

Assessing the Catalytic Role of the African Charter and the African Peer Review Mechanism in the Realisation of the Objectives set out in Africa Agenda 2063 and the SDGs

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ABSTRACT

Africa Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals are undoubtedly the most comprehensive frameworks for Africa's and the world's development. These multi-faceted visions make a candid admission that without state capability this all-inclusive development plan will remain a worthless piece of paper. Throughout the continent, the process of building effective institutions capable of balancing and protecting competing interests without conflict or open warfare while avoiding state capture or fragility cannot be gainsaid. As Africa forges ahead with diverse developmental programmes to lift many from the shackles of grinding poverty and underdevelopment, calls are ringing out for a public administration that has been transformed into an effective, coherent, representative, competent and democratic instrument for implementing government policies and meeting the needs and aspirations of the African people as encapsulated in the African Agenda 2063 as well as in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. This article explains the reasoning behind and the utilitarian characteristic of the Charter and the APRM as the two instruments which are presented as veritable tools for enhancing state capability and advancing the ethos of good governance in Africa. Effective implementation of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs obligates coordinated actions from different institutions and stakeholders at national and subnational levels. The key postulation is for Agenda 2063 and the SDGs to



succeed and realise their visions, there has to be a transformed leadership corps, the utilisation of peer review mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, institutions, and active citizenry. Agenda 2063 and the SDGs have to contend with Africa's traditional weaknesses which include poor implementation, limited resources, and limited skills or capacity. In all these the elephant in the room is the African public administration. It needs to be reformed and adapted to the current needs of the continent as well as global trends and developments. Hence the need to acquaint all stakeholders with their responsibilities and exposing them to new ideas and good practices in governance and above all, promoting professional ethos and practices. The opportunity to act on this recognition in a direct manner and through a continental framework has arisen within the context of the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. Given their strong focus on public administration, the Charter and the APRM are impact instruments for the realisation of the desired capable developmental state in Africa.

Key Words: *Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals, African Union, African Charter, Africa Peer Review Mechanism, Governance*

INTRODUCTION

The African continent is under scrutiny and immense pressure to demonstrate practical action to remove itself from the course of under-development and stagnation onto a path of sustained development. The African continent must therefore, now more than ever, be equipped with the abilities to flexibly and definitively exercise urgency and proactively make decisive choices that are in the interest of its long term and sustained development (African Union 2001). As Africa forges ahead with diverse developmental programmes to lift many from the shackles of grinding poverty and underdevelopment, calls are ringing out for a public administration that has been transformed into an effective, coherent, representative, competent and democratic instrument for implementing government policies and meeting the needs and aspirations of the African people as encapsulated in the African Agenda 2063 as well as in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Busieka 2016). With the centrality of public administration clearly outlined in both the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, it then becomes necessary to examine the role of the African Charter on Values and Principles of the Public Service and Administration (hereinafter “the Charter”) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (hereinafter “the APRM”) in energising and catalysing the implementation of the objectives of the substantial and complex continental plan, Agenda 2063.

The article is structured as follows. A compressed background and context will, besides explaining the theoretical foundation, highlight and clarify the environmental space within which Agenda 2063 and the SDGs have evolved. A theoretical bird's view of the key elements of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs will be explained with a dedicated focus on aspects of key pillars of implementation capacity. The substantive organic linkages that the Charter and the APRM provide in the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs implementation matrix will be discussed with an emphasis on what capacities the two instruments can potentially render to augment the implementation of these comprehensive visions. A conclusion will essentially convey the recommendations arising from this assessment.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Contrasting Africa's Agenda 2063 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Agenda 2063 is presented as a new phase in efforts by Africans to catalyse development of the continent and strengthen African integration and unity (Acemah 2015). Agenda 2063 builds on the achievements and draws lessons from earlier efforts such as the Lagos Plan of Action, the Abuja Treaty and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) to address new challenges faced by the continent, in the short, medium and long-term. Given this premises, Agenda 2063 is a continuum of actions, drawing appropriate lessons and building upon what has worked in the past, the main draw card being how to do things better and bigger (African Union Commission 2015:3). The overall aim of the Agenda 2063 is to encourage Africans to own their problems, take control of their resolution, and build, by themselves, a prosperous continent (Mbaku 2016). In what the AU refers to as "our endogenous plan for transformation" (Dlamini-Zuma 2014:32) this comprehensive plan is poised to harness the continent's comparative advantages such as its people, history and cultures; its natural resources; its position and repositioning in the world. It is only then that the continent will be able to effect equitable and people-centred social, economic and technological transformation and the eradication of poverty (African Union Commission 2015:3).

There is a compelling view that Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are mutually supportive and coherent, with some differences, but these do not in any way affect how the agendas are implemented by the United Nations (UN) and the AU. The key difference is that whilst Agenda 2063 is much more specific on the targets to be achieved, for example in education, the SDGs talk about achieving universal primary and secondary education, Agenda 2063, in addition to targets on



primary and secondary education, sets a specific target of increase in tertiary education (Kuwonu 2015:1). When a thorough analysis is done on the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs, it becomes clear that the main task is for African states to play their meaningful role in achieving their social contracts towards citizens.

The nature of governance and public administration programmes in Africa

According to Kuye and Tshiyoyo (2015:66), in most African countries, the modernisation of state institutions was implemented even before democracy could take place. Therefore, programmes aimed at enhancing the role of public administration in promoting good governance are essential to the achievement of the aspirations of the Agenda 2063 and subsequently the UN SDGs (Kolishchenko 2005:3). A principal characteristic of many developing countries, particularly those in Africa, is that the political system is forced into the position of becoming the major directive force in social and economic reform (Peters 2010:90). Therefore, institutions that educate and train public servants must always strive for excellence because better governance is fundamentally related to the more effective preparation of public administrators (Rosenbaum and Kauzya 2008:4). However, most African countries are confronted with human resource management (HRM) dilemmas (Tshiyoyo 2011:110). The implementation of Agenda 2063 requires an integration of various administrative systems which exist across African countries. For instance, most of existing administrative systems are designed according to the former colonisers hence they need to be reformed and transformed if need be.

CONTEXTUALISING AGENDA 2063 AND THE SDGS

Capacity-building in the midst of global challenges

The rapid pace of globalisation and its associated negative effects have strained the already limited capacities and disabled most countries from optimising the opportunities created by a globalised world. African people have become more aware, more expectant and in fact, more assertive in demanding increased accountability and greater participation in decision-making processes and in the delivery of public services (Shiwisha 2016). The establishment of the AU and the adoption of NEPAD and its related programmes such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) were significant expressions of the commitment of African leaders to define and drive African development by placing countries, both individually and collectively, on a path of sustainable growth

and development, and at the same time to participate actively in the world economy and body politic (AU 2001). Through the establishment of NEPAD, the APRM as well as its attempts to engage in new and collective approaches especially with 'developed' countries, the AU confirmed its appreciation of the need for Africans to articulate their own agenda and responses to the phenomenon of globalisation and Africa's particular challenges as it strives for sustainable development (Ebegbulem *et al.* 2012).

In its Long Term Strategy (LTS) on Governance and Public Administration the Conference of African Ministers of Public Service (CAMPS) is aiming to bring about capable developmental states in Africa that are people-oriented, accountable, and driven by service delivery to the citizenry (AU:2008). As part of the implementation process of the strategy, management guidelines were developed for human resources, public sector leadership as well as management development and performance. This article comes handy as it suggests avenues that could be explored in achieving CAMPS objectives.

African governance imperatives

The African Union Commission (2015:2) highlights the following aspirations in Agenda 2063:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development;
2. An integrated continent, politically united based on the ideals of Pan Africanism and the vision of Africa's renaissance;
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law;
4. A peaceful and secure Africa;
5. An Africa with a strong cultural diversity, common heritage, values and ethics;
6. An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; and
7. Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

The attainment of the above-mentioned aspirations requires a firm commitment from member states of the AU and thus at three concomitant dimensions, namely: political, economic and social. These dimensions reflect a public sector domain at the centre. The emphasis is placed on the role the public sector could play (Leftwich 2007:63; Fukuyama 2008:25; and Hjort 2008:42). At the political level, head of states and executives will be required to demonstrate the political will in establishing and promoting systems that are sustainable and which could militate for an effective public service in their respective countries. In the current context of Africa, politics plays a critical role hence it is catalyst to the performance of the socio-economic sector.



AGENDA 2063 AND SDGS THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Change and modernisation as responses to development needs

The idea of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs finds its resonating expression in development economics and social progress. Development must be redefined as an attack on the chief evils of the world today: malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, slums, unemployment and inequality. Measured in terms of aggregate growth rates, development has been a great success, but measured in terms of jobs, justice and the elimination of poverty, it has been a failure or only a partial success (Streeten 1993). Much has been written about Africa's encouraging growth trajectory but fear and trepidation is equally expressed at the quantitative scale where growth is not inclusive enough to constrain the poverty that is daily entrapping many in the debilitating net of desperation.

The fundamental change indicator propagated in the two plans is the social economic transformation which envisions marked reduction in the number of people holding vulnerable jobs, and increased employment opportunities for all, especially the young, growth in decent jobs for all working age adults as a key driver of broad-based increases in incomes and improved livelihoods thereby creating social stability and cohesion, with the highest aspiration being an end to all forms of poverty among African governments in the next decades (African Union Commission 2015:3; SDGs–Goal 10). As inspirational plans, Agenda 2063 and the SDGs are themed on transformation and change since a whole gamut of indicators have to undergo change and transformation for the lofty goals set out in the plans to be realised, which change is predicted in migration patterns, lifestyles, gender dynamics and reduction of vulnerability to climate change (African Union Commission 2015:26 and 53; SDGs–Goals 11 and 13). The fundamental change indicator propagated in the two plans is the social economic transformation which envisions marked reduction in the number of people holding vulnerable jobs, and increased employment opportunities for all, especially the young, growth in decent jobs for all working age adults as a key driver of broad-based increases in incomes and improved livelihoods thereby creating social stability and cohesion, with the highest aspiration being an end to all forms of poverty among African governments in the next decades (African Union Commission 2015:3; SDGs–Goal 10). To this end, Fulbright-Anderson *et al.* (1998:9) argue that the extent to which Agenda 2063 captures complex initiatives, is outcome based, has causal model, articulates underlying assumptions and is presented in a hybrid of outline and greater detail and complexity does fit very well into the design of a theory of change.

Developmental public administration

Todaro (1985:61) defines development as a multidimensional process involving the reorganisation and reorientation of the whole economic and social system. Taking a futuristic view of development, Vermark (1993:3) emphasises the fact that development must ensure the sustainability of communities. Management in the context of development includes control over the development process. According to Staudt (1991:29) development management comprises the following components, namely: the sharpening of management skills to be able to deal with complex activities over time and in changing circumstances; the achievement of a nation's development objectives; the implementation of change in society or community to increase productivity and organisational capacity; and the improvement of the quality of life of people. However, Esman (1991:19–20) identifies two approaches in development management. The first approach deals with the development of management skills and organisations. After the development of management's abilities public sector institutions can carry out the work of governments development activities. The second approach focuses on the management of actual development activities. Therefore, the focus is mainly on performance. It can be concluded that the concept 'development management' is an application that utilises management activities to support economic and social system development.

PREREQUISITES FOR A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF AFRICA AGENDA 2063 AND THE SDGS

The African Charter and the APRM as catalysts for the implementation Agenda 2063 and the SDGs

Agenda 2063 and the SDGs are firmly steeped in the concept of sustainable development as the plans aspire to a prosperous Africa, based on inclusive growth and sustainable development hence the two plans are framed and presented as endogenous visions for structural transformation and shared strategic frameworks for inclusive growth and sustainable development (UN SDGs–Goal 8, African Union Commission 2015:190). Effective implementation of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs obligates coordinated actions from different institutions and stakeholders at national and subnational levels (Niestroy 2014). The key postulation is for Agenda 2063 and the SDGs to succeed and realise their visions, there has to be a transformed leadership corps, the utilisation of peer review mechanisms, regulatory frameworks, institutions, and active citizenry. Agenda 2063 and the SDGs have to contend with Africa's traditional weaknesses which include poor implementation, limited resources, and limited skills



or capacity, among others. In all these the elephant in the room is the African public administration. It needs to be reformed and adapted to the current needs of the continent as well as well global trends and developments.

Balogun (2003:16–17) is of the view that the implementation of the Charter has wide-ranging human capacity-building implications and acquainting all stakeholders with their responsibilities under the Charter entail exposing them to new ideas and best practices in governance, such as customer service orientation and total quality management, interpretation and application of legal texts, and revitalisation and professional ethos and practices. In addition, the APRM is one of the most significant expressions of Africa's political leadership to not only define and set the agenda for Africa's development trajectory but more significantly, take ownership and provide leadership in transforming the governance of Africa and in this process, contribute to building the capability of the African state. The APRM engages with the recognised need for establishing common standards and codes as part of the response to Africa's governance and development challenges. The Charter and the APRM are mutually re-enforcing programmes that are cognisant of the eventuality of aligning interventions within the framework of broader continental efforts. The opportunity to act on this recognition in a direct manner and through a continental framework has arisen within the context of the Agenda 2063 and the SDGs.

The refrain on state capability that reverberates throughout the prose of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs finds clear resonance in the need to transform and capacitate the public administration and management that is judiciously captured in the United Nations General Assembly resolution. The resolution noted way back in 1996 that there is a need for public administration systems to be sound, efficient and well equipped with the appropriate capacities and capabilities through, *inter alia*, capacity-building, promotion of transfer, access and utilisation of technology, establishment or improvement of training programmes for public service, strengthening of partnership of the public sector with the private sector and civil society, as well as providing an enabling environment for private sector activities, as appropriate, promotion of the role and involvement of women in public administration, development of cross-sectoral gender-sensitive and multidisciplinary capabilities, which supports all phases of the development process as well as the promotion of opportunities for all to participate in all spheres of the public sector (UNGA 1996, Resolution 225/96). This resolution vividly delineates key markers for the transformation of public administration and management on which the broad governance framework of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs is anchored and by which mechanisms implementation will be driven. Within this broad governance construct the Charter and the APRM, given their strong focus on public administration, are impact instruments for the realisation of the desired capable developmental state.

As a result, the objectives of the Charter and the APRM clearly respond to Agenda 2063's vision of an Africa that is a continent where institutions are at the service of its people – strong institutions in place to enhance citizens' participation in development and in economic and governance management (APRM Base Document 2002:3) (Article 2 of the Charter, 2011). This stipulation is in line with Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which puts emphasis on building “effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (SDG–Goal 16). The SDGs also has a vision and aspires to a competent, professional and neutral bureaucracy based on merit to serve the continent and deliver effective and efficient services (Goal 16) which mirrors the provision of Article 9(3) of the African Charter (African Union Commission 2015:13–Aspiration 3.2). What the African peer review processes propose to do is to audit the existing structures and systems and subsequently reinforce them by identifying what capacity needs are required for their successful implementation, in effect this all-encompassing exercise seeks to assess what policies and mechanisms are in place in order to implement the desired programmes; it looks at how effective the institutions are and the outcomes of present policies (Busieka 2003). All the foregoing postulations suggests and point to merit in the supposition that the Charter and the APRM frameworks are integral to strengthening the capacity as well as augmenting the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. These two instruments if effectively implemented at country level would, to a significant measure, impact the implementation of the institutional strengthening aspects of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. It is no brainer that without functional institutions all dreams will be just dreams.

Synchronising Agenda 2063, the SDGs and the aspirations of a capable developmental state

The Charter and the APRM are key continental frameworks premised on the vision of a Capable Development State and in this suggests that a capable state is one that is committed first to ensuring a better life for all its citizens; that promotes popular participation and the indigenous ownership of its entire development agenda; whose public service is people-oriented, based on meritocracy and driven by service to its citizenry, that has sound systems of public administration decentralised; has transparency and accountability to its citizenry and to its institutions as central tenets; has a sound macro-economic framework; that eradicates poverty and surpasses the minimum standards set by the SDGs; implements its continental commitments on governance and public administration; mobilises, budgets and manages its public finances effectively; and is underpinned by democratic politics (Levin 2008:4–5). The Charter and the APRM are essentially located within the context of the evolution as they endeavour to address the challenges of governance and public administration on the African continent. In line with the spirit of the Agenda 2063, these two frameworks are informed by the energy



and vision of the Constitutive Act and also the opportunity created towards the end of the 20th century by the shift in discourse on the role and importance of a capable State in propelling sustainable development.

Both Agenda 2063 (chapter six) and the SDGs (Goal 10) provide for comprehensive monitoring and evaluation measures towards the realisation of the objectives set out in the respective visions. In “Making it Happen”, Agenda 2063 outlines the “how to get there” and treats aspects related to: implementation, monitoring and evaluation principles and responsibilities; financing; partnerships; capacities for implementation; and communication and outreach programmes. Implementation arrangements and M&E is based on the need for the identification of all key stakeholders in the results chain from continental, regional and national levels. The Agenda also spells out the various roles and responsibilities in implementation and monitoring and evaluation. The First 10-Year Implementation Plan provides greater detail on these aspects.

Gender mainstreaming

Most development plans and policies of African states have been gender blind. The planning and policy-making processes in the region have failed to appreciate the fact that women and men have different roles and that their needs and constraints are different (Meena 1994:2). Peters (2010:120) insists that the issue of equal treatment of women has become increasingly important in all phases of social and political life, and the public bureaucracy is no different. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2015:125–126) argues that gender mainstreaming is about making every single bit of work that ... government does sensitive to the different needs and interests of women and men, girls and boys. It is not just about formally treating everybody the same. Therefore, SDG 5 is about achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The UNDP (2016:4, 11) stresses that in Agenda 2030 gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Therefore, public administration programmes should be designed in a way that promotes capacity-building for both men and women.

Innovation and the rise of ICT

The Information Revolution has been facilitated by computerisation, in particular widespread acceptance and usage of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Information is knowledge and knowledge translates into power. Globally, in developed and in some developing countries, proliferation of ICTs and permeation into governance has changed and continues to change the face of public services provision and delivery in fundamental and unpredictable ways (Dassah 2014:340). In Africa, 40

percent of the adult population is illiterate, PC penetration is the lowest in the world with 2,2 computers per 100 inhabitant, the internet tariffs are highest in the world, there are only 2,7 telephones per 100 inhabitant (Kernaghan 2012:7; Kitaw 2006:8). The human dimension cannot be overlooked in the use of ICTs for extensive service delivery. New skills and capabilities are essential in order to fully integrate ICTs into public administration. In many developing countries people with scientific and professional skills to design and adapt ICTs to new uses are scarce (Dassah 2014:358). The most effective way to develop human resources for ICTs is to increase the use of ICTs in educational institutions and provide academic and training programmes to improve youth employability but the training needs of the adult population cannot be ignored (Basu 2004:118). Access to information system requires general literacy of citizens as well as computing skills of users (Song 2006:31). In Africa, the wide use of ICT in the public service has become an imperative if countries were to improve operations but the major challenges faced with are mostly related to low technical capacities within government and the private sector. The low capacities will make it difficult to facilitate the setting up and maintenance of standards and the realignment of institutions and establishments. Capacity-building in the use of ICT in the public service should be given high priority by all countries as that will enable them to fast track the implementation and achievement of the objectives of Agenda 2063 as well as the SDGs.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article has demonstrated that the African Charter as well the APRM are essentially located within the context of the evolution as they endeavour to address the challenges of governance and public administration on the African continent. The two frameworks bring life to the spirit of the Agenda 2063 and they are informed by the energy and vision of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Their respective objectives respond to Agenda 2063's vision of an Africa that is a continent where institutions are at the service of the people.

The discourse in this article has suggested and also pointed to the merit of the Charter and the APRM in strengthening the capacity as well as augmenting the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. These two instruments if effectively implemented at country level and across the continent, they would, to a significant extent, impact the implementation of the institutional capacity aspects of Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. It is no brainer that without functional institutions all dreams will be just dreams. In setting the strategic approach to implementation, Agenda 2063 and the SDGs identify several stages which are likely to be necessary given the transformative nature of the approach being applied. This contribution has made a case for the supportive organic



and non-linear capacities the Charter and the APRM potentially deliver to the two inter-related and inter-connected plans as the transformation processes typically unfold and hence, the importance of on-going iteration between these frameworks and the two plans has been discussed and stressed. Even though there is legitimate scepticism and significant doubts on the efficacy of continental instruments to act as change agents and influence policy options at national level, there is an acknowledgement that the Charter and the APRM can, in complementation with other continental and global instruments, potentially act as important catalysts for the implementation of the discussed two premier plans.

When a thorough analysis is done on the Agenda 2063 as well as the SDGs, it becomes clear that the main task is for African states to play their meaningful role in achieving the social contract with citizens. Revitalising the role of public service in African countries will consequently allow the UN and the AU in achieving their visions. This overall context suggests that capacity requirements within public administrations that are modernising are changing and diverse. Some countries need to build basic administrative capacity to ensure administrative efficiency, while others require more advanced skills for managing the information age. Interventions to address capacity constraints range from focused training courses to long-term education and learning programmes. Increased attention is being paid to the development and enhancement of leadership capacity within public services organisations. The extent of success and the specific utility of these interventions vary according to context. There is also an increased willingness to experiment with less 'conventional' modes of developing human potential, such as internships, action learning, and mentoring, coaching and executive support. All these interventions are aiming towards building institutional capacity for public administration which will ultimately oversee the realisation of the objectives set in Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. The role and relevance of the Charter and the APRM in catalysing implementation of the two plans is clearly delineated in the synergy that is resonating in the analysis presented in this contribution. They are indeed key continental frameworks whose effective implementation will usher the realisation of the vision of having capable states on the continent.

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