

PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON SELECTED COUNTRIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**J van der Westhuizen*****ABSTRACT**

The interest in public sector reform is crucial because public sector reformers are the actors who make governmental transformation possible with the aim of reforming the internal and external political and administrative structures and policies. There is a growing need to reconsider the role of the state and to foster a new awareness for public sector reform with a view to promoting optimal public service delivery. The question could be asked whether the success of public sector reform efforts in transitional countries is tied to the quality of better public service delivery. Based on an evaluation of three selected transitional countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, this article examines public sector reforms in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa. The author claims that public sector reform and effective service delivery are closely related to one another. One of the lessons of public sector reform is that reformers need to realise that each country's reform must be viewed in the light of its own conditions. However, the countries under discussion have evolved through a relatively uniform process of reform each within its own contextual nature. Because the public sector reform programmes in these three transitional countries are basically similar to the evolution of reform programmes elsewhere it is possible that general points of discussion can be developed.

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INTRODUCTION

Beyond responding to global pressures for change, Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries had pressing reasons for embarking on public sector reform that is unique to the continent. This outlook has been driven primarily by the fact that some state bureaucracies in Africa under perform and are too large and corrupt and lack a sense of responsibility and accountability. These issues are covered well in the work of Hope in (McLaughlin, Osborne & Ferlie 2002:213-214). They are of the opinion that most of the public sector reform programmes that have been implemented in the last two decades have been motivated by pressures such as the economic/fiscal crises, political forces, existence of complex institutional mechanisms and influences from the Western world.

In general, the move to reform the public sector have also been a prime concern to social scientists in general and have received different names since it's introduction: 'new public management' (Hood 1991); 'market-based public administration' (Lan, Zhiyong and Rosenbloom 1992); 'the post-bureaucratic paradigm' (Barzelay 1992); 'entrepreneurial government' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992); or 'managerialism' (Pollit 1993). Despite the differing names, all these describe the same phenomenon which are mostly patterned around the principles of 'New Public Management' (NPM) and reinventing government (RIG). Although under different umbrellas, the goal of NPM and RIG centers around the transfer of private sector management practices, introduction of market forces to the public sector and establishment of democratic principles within the state machinery in it's broadest sense (Hughes 1998: 2). In many facets these two phenomena represent a paradigm shift and include principle themes such as 'de-bureaucratisation', 'decentralisation', 'privatisation', 'deregulation' and 'managerialism' which poses challenges to the traditional values of

public administration. This changing emphasis illustrates clearly how the horizons of P (p)ublic A (a)administration have shifted during the last few years.

In most of the transitional countries public sector reform is widely regarded as a critical element of effective service delivery. But despite this consensus on the importance of public sector reform little comparative research has been completed on the development and strengthening of public sector reform or it's relationship to effective service delivery. There are, of course, well-known comparative administration texts by Riggs (1964), Heady (1991) and Chandler (2000) that discuss public sector reform. However, these texts do not focus specifically on this topic or countries. An attempt was also made by authors such as Kiggundu (1989), Subramaniam (1990), Adamolekun (1999), Ayeni (2001) and Farazmand (2002) whose intention it was to mainly do a descriptive conceptual analyses of the public service reform processes in transitional countries. These works are comprehensive and conceptual but are in nature limited in comparative focus. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to:

- elaborate on the meaning of the comparative approach;
- provide reasons for embarking on the three selected countries;
- analyse the contemporary vision of public sector reform;
- describe the characteristics of public sector reform in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa and evaluate the public sector reform programmes in every country; and

- propose selective points of departure of public sector reform in SSA. This presentation is solely a descriptive comparative analysis of public sector reform in the selected countries in SSA and should by no means be seen as a critique.

TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

This article is purely introductory in nature and is designed to serve as a preface to comparative study in public sector reform in SSA. A common framework is used which serves as a basis of comparison and this implies that the article cannot claim to be a fully comparative analysis. Therefore, the author will not make any general theoretical claims concerning the unique differences and similarities of public sector reform programmes in the three selected countries. Each country concerned is briefly reviewed in respect of its profile, the governance environment, the machinery of government, the reform experiences and the main strengths and weaknesses. The article is designed to show how each particular country or public sector reform programme differs, or is similar to the others included.

Within the context of public sector reform the comparative approach is seen as a tool to study the major public sector similarities and differences between countries. Basically, it encompasses the family of strategies and techniques which advance understanding within a field of study such as Public Administration (Hague & Harrop 2004: 69-79). But what is to be gained by comparing public sector reform strategies in these three countries? First, a comparative approach will enable us to find out more about the public sector systems in SSA countries, especially those items we know least about. Understanding public sector systems in SSA not only will help us to interpret and analyse new administrative developments in the region, it also will help us with practical intergovernmental relationships. Therefore, the results of

comparison used in these three related countries merely are used to ensure efficient government and administration in SAA. A second strength of the comparative approach is that it provides us with some base for drawing lessons across these countries. For example, if we find that privatisation does indeed lead to improved service delivery in one SSA country, we can advise governments elsewhere that here is an idea at least worth considering. Coping with some of the risks posed by efforts to compare on a systematic basis is probably one of the most challenging opportunities in the field of public administration (Heady 1996: 2). What makes it even more difficult is that one needs to understand that public administration forms part of the political system and is closely linked to the study of comparative politics. The basic dilemma here is that one needs to compare holistically which demands that any comparative study in the field needs to look at more than one country. This is why the author chose these three countries as a focal point. However, it may be pointed out that the sampling of three SSA countries may not be adequate to make general conclusions for public sector reform. Many authors have contributed towards diverse viewpoints for public sector reform. The ideas developed by Pollit and Bouckaert (2004) are a case in point. In addition, the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and the Worldbank are well-known. However, these issues go beyond the scope of this article. Therefore, the ideas of comparison introduced in this article do not aim to be comprehensive and definitive. Nonetheless, the author is of the opinion that the comparative approach in this context establishes a groundwork from which further research may be undertaken. In addition, the article describes what is being attempted as a matter of interest and as a prelude to describing some of the administrative experiments in the countries under discussion.

CHOICE OF COUNTRIES

This article discusses public sector reform in three selected transitional countries in SSA. The countries studied are all holdovers of colonial influences. This implies that

residues of colonial forms of government are found in their public administration systems, structures, processes and procedures. Further, these countries are, to some extent, comparable since they are not capable of extensive spending on public services and have populations that do not generally accept the prevailing system of government because they are ethnically diverse. Regarding the choice of governmental system the three countries reflect fairly similar constitutional and public service organisational structures. All three countries represent a mixture of presidential and parliamentary systems with a variation of chieftaincies. The article also includes these three countries because of differing population sizes so that contrasts may be made. A striking feature of these countries is the fact that, although the reform agenda differs from country to country, the public sector reform measures adopted are closely linked to each other.

CONTEMPORARY VISION OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

From the mid 1980's public sectors all over the world were faced with major challenges which have impacted on wide-ranging changes for most governments. The public sectors of mainly the Western countries were increasingly subjected to pressures from the domestic and international arena which affected public administrations in a number of ways. There are several rationales for this new onslaught on traditional public administration and some argued that this represents a paradigm shift to 'managerialism' or 'New Public Management' (NPM). The following three significant pressures were affecting the state in how it operates and called for major innovations in public administration, namely:

- globalisation - increasing and intensified flow of goods, services, capital, ideas, information and people among countries worldwide;

- dissatisfaction with public service delivery; and
- budget stringencies (O' Faircheallaigh, Wanna & Weller 1999: 1).

Within this broad framework of pressures public administrations in SSA are also confronted with the alleviation of poverty and inequality, advancement of human rights and democratic principles of government, protection of the environment and sustainable development, mobility of workers and migration, demographic trends because of an ageing population and the impact of HIV/AIDS, bridging the digital divide and combating international criminal networks (World Public Sector Report 2001: 18-28). Flowing from these pressures and challenges the trend was to seek increasingly alternative public sector reform arrangements. By 1997 international 'best practices' in public sector reform had three main features:

- redefinition of the role of the state;
- modernisation of public sector systems and procedures; and⁹
- accountable and transparent government (Dresang 2002: vii).

The emphasis with reforms initiated during the 1980's was on maintaining macro-economic stability. In this regard, five main targets of reorganisation of the state have been implemented:

- Privatisation and outsourcing - transferring of public assets to the private sector and becoming more attuned to market forces and citizen needs.

- Deregulation - eliminating laws imposing restrictions on businesses.
- Decentralisation - abandoning of a highly centralised, tightly controlled often paternalistic and authoritarian bureaucratic system.
- De-bureaucratisation - promoting of cost-consciousness, efficiency and effectiveness through re-engineering.
- Accountability and transparency - right of the public to know and even to be involved in the design and practice of public policy. The 1990's began with reform involvements on the administrative side. In this regard, countries faced the patterns of New Public Management (NPM) and reinventing government (RIG) - effective techniques in improving the efficiency of the public sector and reducing of costs. NPM and RIG have greatly contributed to the language of public administration with numerous new terms and expressions. Some of the well-known terms are 'results over process,' 'downsizing and rightsizing,' 'lean and mean,' 'contracting out,' 'steering rather than rowing,' 'empowering rather than serving' and 'earning rather than spending.' NPM and RIG have already impacted intensively on public sectors worldwide (World Public Sector Report 2001: 32-35). More specifically, NPM and RIG reflect different styles of managing public affairs, but have the following points in common:
 - Hands on managing of public affairs (with the slogan 'let the managers manage') by highly visible top managers with wide discretionary powers.
 - Measuring of results through performance indicators.

- Managing of public sector organisations on the grounds of output-based and outcomes-based criteria.
- Implementing of new responsibility mechanisms where responsibility is cascaded down to the point of service delivery.
- Introducing of business principles into the public domain.
- Promoting of professional ethics in the public sphere.
- Introducing of performance budgeting principles (Bernhardt 2001: 25-26).

All of the above reform efforts seem to focus on changes from process to results and the argument in this article is that this new model of public management has effectively accepted the traditional model of public administration in the abovementioned three SSA countries. Although these reforms have established positive results indications are that the social areas (for example, health care, education and housing) have lagged behind in most of the transitional countries. Developing trends in the past have shown that for Africa, the 1950's and 1960's were times of political and economic advances, the 1970's years of relative stagnation and the 1980's were periods of decline or the 'lost decade.' According to Kiggundu (2000) the 1990's have been a mixed bag. A wide array of gains have been realised in Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique and South Africa. Unfortunately this has been largely downgraded by losses in the form of civil wars, human rights abuses and state disintegration in countries such as Somalia, Angola, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Congo (World Public Sector Report 2001: 47). Although there have been successes these repeated crises highlighted the pressing need for action in public sector reform in most of the transitional countries of Africa.

During the 1990's public sector reform began with some renewed optimism and dedication mainly driven by an emphasis on: economic reform, democratisation and a search for administrative efficiency. Against a background of very mixed results of past reforms recent demands seem to focus on a 'smart government' approach to public sector reform in SSA. Kiggundu (in World Public Sector Report 2001: 48) argues that the key components of 'smart government' refer to:

- a broader and long-term approach to public sector reform;
- effective resource management;
- selective introduction of NPM ideas and practices; and
- *persuasion of donors to introduce home-grown creative approaches best suited to individual countries. One of the critical factors of public sector reform in Africa is that the programmes must visibly address the critical problems at hand. Unfortunately, in most of the SSA countries conditions are of such a nature that it is not conducive to reform.*

CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM IN GHANA, NIGERIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

In SSA public sector reform has been one of the most recurrent activities in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa during the last decade. It has been accentuated by the diversity and severity of the problems faced by these countries. All three countries inherited a colonial legacy with significant dependency on the Western world, more specifically the United Kingdom. After their independence all three countries went through major reforms and achieved both successes and failures.

Ghana

Before 1957 Ghana was governed by a colonial administrative system, largely based on the British civil service. During this time senior civil servants were recruited from Britain and older Commonwealth countries such as Canada, Australia and South Africa - known as 'European posts.' This was the beginning of establishing the British principles of governing and administering into the Ghanaian dispensation. The colonial period of administration was characterised by a centralised government with limited deconcentrating. Over time, however, the British government grew less capable of achieving its objectives and the administrative system became increasingly unacceptable to the public servants and population of Ghana. These anti colonial sentiments led to the country's formal independence in 1957 and a new government, under Dr Kwame Nkrumah, was inaugurated. In the process of adapting the colonial system of public administration the Nkrumah administration decided to strengthen political control in order to 'Africanize' the public service. Unfortunately, this approach has resulted in the appointment of less qualified people and a resulting loss in administrative effectiveness. Together with red-tape, mal-administration and administrative corruption the government's capacity to deliver was greatly undermined. An Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) was initiated in 1983, of which the primary goals were to introduce fundamental structural reforms to improve the macro-economic framework of the country. Although the ERP succeeded in providing Ghana with the status as one of the most rapidly growing economies in SSA the high population growth and lapses in public sector management are some of the constraints inhibiting sustainable growth in the long run. By the mid 1990's economic growth started declining and macro-economic instability surfaced. This has been characterised by high unemployment rates, high levels of poverty and an escalation of social tensions amongst its citizens (Ayeni in Adamolekun 1999: 250-251).

In the 1960's the Nkrumah government was toppled by a military coup. The successor regimes introduced numerous public sector reform efforts of which decentralisation and reorganisation were the most prominent ones (Subramaniam 1990: 230-251). Several public sector reform programmes that emerged over a period of time include the following:

- The Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP). This programme lasted from 1987 to 1993 with the purpose to improve the performance of the public service and strengthen its capacity for policy implementation.
- The Public Financial Management Reform Programme (PUFMARP). The ultimate goal with this programme is to devolve greater autonomy in financial administration to ministries, departments and agencies to ensure greater financial accountability.
- Public Sector Income Policy and Administration Programme. This programme is implemented to develop a policy base and guidelines for uniform salary structures in the public service.
- Decentralisation Policy Programme. This programme is aimed at transferring political and administrative authority to the lowest levels of government in order to improve service delivery at 'grassroots' level.
- The National Institutional Renewal Programme (NIRP -1994) and the Ghana: Vision 2020 - The First Step, 1996 - 2000 Programme (1995) are programmes for capacity building under good governance.

- The Civil Service Performance Improvement Programme (CSPIP). The CSPIP was introduced in 1995 to address the weaknesses of the CSR. The overall goal of the CSPIP is to develop capacity and improve the efficiency of the public service. In addition, the CSPIP seeks to:
 - encourage core public administration values and principles of transparency, competency, accountability, responsiveness and cost effectiveness;
 - evolve 'value for money public services';
 - ensure proper resources management;
 - develop strategic management principles; and
 - introduce performance management. Another dimension of the CSPIP is the proper integration of women into the senior management cadre of the public service. The seriousness of this reform effort is illustrated by the creation of a Ministry for Women's Affairs, establishment of a Gender Secretariat at the Office of the Head of the Civil Service, designation of focal persons as Women's Desk Officers in all ministries and departments. In addition, the CSPIP has emphasised the introduction of a Public Service Commission which has supervisory, regulatory and consultative functions in terms of the promotion of efficiency, accountability and integrity in the public service (Ayeni 2002: 19-22).

Ghana is in a process of establishing an efficient government and creating an effective public administration system. It has excellent public sector reform programmes, but despite these reforms in various areas of the public sector, the Ghanaian public administration system is still generally not performing well. Part of the problem can be traced back to the fragility or 'softness' of the state and the underdeveloped economy. Another way of describing this situation is that the Ghanaian government structures are overdeveloped in comparison to the scarce resources that can be collected from society. The public sector is large and costly, but ineffective in terms of service delivery and has a relatively unproductive workforce. There seems also to be a lack of clear objectives at departmental level and weak leadership at ministerial level. It cannot be overstressed that most public sector institutions in Ghana lack expertise in critical areas of public administration such as policy analysis, strategic planning and financial management. Another problem represents the poor conditions of service for public officials which have created low morale resulting in the loss of managerial and professional expertise. The country has experienced an extensive exodus of skilled and experienced personnel ('brain drain' or 'institutional memory') during the 1980's and it seems that the qualities of these people have not been replaced. Experience also demonstrates that pertinent questions may be raised about the appropriateness of Western Weberian organisational structures inherited from the colonial era. The many failures raise doubts whether these types of structures can be used in the Ghanaian environment marked by different and complex situations (Ayeni in Adamolekun 1999: 271-274; Gyimah-Boadi and Rothchild in Subramaniam 1990: 251-253). Looking to the future it is imperative to deal with the weaknesses and that Ghana's government must take active steps to reshape and reorganise the public sector to achieve desired goals of effective and responsive service delivery. Clearly, there is an urgent need to build a professional, nonpartisan and productive public sector that can

manage the country in such a way that economic growth is assured and decent living standards are established for the citizenry.

Nigeria

Before 1960 the Nigerian governance environment of public administration was featured by the transplantation of the British Westminster-Whitehall arrangements into the system. After independence in 1960 it was accepted that these arrangements would be followed and sustained. This ideal did not materialise and the experiment collapsed. An examination of the Nigerian situation reveals that the country experienced major political crises after 1960: the census controversies of 1962-1963; the electoral conflicts of 1964-1965; civil war between 1967 and 1970; the *coups d'etat* of 1966, 1975 and 1983 and the assassination of the head of state in 1976. These crises created a very unstable environment for public administration activities to evolve in since independence. Since 1966 the country has been under four different military administrations culminating in 28 years of military rule - ruling from the 'barrel of the gun.' Significant, in light of these conditions, is that a democratically elected government assumed office in 1999 (Ayeni 2002: 31-32).

It may be pointed out that various national constitutions have been promulgated since independence which provided for three independent arms of government (the legislative, the executive and the judiciary) and three tiers of government [national, regional (states) and local]. However, the political environment, under military rule, restricted the legislature, the executive and the judiciary by absorbing their respective functions. These functions were to a great extent, performed by the supreme military council. The effects of military rule were very much apparent in the day-to-day governance of the country. The activities of the military administrations have been marked by the following directions:

- decrees were promulgated retroactively resulting in unpredictable law-making;
- ouster clauses have been build into the decrees passed by the military preventing civil courts from challenging the validity of the decrees; and
- parts of the constitution have been suspended to such an extent that there was *no guarantee of a citizen's right of access to information* (Otobo in Adamolekun 1999: 294). This restrictive political environment of military rule has been one of the major contributing factors to the enormous problems the country have to cope with. Nigeria is currently facing heavy external debt, widespread unemployment, increasing levels of poverty, a low economic growth rate and low productivity levels overall. In spite of the above *limitations that have become apparent over the years the Nigerian public administration system produced some valuable reform programmes to promote growth and good governance. Attempting to condense, in a few paragraphs, the public sector reform programmes is an impossible task. Therefore, the author will only highlight certain parts of the reform programmes introduced from 1985.*

In 1985 General Babangida took control of the Nigerian government. The Babangida's administration has tried to reform and steer the government system in many diverse ways. *First, a few structural changes were introduced. The existing military council was renamed with a wider membership and the president was given executive powers akin to the 1979 Constitution. Further, there was an increase in the number of ministries. Second, the administration focused on the recovery of the economy with the implementation of a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). An*

important consideration for the implementation of this programme was to institute a productive economy through strategies such as privatisation and deregulation. Vigorous attempts have been introduced to cut back on the range of public service activities through retrenchments, rationalisation and commercialisation. The third reform arrangement dealt with the establishment of civilian rule which is a multifaceted programme directed at almost every sector of society. The emphasis was to establish a more open politicised model by creating and equipping ministers with chief executive powers. Other aspects of this reform exercise include the professionalisation of the public service and strengthening of the Office of the Auditor-general in order to cope with the enormous accountability implications (Adamolekun and Ayeni in Subramaniam 1990: 282-283).

The reforms initiated in 1999 introduced a new public administration paradigm for Nigeria and expressed concepts such as 'good governance,' 'fighting corruption,' 're-energising,' 'privatisation,' and 'poverty alleviation.' These reforms sought to deal with the impact of globalisation, deregulation of the state machinery, improving of service delivery levels and the establishing of professional public service values in the conduct of government business. On the administrative side the reform programme has been centered on the following measures:

- training and re-training of public officials at all levels, including political office holders;
- restructuring of the public service addressing the issues of rationalisation, downsizing, rightsizing, re-engineering and outsourcing;

- introducing of a new performance evaluation system and greater emphasis on merit;
- reviewing of public service regulations, including the financial regulations;
- encouraging public-private sector partnerships;
- ensuring the prompt and effective implementation of the budget;
- developing of an effective anti-corruption strategy together with the necessary preventing structures and procedures;
- computerising of many areas of government business;
- increasing of the remuneration packages of public officials; and
- installing of 'best practices' techniques in all ministries (Ayeni 2002: 33-34).

In short, public sector reforms in Nigeria have been far-reaching. The thrust of these reforms have purported not only to redraw the boundaries of traditional public administration, but succeeded also to alter the nature and content of public service delivery in general. Real achievements that stand out in the Nigerian public administration system include:

- the successful role that the public sector has played in maintaining the continuity of the machinery of government despite the high degree of political instability;

- the commitment shown by the public sector in restructuring the country's federal system of government; and
- establishing of professional expertise in several areas of service delivery. The downside of this is that there are major obstacles that have shown up during the implementation phase. Basically, the weaknesses of Nigerian public administration, amongst others, lies in the following areas:
 - poor service delivery; and
 - weak accountability (Otobo in Adamolekun 1999: 306-307). Poor service delivery manifests itself in long wait periods in obtaining responses to inquiries and a lack of customer orientation. It is interesting to note that the key contributory factors to low quality services relate to poor incentive structures for public officials, limited capacity and the absence of management information systems. Unfortunately, the Nigerian public administration system cannot uphold the necessary accountability measures. Although it has an impressive array of institutions to combat corruption and to promote public accountability not very much has been done because of limited human and financial resources. This was demonstrated by the fact that Transparency International ranked Nigeria among the six most corrupt countries in the world in 1995, 1996 and 1997. It is inevitable that there will be political and administrative problems in countries that are going through transitions. However, it cannot be overlooked that the Nigerian public administration system will be required to intervene

in several areas of service delivery in order to meet the challenges of the twenty first century. Thus, one emerging issue, with global implications, that public policy must address, is centered on economic diversification. A second pre-requisite refers to the establishment of an improved governance environment. This will require more than the traditional *public sector rhetoric and calls for the creation of political stability*, an elimination of the unpredictable judiciary system and the recovery of accountability measures. A third area of intervention includes the developing of an effective state capacity to create an environment for the private sector to develop to its fullest potential. In this regard, the Nigerian public administration system must enhance its capability for strategic planning in order to support market developments and business friendly regulations.

South Africa

The South African administrative system, designed by the British, was inherited by a quasi-independent Union of South Africa in 1910. Real independence was achieved in 1961 when South Africa became a Republic. From 1961 (to be more exact, from 1948 under the then National Party Government) to 1993 South Africa was characterised by an 'apartheid' system of government which allowed for segregation in all most every activity of life. In this regard, Black people (Blacks, Coloureds and Indians) were denied the opportunities to fully participate in political, economic and social life (Picard in Adamolekun 1999: 311-312). Plus minus 46 years later, after a long political struggle the first democratic election was held in 1994. On 27 April 1994 the first democratic government of national unity under the leadership of Nelson Mandela was inaugurated and faced a massive task of political, fiscal, economic and social transformation. The most important task of the new government was to dismantle apartheid social relations and to create a democratic society based

on equity, non-racialism and non-sexism. This was initiated under the banners of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and supported by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR). With these programmes the emphasis was placed on aspects such as nation building, effective service delivery, democratisation of the state and society and building of the economy (Towards a Ten Year Review October 2003: 1).

Public sector reform in South Africa has its most basic tenets in the values and principles of the 1996 Constitution. These values and principles guide all most every sphere of government and provide the structure and functioning of the public sector (Russel & Bvuma 2001: 244). According to the 1996 Constitution public administration must be, among other things, broadly representative of the people, development oriented and accountable. One of the central points of reform is highlighted as an objective in the Public Service Act 103 of 1994 and that is '... the creation of a people-centered and people-driven public service which is characterised by equity, quality, timeousness and a strong code of ethics.' Since 1994, a series of public sector reforms have been implemented and includes the following:

- Rationalising and amalgamating of former national, provincial and homeland public services into a single unified public service structure (White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service 1995: 12).
- Creating of new central personnel agencies. In this regard, the Public Service Laws Amendment Act 47 of 1997 assigned central human resource management, organisational and reform powers to the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). In addition, the Public Service

Commission's (PSC) role was defined by Section 196 of the 1996 Constitution as to, among others, investigate, monitor and evaluate the organisation and administration of personnel practices in the public service. This means that the DPSA has a policy role and the PSC is tasked to do a monitoring or 'watchdog' role.

- Enacting of new public service legislation and regulations. The legislative framework is arguably the most comprehensive in Africa and again finds its basis in the 1996 Constitution and over 780 other pieces of legislation. Policies are covered in legislation such as: the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995, Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997; the Public Service Regulations of 2001; the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (WPTPS) of 1995, the White Paper on Human Resource Management in the Public Service of 1997, the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery of 1997 and the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (WPAAPS) of 1998.
- Transforming public service delivery. The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery of 1997, the so-called *Batho Pele* White Paper, with the buzzword 'People first' requires of departments to improve their service delivery levels in terms of eight service delivery principles. These are to: regularly consult with customers, to set service standards, to increase access to services, to ensure higher levels of courtesy, to provide more and better information about services, to increase openness and transparency about services, to remedy failures and mistakes and to give the best possible value for money.

- Strengthening of management capacity. In an attempt to improve output-related performance along the lines of equitable service delivery it has been decided that all managers are subjected to competency profiling. In addition, a Senior Management Service (SMS) system has been implemented complemented by the launching of the presidential strategic leadership development programme to focus on areas such as strategic planning, policy research, project management and communication (Public Service Regulations of 2001).
- Achieving representativeness. Special measures have been introduced to ensure that people from disadvantaged groups are taken up in the public service. The respective White Papers (WPTPS and WPAAPS) have set specific targets to achieve representativeness in practice. For example, targets were introduced for management positions in particular and also for people with disabilities.
- Improving performance and enforcing accountability and transparency. There has been an emphasis on holding senior managers accountable for performance through the adoption of performance agreements. Performance management measures have been supported by the introduction of a medium term expenditure framework with an emphasis on fiscal discipline by means of the strategic prioritisation of resources.
- Fighting corruption. A code of conduct is now part of the regulations for every public servant. Other anti-corruption mechanisms that were created are: the establishment of whistle-blowing structures; special corruption courts and the

National Anti-Corruption Forum (Towards a Ten Year Review 2003: page unknown).

- Democratising the state. The establishment of specific values and principles for public administration in the 1996 Constitution called the South African government to follow a participatory approach in decision making. This approach expects of the public sector to have a relationship with the citizenry that is transparent, consultative, participative and democratic. Here attention should be drawn to initiatives such as:
 - the strengthening of the role of parliamentary portfolio committees, more in particular the Portfolio Committee on Public Service and Administration;
 - extending the work of the Auditor-general;
 - publicising the work of the Office of the Public Protector;
 - ensuring that the citizenry have easy access to public sector information; and
 - establishing of state institutions supporting constitutional democracy, such as the Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equality and the Electoral Commission.

In sum, South African public sector reforms have been extensive and with a range of innovative approaches. One of the key reform drives of the post-apartheid government was that it had to disassemble the apartheid bureaucracy as well as repeal its laws. In this regard, significant progress has been made and a democratic

administrative institutional framework has been put in place since 1996. A second area of achievement is the remarkable progress in terms of representativeness. The affirmative action initiative has resulted in significant representation of Africans and women in all public sector institutions. Changes in the composition of positions in the legislature, executive and judiciary also reveal that there has been a dramatic increase in the representation of Indians and Coloureds. Although the influx of 'new' public servants has brought in new skills and dedication, it unfortunately, has led to a loss of experience and institutional memory. This created instability and led to poor performance levels in certain cases (Productivity 2004: 4). A third point on the positive side is that the South African Government has really gone out of its way to scientifically measure its performances over the last nine years. What was being measured is primarily the progress in meeting government objectives within the new democratic order. Seven indexes were used to cover cluster areas such as social, economic and political impacts. More specifically, themes such as infrastructure (housing, water, sanitation, electricity and telephones), quality of life (health, literacy and environmental quality), political participation (political and union participation and social trust in the institutions of the state), economic participation (employment and the proportion of non-poor earnings), economic preparedness (relates to economic participation and education levels), safety and security (compares serious crime, prosecution and resolution rates) and social inclusion (household stability and inclusion in cultural organisations). Some of these indexes have shown a positive improvement since 1995. This indicates that the South African Government has made a positive impact on the lives of people over the last nine years. In this regard, the infrastructure, quality of life, political participation and social inclusion indexes show an improvement (Towards a Ten Year Review October 2003: 73-101). On the downside, however, the other related indexes, namely safety and security, economic participation and economic preparedness show negative trends. A further harsh reality is that there has been little international capital investment. A notable

departure in this regard, is that the international community, rightly or wrongly, sees public sector capacity along with macro-economic policies, privatisation and low crime levels as key indicators of public sector reform and long-term viability of the country (Jordaan & Joubert 2003: 11). Unquestionably, the social and economic trends and the global context point to some major challenges for the South African public administration system. The next several years are likely to witness interventions in several areas to reinforce the consolidation of democracy aimed at integrating all of society into a growing economy. Crime prevention has also to be tackled in a holistic fashion with competent people spearheading the process. This will require the South African justice, crime prevention and security system to shift from policy-level changes to the operational tasks that will be necessary to increase capacity at both public official and organisational levels.

KEY POINTS OF DEPARTURE FOR PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA (SSA)

The descriptive comparative analysis approach followed in this article allows the author to establish some key points about developments of public sector reform in the three selected countries under discussion. Over the years, what has emerged is that each country evidences background characteristics that are similar to and yet different from the others. When viewed collectively, these characteristics are: fairly large populations; ethnically diverse populations and histories which form part of the British colonial system of government. The last point implies that the basic pattern of public sector reform was imitative rather than indigenous. Basically, all three countries have at present a democratic form of government with an executive presidency characterised by principles of popular sovereignty, political equality and majority government. The author is of the opinion that all three could be classified as probably a federal state with strong unitary characteristics. Although there are

similarities, yet each also differs from the others from a historical, social, political and economic perspective. It is not possible to make a comparison of any kind if there is not an understanding of the similarities and differences between these countries. This is the key to understanding their respective laws, government structures, administrative structures and reform programmes. The author also indicated that the history of each country shows that public sector reform was influenced by complex and interactive pressures towards democratisation. For example, in each country there were pressures to allow for greater political freedom. This was characterised by political conflicts resulting in democratic elections which ultimately have led to the establishment of a constitution providing for state institutions supporting democratic ideals. There were also external pressures for economic development characterised by donor monies and other forms of investment. Ghana and Nigeria also experienced a marked decline in their ability to uphold state capacity to fulfill its basic functions. This has led to the collapse of the legitimacy of the state and a fundamental disagreement over the rules of basic democratic public administration. It is also clear from the discussion above that the three selected countries also lack administrative capacity. Kotze (in Wallis & Dollery 2001: 253) in his review of administrative incapacity in South Africa concluded that '... if the problems with the state's administrative performance are not rectified within the next two or three years, the result could be a further decline in the rendering of basic services and another increase in unemployment levels.'

In addition, public sector reform programmes within these three SSA countries have developed through relatively uniform processes towards modernisation, with the South African system probably more sophisticated than the other. There seems little doubt that the New Public Management (NPM) and Reinventing Government (RIG) movements also set the tone and determined the contents of the public sector reform discourse in these countries. Hope (in Mclaughlin, Osborne & Ferlie 2002:

224) even goes further by saying that '... the application of NPM-type reforms in Africa, despite their mixed results, has, been mostly successful.' The discussion also shows why one best way of managing public sector reform programmes is not sustainable and that simple solutions cannot be applied uncritically across all sectors. Given these reflections, it is quite clear that the study of the characteristics of these three countries emphasise some common factors that can be included in a discussion of this nature relating to public sector reform. This will probably lay the foundation for the future of public administration systems in SSA. In this regard, the author suggests five items that may put SSA countries on the right path: First, there is the complex issue of redesigning a new state, its governmental institutions and public administration policies in a globalising world. In these circumstances, it is important to underline that the state of the future will depart from the traditional 'welfare state' idea. However, it might also be unwise to base the role of the state on the 'minimal state' concept. What is required is a mixture of the welfare state with some of the elements of the 'managerial state.' In practice, this approach conceptualises the state as initiator of policy goals and the private sector as a key role player in implementing such goals. Second, it is imperative that political and administrative institutions must be strong enough to ensure the representation of diverse interests, constitutional supremacy, the rule of law and the constraint of executive authority. The designing and strengthening of such institutions is a key to democracy and economic development. This requires an equitable, transparent and democratic framework of laws, regulations, elections, judicial system, parliamentary system and mechanisms for the citizenry to participate (Cheung 2001: 944-946).

Third, public sector reform in SSA must take cognisance of the fact that public administration systems of the future will require a real and concrete strengthening of the administrative capacity of the state. This view highlights the value and role of the state as a 'learning organisation' with an emphasis on efforts such as managing of change, developing of human resources, enhancing of political and administrative

leadership skills, establishing of strategic planning capacities, fostering capacity building, and focussing on efficient service delivery. Fourth, there is an urgent need for reinforcing core public service values. This should be based on elements such as the revaluation of integrity, loyalty, merit, neutrality, cultural sensitivity and professionalism. Fifth, public sector reform calls for the building of formal networks among public services because globalization has expanded the range of contacts among public officials at all levels from different parts of the world. This can be facilitated through modalities such as policy advice, assistance in areas such as skills development and providing of up-to-date data online - the United Nations Online Public Administration Network (UNPAN) is an example (World Public Sector Report: Globalization and the State 2001: 97-117).

The items mentioned above give only a partial picture of what clearly is a highly complex matter that countries in SSA are currently experiencing. It may appear that the author has followed a 'reductionist approach' by pressing for 'one best way' solutions to public sector reform. This is most certainly not the case. Therefore, it is hoped that this article will generate further research into other questions in public sector reform in transitional countries that are interesting, yet beyond the scope of this article. Although certain generic points of departure have been mentioned, it should be pointed out that programmes of public sector reform require a home-grown effort and involvement of competent national teams which cannot always be outsourced to consultants or donors.

CONCLUSION

In this article the author has analysed in some detail the nature and content of public sector reform attempts in a selected sample of three transitional countries in SSA.

Indeed, these efforts precede a concern for administrative consequences of public sector reform by at least two decades now. What lessons can be drawn from the ideas put forward that might guide SSA public sector reform agents? The article reveals several common characteristics in the public administration systems of these countries, despite the differences in size of the country, size of the population, composition of the different ethnic groups, economic activities and forms of state and government. Briefly, all three countries were governed by a colonial system and are facing the same critical problems, including the HIV/AIDS epidemic, backlogs in health care, education and social welfare services, a deteriorating physical infrastructure of roads, transportation and communication networks, electricity supply, sanitation and clear water. This article concludes with a brief discussion of the relevancy of key points of departure for public sector reform in SSA. Although nothing is new that is portrayed here the author argues that a fresh and new look is important. Given the problems and delays that characterised Africa for so many years now, it is difficult not to be impressed with the depth and quite radical nature of several of the reform programmes. Although many of the reform programmes in SSA are acceptable, the author feels that the vast majority draws too heavily on the Western world. More could and should be done to draw lessons in public sector reform from other African countries and other developing countries. In focusing almost exclusively on the content of public sector reform programmes in SSA and problems experienced here, the author is of the opinion that the reform efforts understate a number of important challenges. The problems associated with state capacity building and the consolidation of democracy is just two illustrations of this. In this regard, the following five common items, for public sector reform are suggested: (1) creating of a fresh and new approach to the role of the state; (2) creating of a strong democratic institutional framework; (3) strengthening of the administrative capacity of government; (4) reinforcing of core public service values; and (5) the building of networks among public services.

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