selected African countries

Country	Number of Employees by Year		Percentage Increase Per Annum
	1975	1983	
Ghana	75 000	200 000	15,0
Malawi	31 840	50 000	7,9
Mali	31 783	49 116	5,6
Nigeria	716 421	1 723 519	15,0
Sudan	231 612	261 893	2,6
Senegal	61 836	80 390	3,7
Zambia	240 000	280 000	3,3

Source D. L. Lindauer, O. A. Meesok, and P. Suebsaeng, "Government Wage Policy in Africa: A Summary of Findings and Policy Issues," Country Policy Department Discussion Paper No. 198-24 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1986).

The data shows that for four of the countries, including Ghana, Malawi, Mali, and Nigeria, the annual growth of the public service stood at more than five percent, an increase which could not be matched by a growth in either GDP or GDP per capita. In due course, therefore, the additional employees were bound to become just consumers, rather than producers, of the national product.

Tendency towards centralism

Partly because of the colonial administrative legacy, which, due to its preoccupation with law and order (itself a function of the fragility of imposed rule, and which seems for some countries to have stretched into the independence era), there has tended to be a preponderance of concentrated authority and power. The result has been that the institutions and structures that have emerged have left little room for the sharing of responsibilities, with most functions and responsibilities tending to gravitate towards the center.

Thus, policymaking, which requires informed inputs from various parties, has come to be the sole responsibility of the president or the presidency, the party politburo, or the military council, with dire consequences for the efficacy of policy decisions, including policies dealing with socio-economic development and management issues. Within the ministries it is not unusual for permanent secretaries, who are often burdened with complex decisions, to take action on minor issues or projects in far corners of the country. In some countries,

decisions were made in principle to decentralise responsibility, including administrative functions and socio-economic development activities, to local governments, parastatal bodies, or co-operative organisations, but subsequent or parallel activities whittled away the basis of the measures taken. Thus, local government institutions were created and given responsibility for local services, but no commensurate authority and power to raise revenue were granted to them.

In almost all countries, government involvement in business activities tended to be conducted through institutions known as parastatals or public enterprises, created because such institutions made it possible for the government to be involved in business activities without being encumbered with the bureaucratic rules and norms that govern the public service. Yet, in almost every country, these same parastatals are subjected to controls by more than three layers of bureaucratic agencies, robbing them of operational autonomy to make business and other strategic management decisions, thus crippling their efficiency and profitability.

## Management Problems of Human Resource Function

While African countries have made concerted effort to train skilled human resources since the early years of independence with aid agencies playing a significant part in the endeavour, a number of factors made those efforts go to waste to the extent that two decades after many countries' public services were apparently facing human resources shortages. The shortage had two dimensions. On the one hand there was an absolute shortage of specific categories of skilled personnel and on the other hand available personnel were not making an optimal contribution to productivity, which was due mainly to low public service pay. The problem of pay only came to the fore from the late seventies. During the first decade of independence (and even into the second) public service pay levels were relatively good and there was no doubt that the pay structures in place then were sufficient to recruit, retain and motivate the best brains in the country for public service. For example graduates entering the public service did not only receive good pay, they were assured of a car loan and access to government pool housing at a low and fixed proportion of salary. Most of these officers felt they had taken the first step up a ladder of promotion to status, authority and an assured standard of living. Salaries broadly held up until the oil price shocks of the early to mid-1970s, and somewhat longer in a country like Zambia which enjoyed an offsetting but temporary mineral boom.

Public service pay, however, came under increasing strain in the late 1970s and early 1980s as economies slowed, revenues faltered, and staffing numbers continued to rise, driven by expanding social services and a paradigm of development that envisaged government playing the dominant role in many sectors. The erosion of pay was to intensify in most countries to the extent that by the mid eighties officers retiring from public service were contemplating how they could cope with a pension far less in purchasing power than anticipated at entry. At the lower end of the pay spectrum, daily paid unskilled workers earned slightly better than a subsistence wage.

This collapse of pay destroyed the employment contract between government and its civil service employees. Although the civil service outwardly maintained many of its formal routines, informality mushroomed, and performance plummeted. Ordinary civil servants in almost all

Figure 1 Index of Real Average Pay in the Tanzania Civil Service 1969–2000
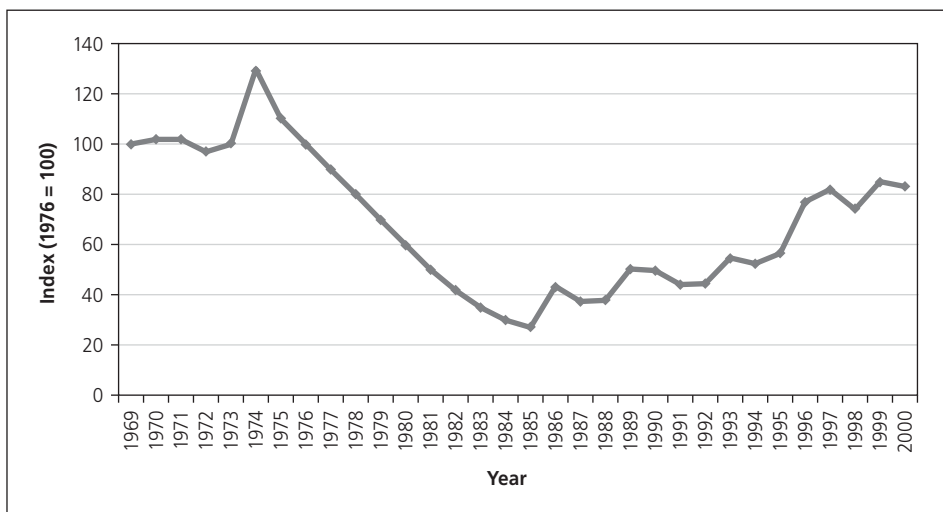
African countries adjusted for the collapse of the formal reward structure by a series of survival strategies. These ranged from taking second jobs, within and outside office hours, manipulation of travel allowances and *per diems*, extracting private fees for public services, commissions on office procurement contracts, to outright theft of public assets. Professionals with scarce skills left to work in the private sector or even overseas. Donors seeking to maintain operational effectiveness of their projects, paid supplements, often large ones. These had the effect of drawing skilled staff out of departmental structures into project units, further undermining core administrative capacity. Aid dependence increased and the management of aid programs moved in the hands of donor agencies. Training budgets evaporated, training institutions atrophied and trainers lost skills and relevance. Systemic corruption became ingrained. The formal rules became in many public services a shell in which huge informality was practiced. Public interest and the merit principle were relegated to second place.

FIRST WAVE REFORMS: COST CONTAINMENT AND STABILISATION

The foregoing review suggests that the African public administration crisis did not emerge as a result of the 1980s world economic recession; it was rooted in the fact that the administrative reforms which were undertaken in the early post independence period were patchy and had not sufficiently addressed the underlying causes of the capacity problems. In addition during the 1970s and 1980s African public administrative systems operated in harsh environments which strained their capacities and capabilities even further. As Africa, like the rest of the world came to face a global economic crisis of the 1980s it was already in some sort of a crisis. In this section Africa's response to that crisis is reviewed.

Given the multi-dimensional nature of the crisis, the appropriate response would have been to focus on addressing its underlying causes. Instead, on the advice, and at times coercion

of the Breton-Wood institutions, most Africa countries embarked on measures to reform the public administration systems as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). This position was predicated on the supremacy of the free market and the inefficiency of state intervention in the economy. The observed malaise is ascribed to the fact that the role of the market is too little while that of the state is too large. The prescription that follows is that there should be greater reliance on the market, reduced government spending, restrictions on credit creation, currency devaluation and a greater role for prices and markets.

Regarding public administration, consistent with the assumption that the role and size of the state had become big and too strong in relation to other players in society, measures similar to those taken on the economic front were adopted to trim and cap it. They included containing fiscal deficits, reducing the costs of running government operations, and containing the wage bill. Measures to contain the wage bill included; i) undertaking functional reviews, ii) public service census to identify *ghost workers*, iii) strengthen establishment and payroll controls to prevent the annual accretion of staff and the proliferation of payroll budgets. Also efforts were made to curtail the proliferation of allowances by incorporating them into pay, and raise, to the extent possible, total remuneration. And attempts were made to strengthen establishment and payroll controls, to prevent the annual accretion of staff, and the proliferation of payroll fraud.

It was soon realised, however, that the structural adjustment related reforms were insufficient to bring about a reversal in the decline of the public service. In the first place, the reduction in numbers proved unsustainable, and total public service employment began once again to rise. Much of this was driven by the hiring of teachers in response to continued growth in the school age population as was the case in Kenya. In Ghana, parastatals and subvented agencies provided a back door for re-entry to government employment for staff laid off from line ministries and departments, while still keeping, for the most part, their severance packages. To the extent this happened, the reduction in civil service numbers was a mirage viewed from the perspective of the public service as a whole.

Second, and more importantly the measures did not only have disappointing results in terms of intended objectives, they had adverse and in some cases disastrous impacts on the health and capacity of the public service. By starving public agencies (particularly, those responsible for health, education, water and sanitation, employment generation, law enforcement and justice administration) of personnel and financial resources it became difficult to maintain tolerable standards in the delivery of the services. Also, besides destroying the incentives and motivation structure, the cost-cutting aspects of SAP measures aggravated the ethics and accountability crisis confronting the African public services. It was at the height of SAP reforms that the services witnessed increasing cases of moonlighting, inflation of contract prices, bribery and corruption (Balogun, 1989). SAP has also been accused of dismantling public service institutions without leaving behind any viable alternatives (Adedeji, 1992a).

SECOND WAVE REFORMS: SERVICE DELIVERY IMPROVEMENT

The disappointing outcomes led to the development of what have been termed second wave Public Service Reform Programmes (PSRPs) (Mutahaba and Kiragu, 2005). These broadened

the reform agenda and began to explicitly address some of the causes of poor public service performance. Many of them explicitly adopted concepts of New Public Management (NPM), drawn from the experience of OECD countries with a similar administrative tradition. Implicitly, the designers of these programs appeared to believe a traditional public service could no longer be the goal and that there was a need to re-think the model.

First, the reforms placed an emphasis on improving delivery of public services. This entailed a focus on performance. At the level of individuals this meant the overhaul of human resource management practices to emphasize assessing performance based on results and rewarding personnel based on those results. At institutional level, performance would be measured based on the extent to which an institution has achieved agreed targets in the strategic and annual plans. In several countries special incentives, such as performance improvement funds, were established to encourage public institutions to re-engineer existing processes to make them faster and more efficient (so called *quick wins* programme). Emphasis was placed on making public institutions more transparent by requiring them to publish annual reports describing how budget resources have been used, and the results obtained from them.

At the same time, the programme reinforced the merit principle in civil service, through the updating of ethical codes and conflict of interest rules, and strengthening institutions responsible for protecting the merit principle, such as the public service commissions. Closely related are efforts to make training more relevant. During the 1980s and 1990s institutions responsible for training civil servants were run down, they lost competent faculty and those who remained became demoralised. The second wave reforms are placing emphasis on refurbishment, curriculum modernisation, and a better balance between supply driven and demand led modes of training provision.

Second, the reforms continued the focus on rationalisation of the role of the state and its functions which had been started during the SAP era reforms. However the redefinition of roles was to be based on objective conditions in the country, including the capacities of the various players in development, including the state, rather than being on a doctrinaire basis. Increasingly governments would come to focus on classic public goods functions such as law and order, development and maintenance of infrastructure, regulation of the private sector, macro-economic management as well as the provision of social services in areas where there are large "externalities" such as primary education and health care.

In public management terms, one dimension of this trend is to reassess the governance framework for particular policy functions. This entails in several countries the creation of autonomous agencies to deliver key programme, in particular subjecting them to a governance framework which gives managers greater freedom from government regulations in return for the achievement of specific performance standards and targets. Alternatively, if agencies already exist (as in Tanzania and Ghana, for example) the aim is to streamline and improve the management and oversight of those remaining in regular public administration institutions. These moves were informed in part by New Public Management reform ideas (Ademalukun, 1999).

Second Wave reforms also aim to reverse the centralisation of government which occurred under the state development paradigm, when the mandates of local governments were sharply curtailed in many countries, including their virtual abolition in some countries (Olowu, 1998). Guided by the principle of subsidiarity, the thrust is to push service delivery

down to the local level, where there is more information and, hopefully, greater scope for community action to hold local government service providers accountable. In regard to power distribution between the central government, local authorities and other actors, appreciable changes have taken place in some countries such as Uganda and Tanzania. Power has continued to be decentralised to local authorities in the context of the Local Government Reform Programmes (LGRPs). The ongoing decentralisation by devolution (D by D) in some countries has seen substantial hiving of responsibilities, resources and decision making power to local authorities. Delivery of services has also continued to be decentralised to executive agencies, local authorities, civil society organisations and private commercial operators. In turn fresh emphasis is being placed on the rehabilitation and modernisation of office equipment, enhanced use of information technology, and improvements in record management systems across government.

CONCLUSION

While the recent reform measures have gone, in some way to move African public service in the direction of a concern for efficiency and effectiveness and quality of service delivery, there are emerging concerns that traditional means of ensuring public service accountability through Parliament and executive political leaders (ministers) are becoming eroded. Public service managers are becoming too independent (with permanent secretaries having authority to hire and fire their employees) and a power into themselves. Whereas this is taking place in situations where consumers of public services either do not know their rights or they are too weakly organised to defend themselves and local level democracy is still weak public servants may become the tyrants, especially at the local level. As Africa moves in the direction of creating democratic developmental states, care should be taken to ensure the various traditional instruments for keeping public servants accountable are nurtured.

The overall recommendation is that more efforts must be made by the people as individuals, groups and communities as well as by governments and development partners to strengthen the demand side institutions of the governance and accountability equation. The most important areas that need special attention include strengthening of parliamentary oversight functions, keeping the media independent and strengthening opposition parties and civil society organisations. It is through those avenues where people will be able to effectively participate in the implementation of public service reform programmes. The people are supposed, in collaboration with other players, to ensure that results are achieved, resources are allocated according to approved budgets and public servants at all levels are kept accountable. It is extremely important to note that the reforms of the public administration systems can only achieve their desired effect if complementary actions are taken to modernise financial management systems including budgeting, financial control and auditing as well as ensuring improving the performance of statutory oversight institutions especially the national audit offices, the central banks, commissions of human rights, ethics commissions and anti-corruption agencies. Fortunately many countries in Africa have instituted governance reform initiatives and this entails greater possibilities of positive social change in future.

ENDNOTES

1 An earlier version of the paper under the title 'Towards a Developmental State in Africa : The Role of Public Service' was prepared as a background paper for the first issue of Africa South of the Sahara-Human Development Report, to be issued by UNDP-Regional Bureau for Africa.

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