



Opinion

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Issues in Public Service Reforms in Africa: A Critique of Willy McCourt's "Models of Public Service Reform"

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Opinion

Africa is not developing as much as expected because most of the countries in the continent have faulty and problematic Public Service institutions. The twin evils of institutional and cultural constraints have combined to hinder African Governments from delivering public good to their citizens. Several years after democratization had emblazoned the continent with democratic institutions, a significant number of the citizenries of the different countries of Africa are wallowing in poverty while the public infrastructure is run aground because the Public Services of these countries are serving private interests. The interventions by international organizations and development agencies such as the World Bank, IMF, DFID, USAID, etc., in providing institutional support through policy recommendations and capacity building have not yielded any positive change in the quality of public administration in Africa.

This article attempts to review the policy suggestion by a World Bank consultant whose policy paper entitled: "Models of Public Service Reform: A Problem- Solving Approach" was presented at one of World Bank's Policy Seminars (Reference No: WPS 6428, April, 2013. Washington DC, World Bank) The decision to review this scholar's paper was borne out of the need to point out the gaps in the perception of most work Bank's theorists using Willy McCourt's theorizing as a case study. McCourt's thesis which could be regarded as an eclectic one was an effort in understanding the uniqueness of every public service entity in Africa- a commendable initiative, which is amenable to critical appraisal as has been done in this article. If indeed any reformatory idea could emanate from outside of Africa on how its Public Services could be re-positioned, it ought to have come long ago.

Africa's Public Services had over the years been subjected to all sorts of theoretical experimentation which have not changed in any dramatic way the quality of services delivered by these Public Services. From a unique perspective, the Willy McCourt describes Public Service Reform as Administrative Problem – solving. He considers the different reform initiatives as ways of dealing with the 'Problem Situation' as different national governments have defined it. He identifies six major problems of Public Service Reform as bordering on how to make government more efficient, grassroots-oriented, affordable, honest, responsive and better-able to deliver on key objectives. To these six problems, the author analyzes the proposed solutions which included capacity-building, decentralization, pay and employment reform, New Public management, integrity and anti-corruption reforms, and bottom-up reforms.

These solutions are derivatives from six different models which he presents as follows:

- a) Political Decentralization and Human Resources in Indonesia and Uganda.
- b) Performance- related pay in Mauritius and Malaysia.
- c) Public Service Reforms in Swaziland.
- d) The Public Service Legal Framework in Tanzania.
- e) Citizen's Charters in India.
- f) Public Service Reforms in Sri Lanka.

In doing this, the author believes that any of these models could be selected to suit the problem situation in the context of the Political economy of any given country. The author's

characterization of the Weberian Public Administration and Capacity Building was almost a correct depiction of the Nigerian bureaucratic setting. The assertion that for the weberian model to produce the anticipated results, there ought to be in place a culture that respects rules is a truism. The Nigerian Public Service system is rules-based but efforts are still being made to ensure perfect adherence to rules devoid of patrimonial and other subjective values. The series of regular workshops being organized by the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation are aimed at attitudinal and behavioral modification.

The second condition for Weberian Bureaucracy's effectiveness as stated by the author counseled that the service rules should not be undermined by patronage pressures. This idea is an apt and relevant one especially viewed against the backdrop of the series of challenges facing Public Service systems in democratic environments in which politicking could be extreme, thereby penetrating the entire social systems of the country including the Bureaucracy.

On Capacity-building, the author correctly recognizes the need for thriving bureaucracy to promote and encourage capacity building programs as a way of beefing up performance level of staff of the bureaucracy. He, however, emphasized that such capacity building schemes ought not to be undertaken in an organizational vacuum. The author's analysis of decentralization and central-local relations, in which he differentiated between political decentralization and administrative decentralization; territorial and functional decentralization made his thesis on central-local relations rather complex. In the Nigerian context, none of the categorizations captures the nature of the relationship between Nigeria's Federal Public Service and State Public Service systems. The National Council on Establishment in Nigeria, which came into being in 1957 which is chaired by the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation, is the only national body which provides a forum for the Central and State governments to seek ways of harmonizing their policies on Establishments including their Schemes of Service.

The nature and character of Local Government Public Service systems in Nigeria are determined by the State Governments that have supervisory power over them. This situation has continually given credence to the agitation in some quarters for Local Government autonomy. The point to note here is that the nature of political decentralization in Indonesia and Uganda as portrayed by the author is different from what obtains in Nigeria. Thus, rather than talk about 'Central-Local Relations' in Nigeria, it is more appropriate to focus on Federal or Central – State relations because power is majorly shared between the Federal and State Governments in Nigeria.

On Performance Management, our author's theory was hinged on the Malaysian Model, which from my assessment is not different from the Nigerian SERVICOM Initiative which is aimed at upgrading and expanding the frontiers of service delivery to Nigerians, thereby making government more responsive and

accountable to the citizenry. SERVICOM is the acronym for "Service Compact with Nigerians". This initiative is unique and novel, and ought to have at least received a passing reference by our author in view of its impressive impact. The author's assessment of citizen's charters in India seems to some extent a correct reading of some of the preliminary challenges faced by the Nigerian SERVICOM charters designed by each of the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). However, steps have been taken to correct the observed anomalies as the charters in Nigeria's Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) have inputs from the relevant stakeholders. Overall, the author is of the view that regardless of the general applicability of certain theories, there is the need to begin by identifying specifically the problems of each reforming entity before proceeding to solving them.

Critique

- a) The six models are not exhaustive. There could be as many models as there are Countries interested in reforming their Public Services. Every Country in the World is a veritable laboratory for the discovery of principles of Public Service Reforms.
- b) The Problem-solving approach does not present any generally applicable theory of Public Service Reform. This approach seems eclectic and therefore weak.
- c) The article's focus is general without any deep attachment to a given case study. The choice of countries was not representative of global diversities – (Swaziland, Sri-Lanka, Mauritius, Malaysia, India, Indonesia and Uganda). The experiences of these countries cannot be generalized for other countries in the Zones they represent because each country's historical experiences and reality vary one from the other.
- d) Too much emphasis is placed on the development of structures which the author like several others misconstrues as institution building. Africa is not lacking Public Service structures but deficient in Public Service culture. Any theorizing that does not address the cultural dimension of public service administration in Africa is defective, and therefore inadequate.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, the paper is a scientific rendition of the historical manifestations of Public Service Reforms in the chosen countries of reference. The author succeeded in examining the problems confronting the Public Service using different countries as case studies, thereby arriving at six models of problem-solving approach to Public Service Reforms. The strength of this approach is in the recognition of the uniqueness of each country's problems as a determinant of how its own Public Service would be reformed. This apparently is an admission of the absence of universally acceptable theory of Public Service reform. Yet, the Public Service as the engine room of the Government is central to the public service delivery plan of any Government, and therefore a key factor in the legitimacy of any public administration.

Utilizing our author's framework of analysis could help us unearth the problems militating against the efficiency and effectiveness of Africa's Public Services. But, if we heed the counsel of our author, by taking on one problem at a time, and believing as

he does, that every attempt at solving a problem throws-up other problems, then reforming Africa's Public Services would become an endless engagement.



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