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ADMINISTRATIVE AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES
FOR DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

by

ECA Secretariat

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"If everything else is done and public administration fails, all fails".
Clarence L. Blau

I. Introduction

The above quotation is hardly an exaggeration. The experience of the Third World as a whole in its war against poverty, disease, hunger and illiteracy indicates clearly that a country without a proper and effective system of administration can scarcely achieve its economic, political or social objectives. The failure of administration in Africa, as indeed in many other Third World regions, was largely responsible for the dismal results of the development plans which were in vogue in the sixties and seventies; the failure of administration was also responsible for the low absorptive capacity in managing foreign aid received, for the subsequent disillusionment of the donor countries, and most recently for their intransigence in the international fora where future international economic relations were discussed. In fact the arguments used against the Third World as a whole rest on the premise that Third World countries can neither be helped nor can they even help themselves as long as their administrative and political systems remain unsatisfactory. These same arguments have been used to refute the bases of the New International Economic Order which the South is pressing for and which the North is resisting. Furthermore, these same arguments have also been used to attack the recently published Brandt Report.

Dudley Seers, for example, rejects the Report's contention that 'the South needs above all finance' on the grounds that it is 'simply untrue'. He goes on to say, in his critique of the Report that 'in most countries of the South the needs are above all political and/or administrative and it is not service to their people to pretend anything else.'^{1/} His fellow academics Professors Bauer and Yamey have advanced a similar argument in their article: "Against the New Economic Order."^{2/} In that article they say: "In all cases, in the Third World as in the West, the principal determinants of economic achievement and performance

^{1/} See Dudley Seers, "North-South: Muddling Morality and Mutuality" in Third World Quarterly, Vol. II, No. 4, October 1980

^{2/} Professor. P.T. Bauer and B.S. Yamey "Against the New Economic Order" Commentary, April 1977, p.28

have been human aptitudes, motivation, aspirations, mores, modes of thought, social institutions and political arrangements" and they go on to say that it is these factors '.... which have either fostered or hindered the willingness to work, save, take risks and perceive and pursue economic opportunities.'^{1/}

These are powerful arguments indeed. We know that one of the Third World's major problems is not so much a lack of resources but rather an inability to identify and exploit the resources that exist. There is also clear evidence of inability to apply the abundant financial resources made available from exploitation of oil resources by many of the Third World countries which remain underdeveloped in spite of these resources. It seems an inescapable conclusion therefore that the major development problems of these countries are attributable largely to lack of skilled manpower, maladministration and socio-political factors.

These arguments are by no means confined to academics and therefore cannot be dismissed as mere academic exercises or mere stretching of intellectual muscles. A veteran diplomat, Lord Trevelyan, had voiced earlier his scepticism about the effectiveness of foreign aid in countries beset by chronic problems of maladministration by saying 'giving elaborate technical assistance to a country without a reasonable standard of administration is like putting the latest electronic equipment on a ship with a leaky bottom.'^{2/}

The inability of many African nations to manage their domestic affairs efficiently is equally reflected in the conduct of their international affairs, be they bilateral or multilateral. Here the identification of vital national interests, the marshalling of the necessary information, establishment of negotiating positions, require skills which in many cases are lacking in African negotiators. The result is that in many cases Africa's interests are lost by default. It is therefore vital that African nations should recognise their inadequacies in this area and formulate strategies which will be aimed at increasing their ability to benefit more from international negotiations. In this regard, it has been doubted whether African nations are realistic in their demands for a New International Economic Order since they are most unlikely to derive much benefit from it.

Indeed, one of Africa's own prominent sons, Professor Adebayo Adedeji, also wonders whether African countries would perform well enough to derive benefits from the New International Economic Order, if, some miracle, it is established;

^{1/} Ibid.

^{2/} Lord Trevelyan, Diplomatic Channels, Macmillan, London 1974, pp.105-106

and he arrives at the conclusion that all present indications are that they would not. "Yet", he says "African countries continue to participate in innumerable meetings in search for a new international economic order". 1/ It is therefore vital that African countries are fully aware of the implications of what they are pressing for. With regard to future negotiations some lessons can be derived from the complexity of the negotiations for the New International Economic Order, UNCTAD IV and V and the Law of the Sea.

More recently African governments have pledged themselves to a plan of action which has come to be known as the 'Lagos Plan of Action.' The OAU Summit which endorsed this Plan was held because of a general but acute awareness that if the dismal economic performance of the previous two decades were allowed to continue the result was likely to be social and political chaos. Thus, without neglecting the remaining stages of the liberation struggle, the OAU has decided to give economic issues a much higher priority than hitherto.

Neglect of the economy, maladministration, financial mismanagement and political antagonisms have all combined to reduce the continent to a post-colonial dependency of foreign powers with the result that sovereignty seems in many cases to have been compromised. It is not surprising therefore that Africa's refugee and hunger problems (compounded by epidemics and endemic diseases) are being discussed in Geneva and elsewhere. The pictures of emaciated bodies of women and children in Western press and television screens are eloquent testimony of African socio-political conditions that have gone perverse. In short, if Africa has disastrously failed to feed her own population, care for her sick, efficiently manage her scarce resources, and educate her own children, she cannot hope to influence world affairs, to say the least.

II. African administrative and Management Challenges

African nations reflecting the diversity of the continent differ in many respects. They differ in physical size, size of population, historical background, resource endowment, stage and pattern of development, systems of government, etc.

This diversity does naturally have a profound impact on efforts directed at shaping the future of these nations. Properly co-ordinated and channelled, however, Africa's diversity could be a source of immense strength both with regard to intra-African relations and in Africa's relations with the rest of the world.

1/ Professor Adebayo Adedeji, African and the New International Economic Order: A Re-assessment, Lecture delivered at the National Bank of Egypt on 19 December 1979, p.6.

More importantly however, what they have in common can be said to be more significant. They share needs which are fundamental to the well-being of their peoples and their own integrity as sovereign entities. One of these needs is nation-building. This arises from the heterogeneous nature of the peoples of the majority of African nations. It is no overstatement to say that the moulding of the diverse ethnic groups into national identities must continue to be one of the most pressing tasks of African governments. As the history of the more developed countries shows this is a long battle which calls for leadership with great dedication, devotion and sincerity.

Another challenge concerns the pressing need to provide the basic needs of life, so that the present degradation of human dignity can be banished from the face of Africa. These basic needs, food, education housing and health services, are indeed basic to national socio-political stability. The need for engineering socio-economic development to a self-sustaining level constitutes the third area of challenge. It must be emphasised, however, that these needs cannot be separated. It is not even a question of allocating priority in terms of which should be tackled first. They all must be tackled at the same time.

These challenges are essentially post-independence challenges as far as government tasks are concerned. Thus it is today recognised that both the aims and character of administration have changed from the mechanics of administration to the more dynamic aspects of development administration. In this regard some of the requisites for an effective administrative system will include a clear statement of aims and objectives; clearly stated policies for achievement of those aims; appropriate plans with related machineries for implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

(a) Current aims of Administration

An effective public administration system should address itself to the domestic problems as well as to the international challenges mentioned in the Introduction above. In this regard quite often poor performance of administrative systems arises from a lack of clearly stated aims and purposes which administrators and managers are expected to pursue. Sometimes these aims are contained in development plans. However, even then they often lack specificity. This is true at both governmental and agency level. Following onto this there is also an almost universal absence of a statement concerning the expected results together with the required performance standards. As a result it is virtually impossible to measure performance.

As it has already been pointed out above, these aims would appear to be universal to Africa. They include the blending together of diverse ethnic communities into a nation where allegiance to the ideal of nationhood supersedes sectional loyalties. The provision of basic human needs to ensure a reasonable standard of the quality of life should be seen as the major objective to be pursued by public administrators and managers. For without demonstrating the ability to do this, administrative systems, sooner than later, lose the confidence of the people, with the likelihood of

serious consequences. These aims should additionally state clearly that public administrators and managers should see as their major role the engineering of socio-economic development with a view to achieving self-sustaining development stage. It is important to realise, in this regard, that aims and objectives clearly articulated and understood have the beneficial effect of moulding the thinking and behaviour patterns of the administrators and managers in a positive way. It is therefore important that this situation should be put right as one of the corrective measures for the future.

For example currencies have been devalued without careful analysis of the objectives to be achieved and the likely consequences; decisions have been taken in many countries regarding agricultural produce prices without the necessary research and analysis. The list can extend endlessly. If Africa has learnt any lessons at all from the last two decades, that lesson must surely be that clear and articulate policies are necessary guides to action. And the difficult world economic situation of the 1980s and beyond makes this indispensable. We should, however, hasten to add that we are not suggesting that policy would be a panacea. Policy is unlikely to succeed where there is no planning, where there is lack of executive capacity, and where there are grossly inadequate resources.

(b) Policy-making

Policy as a guide to purposive action is vital for any organisation. It gives legitimacy and a sense of direction to actions. Further, policy enables rational determination of priorities and forms a good basis for judicious allocation of resources. The existence of clearly stated, understood and accepted policies do also give a measure of the possibility of decisions and actions being consistent.

Policy-making means more than decision-making and more than the ability or courage to take unpopular decisions. It is a process which culminates in a set of interrelated decisions. In a political setting, policy-making often seeks, inter alia, the reconciling of competing and conflicting interests. In this connection the experience of the last two decades shows that in many countries there has been a complete lack of policy guidelines in many vital sectors of national endeavour or at best policy which lacked specificity and clarity.

We have seen famines recur with sickening regularity largely owing to total absence of a food policy. The energy crunch has been treated in many countries as if it was non-existent; and financial resources have been regarded as if unlimited. Another glaring example of lack of clear policy has been in the fields of education and employment. Almost everywhere in Africa education has not only taken a disproportionately large slice of the budget, but no efforts seem to have been made to relate the supply of its products to the expansion of employment opportunities. As a result in the 1980s the spectre of 'educated jobless' is certain to haunt many African countries.

This situation has been produced by a number of factors. In the first place the political vision, will and determination to guide events would appear to have been weak. This in many countries has resulted largely from excessive pre-occupation with purely political issues to the detriment of developmental issues. Secondly, in many countries the machinery for policy-making is fragmented, unco-ordinated and hence in-effective. Owing largely to lack of recognition that policy-making can be a very complex process, momentous decisions are sometimes taken on the spur of the moment without any staff work at all. In many cases such decisions have led to disastrous results.

(c) Development planning

Planning implies a desire to look ahead in order to influence and regulate events with a view to achieving some particular results. As there are many things that a nation would wish to do but cannot owing to resources and other constraints, by planning it chooses those considered, on balance, most important and pressing. In planning is also implied discipline to pursue that which is chosen.

Development plans are still quite fashionable, but certainly less popular than they were during the 1960s and early 1970s. The reasons for the waning popularity are many, but the major ones are not hard to see. In the first place it would appear that too much was expected of development plans. While they might not have been considered panaceas, they seem to have at first come very close to being regarded so. It is also true that some countries which had adopted development planning achieved some fairly impressive growth rates, as evidenced by Uganda, Kenya, Malawi, Ivory Coast, - some people have argued that the results could have been achieved without plans. However, by and large the results in terms of economic growth rates seemed rather indifferent. Some of the major reasons for this were that the statistical data used were too unreliable to form a good basis of prediction. In the course of time it also became clear that many of the assumptions underlying the development plans were completely unrealistic. The result was that most plan targets were unrealistic and were therefore not attainable.

Today, two decades after, the statistical data base in many countries is a lot more complete and reliable. The knowledge and skills of development planning are much better. However, development planning still leaves a lot to be desired. In many countries there appears to be an inability to identify problems and opportunities; to conceive ideas and to reduce those ideas to viable projects. It is in fact an open secret that in many countries - any project that appears innovative has been thought up by some aid agency and merely adopted by the government. The tendency by planners seems to have been to provide more and more of the same things and in the same traditional manner. As a result, we have had more and more schools, more of the same traditional ways of providing health services etc. The 1980s and beyond, a period which can be termed an "era of hard options" in development, African planners and administrators will need to be more discerning and innovative.

One of the results of this state of affairs is that development planning has been reduced to a state of formalism. It has become standard to have a development plan as a means of soliciting aid and not because there is any serious belief that the plan is a tool for development. It is therefore important that planners and administrators work to ensure that development plans are regarded seriously.

(d) Plan implementation

It has been said that a good development plan is one which is implementable. However, this presupposes the existence of executive capacity. The experience of many African countries over the last two decades shows that the ability to implement development projects has been one of the most scarce commodities. Even where development plans were technically sound and resources were available the gaps between plan targets and results were enormous.

The main cause of this situation was the lack of realisation that assessment of executive capacity should form an integral part of the development planning process. In other words, at the same time as project formulation is done, a parallel exercise should be undertaken to assess the executive capacities of the implementing institutions. But in many cases political leaders themselves have also contributed to failure to achieve plan targets chiefly by making decisions, during the plan periods, which have the effects of diverting resources away from planned projects. Additionally, in many countries there is hardly any formal and systematic monitoring of project implementation. As a result, development plans are virtually shelved to gather dust and are only used once every year in preparing financial estimates of expenditure.

In order to improve the implementation record, it will be necessary in the first place to formulate development plans that are simple enough to be understood by politicians, civil servants and community leaders. Without this, it is difficult to secure commitment which is so important. Secondly, it is necessary for African countries to take all measures possible to improve and strengthen the public services including the structures, procedures and practices. Additionally, greater efforts will need to be made to ensure adequate supply of manpower with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes.

(e) Administrative structures, procedures and practices

Over the last two decades many African governments have from time to time made modifications to the inherited public service structures and procedures. These modifications have been necessitated by the realisation that in many cases the structures and procedures had become inappropriate as vehicles for the new tasks of government. But so far the results seem rather mixed. This is largely owing to the fact that the use of unscheduled commissions or committees of inquiry for this purpose is an unsatisfactory way of introducing reforms. For one thing, such reforms are introduced in many cases long after they became necessary. It is also true that such commissions consisting of outsiders by nature do not endear themselves to the insiders and as a result many reform reports are left to gather dust.

In this regard, the fate of most of the proposals for fundamental reform of the British Civil Service made by the Fulton Committee in 1968 clearly highlights what is likely to happen to reform proposals by external groups. Reform in this case is likely to be successful if conditions have been created for initiative to come from within.

Most important, however, it is necessary for the need for change and reform to be viewed as being continuous. Since the administrative system is the indispensable instrument through which policy and programme work is carried out it becomes vital that it should be kept relevant and efficient on a continuous basis. This calls inevitably for the creation of a permanent internal mechanism specifically for this purpose.

Training, particularly that for administrators and managers, should also be used deliberately as an instrument of change. This can be particularly useful with regard to procedures and practices. For it is common knowledge that bureaucrats in many public services still exhibit attitudes and behaviour patterns of an era which is long past. In many cases these behaviour patterns act as bottlenecks in relations with the masses thereby becoming an impending factor in development.

(f) Administrative relations and behavior patterns

One of the many factors which determine the effectiveness of administrative systems is the whole area of the nature and quality of relations between public servants and the masses. The colonial administrators were often accused of deliberately maintaining a distance between themselves and the subject peoples they administered. Their elitist behavior demonstrating at best sympathy rather than empathy for those administered was said to be characteristic of the colonial era. Today, two decades after independence indigenous administrators and managers are in many countries accused of the same patterns of behaviour, if not worse in some cases. They are said to be aloof, arrogant, inconsiderate and as unresponsive as they personalize their office. Whether these allegations are true or not is really besides the point. The fact that they are voiced at all means they constitute a fact sui generis and should not be dismissed as unfounded. It is therefore necessary that efforts directed at making administrative systems more effective should incorporate measures designed to reorient the behaviour patterns of public administrators and managers.

III. Measures for improvement

The foregoing analysis indicates that public administration in Africa is in unsatisfactory state and the situation cries out for change and reform. It would of course be presumptuous to prescribe solutions to all Africa's administrative ills in a few pages. It is therefore necessary to limit ourselves to some broad issues and to make suggestions as to broad strategies. Accordingly, the following suggestions should be given serious thought in order to make a good start in the

journey on the long and prickly path of administrative improvements. The Chinese say 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step' and so let the conference of Ministers take the first step in this long journey by dedicating itself to the improvement of public administration in Africa not only by endorsing the suggestions but also by carrying the message home where concrete ameliorative steps would, hopefully, be initiated. The following are the suggested **guidelines** for action:

1. The Lagos Plan of Action to which African governments committed themselves last year suggests that certain reforms be made in public administration in individual African countries. The reforms which have been called for are:
 - (a) Restructuring and streamlining national administrative structures in order to enhance their effectiveness and to enable them to shoulder their responsibilities in policy-making and execution;
 - (b) Setting up performance audit systems and units in order to ensure the attainment of targets within the shortest possible time and with minimum costs;
 - (c) Controlling the proliferation of administrative structures in the light of resource demands of the economic development efforts and the need to minimize government operational costs; and
 - (d) Maintaining an efficient merit system for the attraction, retention, motivation, training and career development of public servants to ensure the use of staff motivated by internal standards of excellence and commitment to development objectives in the discharge of their duties.

2. There is dire need in all African countries for institutions solely concerned with policy analysis and review; these are generally referred to as 'think-tanks.' However, these institutions must not be completely cut off and isolated from the administrative and executive machinery and should not be solely staffed, as is sometimes the case, by academics. We are aware that institutions like these are normally staffed by reputed researchers who link up with politicians and top civil servants. In Africa, however, all those who contribute to policy-making (politicians, academics, senior civil servants, professionals, journalists, etc.) should contribute to the activities of these institutions.

3. On the continental level such institutions would find support and collaboration from the African Centre for Public Policy Analysis and Perspective Studies, the establishment of which is being promoted by ECA. The responsibility of the proposed Centre will be to conduct research in topical issues in international economic relations and subsequently provide the necessary information to its member States. The Centre will also make thorough studies of other studies with a view to identifying problems and foreseeing difficulties before they

actually arise. The conclusions arrived at as a result of these in-depth studies will be used by the Centre to forewarn its member States. Owing to the sensitivity of issues and the confidential nature of its work the Centre will be entirely staffed and managed by Africans; needless to say that it will also be financed by Africa. Counterpart national institutions and the Centre will have a symbiotic relationship and will reinforce each other. Therefore, the proposed Centre should be given full and wholehearted support.

4. The functioning of the administrative machinery needs to be monitored for possible malfunctions. Administrative reform should thus be regarded as a continuous process and there is need therefore, for a specialized institution for this purpose which will identify bottlenecks, recommend improvements and monitor the implementation of the proposals for improvement. Some countries, notably The Sudan, Egypt and Nigeria have already taken the necessary action to institute permanent machineries for administrative reform. In the Sudan, this machinery is within the Ministry of Public Service and Administrative Reform and in Egypt it is the Central Agency for Organization and Administration. In Nigeria this function is supposed to be performed by the Management Development Service in close collaboration with the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCN).

It is in fact ideal to combine responsibility for the Public Service with responsibility for administrative reform because, in the final analysis, it is individual public servants (the human resource) that count and administrative reforms are nothing more than improving the tool of his trade. Improving the quality of the public service and improving the rules, procedures and departmental structures go together hand in glove and therefore countries should consider linking these two functions under one institution.

5. Whatever plans, reforms or policies governments may introduce are unlikely to succeed if the executive capacity is lacking. How many laudable policies and plans have lamentably failed to bear any fruit because of improper or poor implementation? Executive capacity is of course vested in the human resource, not in inanimate resources, and so in effect it means that the civil servants and managers of public enterprises should be professionally qualified, experienced and committed to their work; the latter quality being a function of motivation. Therefore, African governments should institute policies which will accord due recognition to qualities in public servants that promote and contribute to development, these qualities being demonstrated technical competence, professional expertise, dedication, innovation and adaptation. The public service system must handsomely reward those who produce, innovate, adapt and multiply and must punish those who shirk their responsibilities and stagnate. Most African systems now punish the worker and reward the shirker: few countries can claim to have merit systems and good jobs go to the kins and cronies of those in power irrespective of their knowledge, qualification or service record; ultimately, it is the country that suffers most. In some countries this has led to people with scarce skills in great demand emigrating to Europe, America, Canada etc. Many African public services have been extensively damaged by the brain drain. The Sudan alone has 3,000 medical doctors abroad (1,000 in the United Kingdom and the remaining 2,000 in other Arab countries). Surely, it is high time to arrest the brain drain and create conditions which facilitate the repatriation of those who had migrated and encourage nationals to work in the home country.

6. Fresh impetus should be given to the revitalisation of Institutes of Public Administration, ENAs and analogous training facilities. It is noted with great concern that many of these facilities have now deteriorated to a level where they cannot seriously be expected to meet the challenge of assisting in creating and maintaining Public Services which are dynamic, responsible and responsive. These institutions would be enabled to work in the closest collaboration with the suggested permanent machineries responsible for management services and reform.

7. The role of ECA

In the ECA secretariat, the Public Administration and Management Section has responsibility to promote the adoption of sound administrative structures, and procedures and management practices in Africa. The Section is engaged in a variety of activities all of which are aimed at assisting African governments improve the performance of their administrative machineries.

First, the Section seeks to create and maintain awareness and interest in leadership at all levels in governments in the necessity of having efficient and dynamic government machineries as tools of socio-economic development. In this regard it is essential for the top political leadership to appreciate the fact that the administrative system is their most important instrument in running the affairs of the nation.

Second, the Section in the ECA secretariat plays the role of assisting governments in the identification and analysis of performance problems and further assists in formulating corrective measures for implementation. In this connection the initiative for mission visits could either come from the Section or the government of the country concerned. In order that such visits may have a lasting impact the ECA prefers joint teams so that at the end of the mission internal capability is left behind to continue the work of administrative improvement.

Third, the Public Administration and Management Section of ECA secretariat seeks to assist in administrative and management improvement through training by organising workshops and seminars. Again such activities are as a matter of policy organised and run jointly with officials of government concerned. The Section also publishes and disseminates guidelines and general information on administrative and management improvement measures.

Fourth, in all its activities, one of the major objectives the Section seeks to achieve is the reorientation of the administrative systems so that administrators and managers can exhibit more appropriate behaviour patterns. As engineers of socio-economic transformation African administrators and managers need to gain the confidence of the people in order to be able to induce the new habits, values, motives and attitudes which are essential for change.

Finally, but by no means least, the Section plays a major role in facilitating the sharing of experiences among African countries. This is done normally through seminars and conferences. But it is also sometimes done through publications and exchange visits. In future it is hoped that exchange of staff members amongst IPAS and ENAs will become an important feature of this activity.

In order for the Section to succeed in making a meaningful contribution, it is necessary that there should be greater interest in its work by governments of member States whom it seeks to serve. In this connection the secretariat has put forward a project document (RAF) for consideration. The project has as its main objective the improvement of government machineries by making them more result and achievement-oriented through a series of measures. It is the hope here that this project will be seriously considered.

IV. Conclusion

In this paper the secretariat has been concerned to show that while Africa has achieved some results over the last two decades, its failings have in many cases been quite gigantic. The premise here is that many of these failings can rightly be attributed to a widespread prevalence of maladministration and mismanagement. From its vantage position as a continental organisation concerned principally with socio-economic issues the ECA will be failing in its duty if it did not speak frankly. Being aware of this duty to warn member States about possible dangers the Executive Secretary, Prof. Adebayo Adedeji gave this warning to the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of Ministers, when he stated:

If past trends persist and if there are no fundamental changes in the mix of economic policies that African governments have pursued during the past decade and half, and if the current efforts to fundamentally change the international economic system fail to yield concret positive results the African region as a whole will be worse off compared with the rest of the world at the end of this century than it was in 1960.^{1/}

It cannot be gainsaid that senior administrators, top managers and politicians chart the future course of their nations. They are the makers of policy as they are its executors. It is impossible to speak of economic performance without them. But their area of operation is public administration and so the latter is sine qua non to development. Therefore countries will be well advised to pay more than cursory attention to administrative and management improvement. It was not the purpose of this short paper to prescribe a panacea or solution for each and every particular case. Guidelines have been given in it as to the broad outline of the reforms which are urgently necessary. The sooner these reforms are instituted the better.

^{1/} Speech by Professor Adebayo Adedeji, Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, to the Fourth Meeting of the Conference of Ministers and Thirteenth Session of the Economic Commission for Africa (Kinshasa, 28 February to 3 March 1977) published by ECA, p.7.