Editorial: Public Administration Processes central to Africa's growth and development

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Guest Editor

In March 2013, *The Economist* published a special report on emerging Africa – the title read "A Hopeful Continent". A lot of articles in this issue resonate with this title and this editorial is inspired by the hope therein. As a continent, Africa is fraught with poverty and disease – issues that can be offset by a functioning public service. Yet in many African countries public services are either absent, inaccessible or fall short of the minimum acceptable standards. The reasons for this state of affairs are numerous and multifaceted and vary from country to country, often steeped in historical factors. But the writing is on the wall that Africa is rising. In a special report in the March edition of *The Economist*, a positive image of Africa was presented. The author and editor, Oliver August declares that:

> *broadly the numbers suggest that human development in sub-Saharan Africa has made huge leaps. Secondary-school enrolment grew by 48% between 2000 and 2008 after many states expanded their education programmes and scrapped school fees. Over the past decade malaria deaths in some of the worst-affected countries have declined by 30% and HIV infections by up to 74%. Life expectancy across Africa has increased by about 10% and child mortality rates in most countries have been falling steeply* (August, 2013:1).

Using statistics from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), August proceeds to paint a picture of hope for the continent when he points out that

> *"over the past ten years real income per person has increased by more than 30%, whereas in the previous 20 years it shrank by nearly 10%. Africa is the world's fastest-growing continent just now. Over the next decade its GDP is expected to rise by an average of 6% a year, not least thanks to foreign direct investment. Foreign Direct Investment has gone from $15 billion in 2002 to $37 billion in 2006 and $46 billion in 2012"* (2013:2)

At the heart of this seemingly good story on Africa is political will and an alert citizenry – but there is also a public administration system keen on building its image. As Africa strives to rid itself of the negative perceptions brought on by, among others, its colonial and apartheid legacy, experiments with the traditional, the managerial and the governance model of public administration have pervaded the public service of numerous countries. The various models of public administration notwithstanding, Maphunye (2009) noted that present features of Africa's public administration have striking resemblances to a Weberian model simply because of the colonial legacy in many African countries. As noted by Hughes (2003:17), however, the Weberian model of public administration, while remaining the longest standing and most successful theory of management in the public sector, is now being replaced. But this model has not disappeared overnight and elements of it still exist, though its theories and practices are now considered old-fashioned and no longer relevant to the needs of a rapidly changing society. Adopting the correct model of public administration practice is pivotal to development of the continent for, as noted in the 2010 United Nations World Public Sector Report,

> *no progress can be made in promoting peace, development and protection of human rights unless appropriate governance and public administration institutions are established, leadership and human resources capacities are re-built, citizens are engaged in the process of reconstruction through decentralized participatory mechanisms and basic public services are delivered.*

Implicit in the above is that there are a number of pre-conditions for progress on the continent. In this issue of *Loyola Journal of Social Sciences* some of these preconditions are, within the ambit of public administration and governance, critically unpacked drawing on experiences from a range of settings.

Phago, noting the inescapable relationship between public governance and politics, asserts that the quality of politics determines the quality of governance of public institutions. He proceeds to show that, in general, political parties focus mainly on the elites' interests rather than addressing society's need to improve public service delivery and social cohesion. The challenge for the civic movement, Phago argues, is to ensure that its bargaining power is consolidated to gain the influence of society over partisan politics and not vice versa. Such a situation could assert the position of civil society in holding governing political parties to account on the use of public resources and in the delivery of social and welfare services.

Nowhere is accountability more needed than in the delivery of social welfare services. With many social welfare policies developed and implemented, **Ile and Dinbabo** critically examine some of South Africa's social policies and their impact, while reflecting on challenges and opportunities that these policies present. Ile and Dinbabo, while noting policy implementation gaps, show that, in South Africa, coverage of social grants has increased significantly over the last 20 years. They conclude that successful implementation of the social welfare policies depends mainly on proper functioning and interconnectedness of a triad that includes targeted beneficiaries, the workforce, as well as the institutional and infrastructural capacity of the public service.

The overreliance on social welfare in South Africa has long been a point of contention, with discourse increasingly focusing on how the poor that reside mainly in rural and peri-urban townships can progressively be weaned off social grants. Townships in South Africa are synonymous with an array of social tribulations; including malnutrition, low basic education levels, increased terminal illnesses, and economic stagnation. The improvement and development of townships has the potential to eradicate these unfortunate circumstances. **Kunene and Dyili**, present results of a research study that set out to ascertain the impact of a business hive infrastructure on the economic livelihood of people in KwaDabeka – a township outside the port city of Durban in South Africa. While the development of enterprises is fraught with problems, Kunene and Dyili suggest strategic adjustments that have the capability of improving and contributing to the growth and development of economic and social structures in townships like KwaDabeka.

For the rural poor, farming, even at a subsistence level, remains the main route through which growth and development of economic and social structures will improve. As efforts of land reform continue to take root in South Africa, it is useful to take cognisance of how other sub-Saharan African countries are performing in establishing sustainable agriculture. To this effect, **Siulemba and Bob** examine sustainable agricultural practices in Zambia and note that the good policy intentions to increase sustainable practices are constrained by a range of factors, which leave small-scale farmers overly reliant on conventional, traditional methods of farming. They recommend political buy-in to the programmes that support sustainability of agriculture as well as a scaling up of government funding by the pertinent line ministries.

The efficiency and effectiveness of public service provision is largely dependent on a capable workforce. To this effect, **Kakumba and Fennele** examine human resource talent retention in Uganda's local governments (LG) with respect to that country's existing policy and

institutional arrangements. Kakumba and Fennele's discussion is based on the premise that public services in less developed countries continue to grapple with the challenge of effectively retaining resourceful employees, which affects the extent and quality of service provision. Kakumba and Fennele note that the scope of decentralized service delivery responsibilities is much greater than the degree to which revenue sources have been devolved, thereby leaving LGs with a very limited budget to support schemes for workforce welfare and staff retention.

But retaining staff is only half the story, as another critical factor in this regard is the developing and training of staff to service public institutions. Fundamental to the training and developing of public servants is the question of what competencies and skills are, in fact, necessary in aiding public servants function effectively in the constantly changing environment in which public servants typically work. To this end, **Holtzhausen** explores the issue by firstly providing an overview of the dynamic environment in which public administration functions. Against this backdrop she explores the particular skills required by various frameworks while questioning the extent to which these are, in fact, developed by South Africa's institutions of higher learning.

Mubangizi takes the discussion on competencies of public servants a step further by advancing the necessity of incorporating human rights education in the training of public administrators. Mubangizi argues that since public administrators are strategically placed at the coalface of the delivery of socio-economic services, human rights education for public administrators can play a pivotal role in enhancing the realisation of socio-economic rights.

A discourse on public governance would be incomplete without a reflection on corruption and attempts to curb it in the public sector and **Dassah's** article is a useful addition in this regard. Dassah's conceptual paper outlines various typologies of anti-corruption agencies, and examines some criteria for assessing anti-corruption institutions' performance as well as factors influencing their effectiveness. Against this backdrop, two single-agency institutions, the Independent Commission against Corruption of Hong Kong and Singapore's Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau, are discussed alongside South Africa's multi-agency approach. This is done with a view to draw lessons of best practice for countries whose anticorruption model is based on a multiple agencies.

Taken together, the discourse presented in this issue is testimony to the robust research by young scholars of public administration on the continent. And while the discussion points to numerous challenges; it

equally notes abundant opportunities for effective public institutions capable of successfully delivering public services to Africans. It remains crucial for governments and civil society to join with public servants in a joint commitment to improve public sector performance and deliver tangible results.

References

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