

Applying Results Based Management (RBM) Strategies in African Public Administration: Challenges and Opportunities

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1. Governance Context for Results Based Management (RBM)

The Civil Service is the implementation mechanism of the State charged with translating the socio-economic vision of the State into tangible social and economic development for citizens. By assuming this critical role of policy implementation, the Civil Service plays a strategic role in determining the degree of legitimacy and credibility the state enjoys among ordinary citizens. An effective and efficient Civil Service equipped with necessary implementation capacities, is therefore an absolute sine qua non for a well performing or capable state. A well performing state is one which meets the developmental aspirations of its people. Therefore in practically all African countries, particularly those in Sub-Saharan Africa, ordinary people demand results based management strategies in the Civil Service so that they can enjoy the practical benefits of sustainable development. When a State can not provide the enabling environment for sustainable development for citizens, the net result is an erosion of credibility and legitimacy , which is normally the prelude to full blown State implosion .

Development can be defined in a general sense as the enhancement of the quality of life of citizens: meeting the basic needs for food, shelter, good health and education and a general sense of well being. A more broad-gauged definition is as follows: “The challenge of development in the broadest sense, is to improve the quality of life ... Especially in the world’s poor countries, a better quality of life generally calls for higher incomes... It encompasses as ends in themselves, better education, higher standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, more equality

of opportunity, greater individual freedom, and a richer cultural life” (Adamolekun, 2007,2).

Development is very closely linked to the quality of governance; which has been defined as “the manner in which the state acquires and exercises its authority to provide public goods and services. In other words, the evidence indicates that countries that are managed on the basis of good political governance tend to score better on socio-economic indicators than countries which experience bad governance.

Box 1: Good governance - for what?

From the human development perspective, good governance is democratic governance. Democratic governance means that:

- People’s human rights and fundamental freedoms are respected, allowing them to live in dignity.
- People have a say in decisions that affect their lives.
- People can hold decision-makers accountable.
- Inclusive and fair rules, institutions and practices govern social interactions.
- Women are equal partners with men in private and public spheres of life and decision-making
- People are free from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, class, gender or any other attribute.
- The needs of future generations are reflected in current policies.
- Economic and social policies are responsive to peoples’ needs and aspirations
- Economic and social policies aim at eradicating poverty and expanding the choices that all people have in their lives.

Source: *Human Development Report 2002*, p. 51

Bad governance tends to undermine social and economic development and the overall result tends to be endemic instability or civil wars as we in Africa are all too aware. On the other hand, well performing states tend to promote human development on account of registering good results on the following criteria:

- ❖ **State legitimacy**: constitutional order; law-based state; rule of law; electoral legitimacy; political stability; centralized/decentralized (multi-layered governance); international dimension (global governance)(Adamolekun,2007,4)
- ❖ **Vision and strategic directions**: vision statement and strategy or plan to achieve vision. Vision statement – dissemination and citizens’ buy-in; development strategy/plan – consistency, level of citizen participation

❖ **Implementation capacity:** depends on the quality of public administration and associated institutions. World Bank's criteria within its "Country Policy and Institutional Assessment" (CPIA) are: rule-based governance; quality of budgetary and financial management; efficiency of revenue mobilization; efficiency of public expenditures; and transparency, accountability and corruption. Others: merit recruitment and promotion; professionalism in human resources management and development; and quality of service delivery.

❖ **Development outcomes:** Proxies: (A) Human Development Index (HDI) – expansion of education and health and decent living standard (life expectancy). According to HDR 2002, human development also includes (a) political freedoms; (b) participation in the life of one's community; and (c) physical security. (B) Millennium Development Goals.

When Public Administrations can deliver tangible developmental outputs that populations can physically enjoy like roads, clean water and good sanitation services, clinics and hospitals etc, State legitimacy is reinforced and governments can pursue reforms aimed at further improving living standards and realizing desired development outcomes, MDGs, HDI etc.

2. Situating Results Based Management (RBM) in the African Context?

RBM is a performance based approach that aims to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and access to improved public services (Uganda, 2007). Public sector organizations in Africa and elsewhere are coming under greater pressure to deliver results. Indeed the pressure for results based public sector organizations is more acute than other regions if one examines the key development indicators which suggest that millions of Africans are in danger of slipping into deeper poverty. The United Nations in a recent report has warned that despite faster growth and strengthened institutions, Africa at its present rate would fail to achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals (UN News Service, 12 September 2007)

Box 2 : FACTS ON POVERTY IN AFRICA

- 315 million people: one in two of people in Sub Saharan Africa survive on less than one dollar per day
- 184 million people: 33% of the African population – suffer from malnutrition
- During the 1990s the average income per capita decreased in 20 African countries
- Less than 50% of Africa’s population has access to hospitals or doctors
- Three quarters of the 42 million people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide leave in Africa¹
- In 2000, 300 million Africans did not have access to safe water
- The average life expectancy in Africa is 41 years
- Only 57% of African children are enrolled in primary education, and only one of three children do complete school
- One in six children dies before the age of 5. This number is 25 times higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in the OECD countries
- Children account for half of all civilian casualties in wars in Africa
- The African continent lost more than 5.3 million hectares of forest during the decade of the 1990s
- Less than one person out of five has electricity.
- Out of 1,000 inhabitants 15 have a telephone line, and 7.8 out of 1,000 people surf on Internet.

Source: United Nations Development Program (www.africa2015.org/factspoverty)

The challenge of eradicating, alleviating, or at least reducing this kind of poverty, belongs to the State, leadership, whose efforts to address the development crisis must be complemented by effective public administrations whose performance must be anchored on the delivery of results.

Politicians all over Africa now realize that the most effective strategy for re-election is the delivery of tangible results to the electorate. All over the continent, Heads of state, Ministers, Members of Parliament, elected officials in Local Governments are assessed on what results they delivered during their time in office. Besides political leaders and the African populations, donors are also becoming more demanding on good governance frameworks, and public administration performance against benchmarked results as the price for continued development investment support.

3. Opportunities/Benefits offered by RBM for Modernization of Public Administration in Africa

a) Clear Definition of Objectives of Government Programmes and Services

RBM is results based focus, measurement, evaluation and accountability tool for achieving more efficient and effective resource mobilization by the public sector. RBM is seen by its supporters as a mechanism for forcing politicians, civil servants, and voting citizens to be clearer about objectives of government programme and services. Performance measurement enables a public sector organization to monitor its effectiveness in achieving its goals and objectives, managing its services and ensuring customer/client satisfaction. Performance measurement systems have numerous uses: they help set and communicate priorities, formulate budgets, allocate resources, motivate employees, improve services and facilitate information exchange between citizens and government.

b) Putting Customers First and Clarifying Mandate of Organizations

Public service organizations sometimes lose sight of their purpose. They sometimes even forget they exist to serve the public. RBM ensures that the client focus remains the key guiding force of operations. The identification of customers and their priority status in organizational operations is critical to public sector organizations, and particularly for those organizations which do not have an evident service function. Central agencies such as Ministries of Finance and Planning provide core control and support functions to the rest of government. They therefore serve a wide variety of clients—the Executive, the Presidency, the Parliament, other line ministries and agencies. Re-examination of mandates allows the agency to establish priorities and relationships among its clientele. Instituting Results based management system begins with the asking of some hard critical questions. Key questions asked are shown in the box below:

Box 3: Asking the Hard Questions

Why does public administration exist? What would be lost if it did not exist Who does it serve? What is it supposed to deliver to them?
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In management terms, this questioning generally results in a mission statement for the organization, and the identification of key results areas. These are the operating spheres within the organization which the organization will deliver concrete outputs and outcomes.

c) Defining Results and Performance Expectations of Clients

RBM requires that once KRAs are established, these must be translated into targeted and benchmarked results. In general terms, it is difficult to obtain a clear and consolidated statement of performance results for public sector organizations. On being asked for such clear statements, invariably a statement of activities and budgetary expenditures is produced to demonstrate the scope of and extent of the institution's operations. Public administrations tend to be focused on budgets and expenditure patterns at the expense of assessing the human impacts of their operations. This makes it extremely difficult to assess administrative performance and introduce reforms for performance improvement.

d) Output-outcome indicators

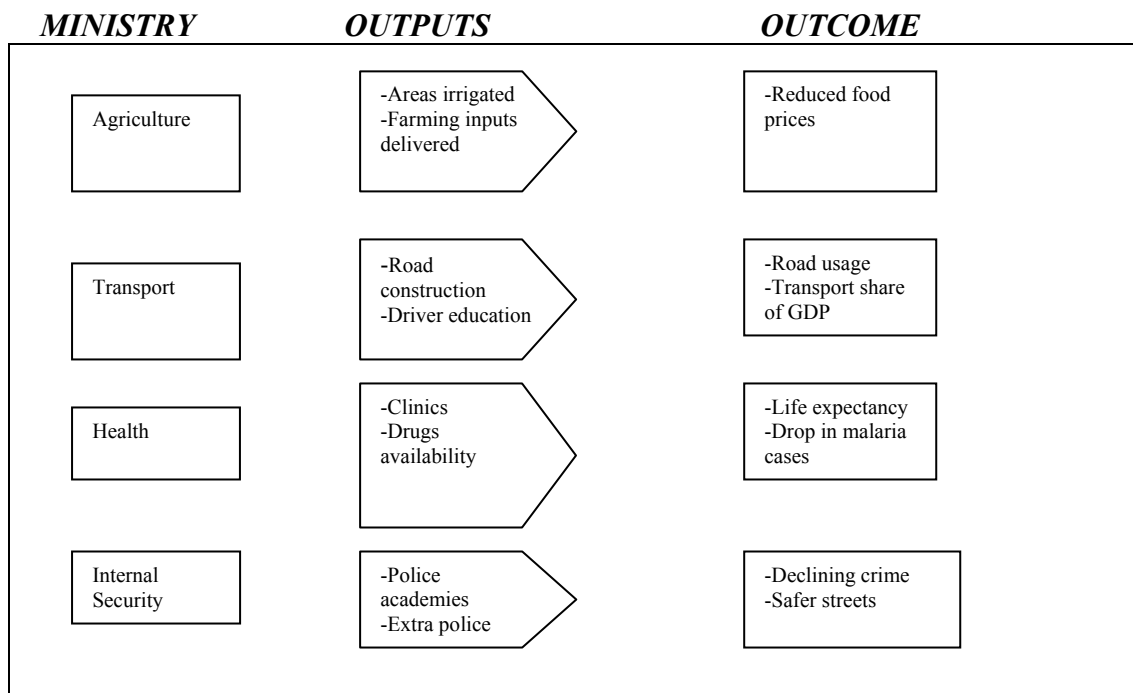
The concepts of outputs and outcomes are an integral part of RBM.

- Inputs are defined as the human, financial and material resources required by public administration to perform a certain task;
- Outputs are defined as goods and services produced by the public administration.
- Outcomes are the consequences for the public resulting from the outputs and activities of government

The purpose of government is to produce desired outcomes. While outputs are important to plan for and monitor, they cannot by definition be used as the sole yardstick for judging administrative effectiveness. Public administration's performance must be judged based on why it was established. It must be evaluated for the outcomes or impacts (client-benefit and satisfaction) it achieves. An Education Ministry should be evaluated not just by how many schools it builds, but by the resulting increase in literacy and increased awareness of the importance of protecting the environment through community based reforestation etc. The Ministry of Health not just by the number of clinics built, but by improvements in child mortality, reduced incidence of malaria cases etc. the Ministry of Internal Affairs or security should not be judged as successful just for building more police training schools and deploying extra police on the streets, but more importantly by visible reductions in violent crime and the creation of a safer physical environment for citizens.

These are the *raison d'être* of public administration. They are the benefits public administration is expected to provide to its stakeholders. And if these impacts are not being achieved, there is no clearer sign that public administration has become ineffective or irrelevant.

Sectoral Outputs and Outcomes in Developing Country Context



e) Efficiency –effectiveness Indicators

Efficiency indicators reflect the level of outputs (the actual products/services delivered) of the organization in the context of available resources. They therefore represent the ratio of inputs to outputs: for example, the extent of budget or staff resources required for every unit of electricity generated or every unit of health care offered.

❖ *Effectiveness indicators* represent the expected impact public administration on customers through its products and services. Thus, they are indicators which represent the ratio of inputs to outcomes such as the level of client coverage and client satisfaction. They can also represent the ratio of outputs to outcomes/impacts achieved. For example the extent to which electricity generated is accessed and used to improve productivity and quality of life; or the extent to

which improved or increased health services have improved the health of the target population.

- ❖ ***Equity indicators*** are important for public administration since they reflect the distribution profile of outputs (public access to products and services) and related equity of access ; extent of rural versus urban areas which have access to clean water, electricity or medical/health services.
- ❖ ***Sustainability indicators*** reflect the ability of public administration to ensure consistent and self sustaining performance and, thus continuity of institutional effectiveness and efficiency; for example the level of revenues and profits generated by state supervised Utility Companies delivering water supplies to inhabitants of large African cities like Abidjan, Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Cotonou etc and therefore the financial capacities to sustain themselves and expand service, or the ability of Provincial and District Health Management Boards to recover revenue from clients based on improvements in service , and thus depend less on government subsidies for continued operations.

f) Linking Resources to Results

RBM promotes a direct link between results registered by public administration and the budgetary process. Budgets are assessed and allocated based on the cost of delivering outputs, a process known as ‘output-based budgeting’. The process would usually include ‘performance agreements’ between a central coordinating department and the recipient department. These agreements record expected performance (outputs) for the budget allocated.

g) Performance Reporting

Results focused public administration requires the adoption of performance reporting systems as part of larger public accountability responsibilities. In countries which have adopted the output based budgeting system, reporting on achievements of outputs becomes an essential basis for appropriating the budget of the following year. The Performance report essentially provides information on administrative performance against a set of performance indicators which represent outputs delivered and the outcomes/impacts these outputs have achieved. Outputs should and can be reported annually. Outcomes/impacts sometimes can only be assessed in a longer time

frame, perhaps of up to three years. Notwithstanding this, it is essential that outcomes are monitored and reported.

Administrative performance measured in terms of outputs and outcomes is normally assessed using three parameters:

- I. Targets that have been set by management and stakeholders;
- II. Past performance, using trend analysis to review whether performance is on an upward trend or otherwise; and
- III. Comparators or industry benchmarks (in the public sector, comparators could be similar institutions in comparable countries)

h. Performance Analysis and Institutional Strengthening

Another vital element of RBM is performance analysis and continuous institutional improvement. Performance reporting leads to identification of performance problems (negative variances) or performance improvement opportunities (potentially positive variances). The greater the clarity and preciseness with which these are defined, the easier will be the diagnostic processes which isolate causal factors and consequently lead to institutional strengthening actions. Identifying performance variances in tangible, verifiable and timely terms depends on the performance indicators used. In the context of public administration, this is a major challenge when dealing with entities whose outputs cannot be quantified. An example would be a Directorate of Policy Planning and Evaluation in the Office of the President or Prime Minister, Public Service Commission, Local Government Service Commission, or Water Supply and Sanitation Regulation Board.

i) RBM Demands Merit Principle in Managing Human Resources

RBM can only work if staff selection, compensation and career management are professionally managed and based on merit. Like budgets, human resources are a key resource to the delivery of results. A Permanent Secretary or Director General of a Government Ministry cannot be held accountable if he/she is not given discretion on the quality of staff provided to the Ministry. Accountability for results demands that personnel be of the highest possible quality and with a range of competencies responsive to results expected. Thus selection must be professionally managed, open and competitive, resisting political pressures and influence. Promotions and career

management must be guided by HR best practices, and staff must feel principles of fair competition are transparently applied

4. Challenges of Applying RBM in Modernization of Public Administration in Africa

A. Challenge of Weak Management Information Systems in Public Administration
For RBM to be successfully introduced and applied as a tool for administrative modernization in Africa, a major challenge that should be overcome is the lack of up-to-date and credible information on administrative performance. Indeed many public sector institutions are known to be weak in terms of having readily available information on performance, specifically on outputs and impacts. This is a reflection of public administration being typically budget and supply driven rather than output and impact focused. An example that immediately comes to mind is the record of Civil Service Reforms in Africa undertaken in the 1980s and 1990s.

Current evidence broadly indicates that Civil service reforms implemented throughout Africa in the 1980s and 1990s did not lead to more capable and efficient public administrations because they were largely preoccupied with reducing the size of the public sector and thereby reducing the burden of personnel emoluments in the context of economic stabilization programmes (CAFRAD, 2007). Hence rather than focusing on innovations which could lead to improved service delivery to populations, Civil Service Managers were more preoccupied with savings and reducing the ‘administrative burden’ on the national budget. To the extent that the dismissals of thousands of civil servants led to ‘savings’ on the wage bill of the civil service, Civil Service Reforms were judged to be successful. Accurate statistics on how this output (decrease in the size of the civil service) generated wider outcomes/impacts etc were not seen as an urgent priority.

B. Challenge of Communicating Performance Indicators in User-Friendly Language

A key motivation behind the deployment of RBM in public Administration is objective, timely and understandable feed back to Senior Civil service Managers. A danger in the design of Management Information Systems (MIS) supporting RBM is

to leave them completely in the hands of information management specialists and consultants supplied by well meaning donors. Their natural tendency is to install complex information systems, requiring financing and skills beyond the capacity of the Civil Service of many African countries. Apart from generating information that may be 'too technical' for government managers, the MIS system may be too dependent on donors and might only function as long as donors are able to finance and support it.

C. Challenge of implementing Resources-Results Frameworks in Public Administration

While output based budgeting seeks to establish a direct link between resource allocation and results, it has generally been a failure in its application in developing countries (most of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa) for some very good reasons. Output based budgeting assumes an operational and financial management infrastructure of a fair degree of sophistication and this is often not feasible in an African context. It requires accounting systems often unrealistic when governments still struggle with maintaining line budgeting. The degree of skills required for establishing outputs, costing them, verifying the realism/accuracy of the costing, monitoring and reporting implementation, assessing the need to adjust budgets based on past performance etc are simply not often available in Sub-Saharan Africa due to a number of factors such as bad governance leading to state failure or the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis on such critically important capacities. If available, highly talented technocrats are captured by the private sector who can afford to pay more attractive salaries.

D. Challenge of applying Effective Human Resources Management

❖ Poor Pay and Conditions of Service

Expectations of improved pay scales for leaner public sectors following the implementation of public sector reform down-sizing sub-components have by and large not been realized in Africa. As a consequence, motivation among public sector employees has been eroded owing to poor pay scales relative to the private sector, thereby negatively impacting the quality of services rendered to the general public.

In general terms Civil service pay and conditions of service can neither attract the best talents on the labour market nor retain capacity that is internally developed.

❖ *Weak Institutional Environment*

Donors are approached by public administrations of African countries for capacity building assistance as part of Human Resource capacity strengthening. Every year millions of dollars are invested by donors in this type of assistance. Unfortunately, much of the investment goes to waste, spent on interventions that have limited sustained impact. The typical capacity building intervention is training. Skills are developed but often without parallel strengthening of the institutional environment within which they can be put to productive use

❖ **Political Pressures on HRM**

Professional HR Management has been one of the major constraints to RBM in Africa. The multinational, multicultural and multilingual character of many African countries requires that the composition of the public sector reflect the diversities of African countries. In this context, Human Resources Management (HRM) in public sectors of countries undergoing complex political and social transitions is more acutely challenged to address the question of prudently managing diversity. It is therefore not unusual to encounter a public sector with personnel appointments heavily influenced by political forces or Ministries and Departments with top-heavy structures and underpaid professional personnel because regulations or absence of political will does not allow for necessary downsizing

5. Conclusion

Taking on accountability for clearly defined outputs, and making budget allocations conditional on achievement of concrete outputs can be threatening to both political leaders and civil servants at all levels.

- One approach towards an RBM oriented culture in the civil service is to do away with career, permanent and pensionable employment and put in its place performance based contracts for the entire civil service. This is in fact the trend in Africa today, where the rank of Permanent Secretary or Director-General of a Ministry is not necessarily career based but contractual and performance based;
- Another option is to hive off as separate enclaves some functions from the civil service in order to run them as autonomous institutions charged with generating concrete outputs and clearly defined outcomes. This approach has resulted in many African countries hiving away tax collection and administration from Ministries of Finance to semi-autonomous National Revenue Boards or

Authorities. These autonomous bodies, as the example of Ghana shows, have applied RBM resulting in higher outputs(tax and customs revenues as % of GDP)(Dia, 1996, 90);

- Political re-election is always a major incentive for political leaders all over the world to secure results and Africa is no exception. Presidents, Ministers, Members of Parliament, Elected Representatives (Mayors, Municipal Governors etc) in Local governments will always demand that public administration perform more effectively and efficiently. Tangible improvements in the delivery of essential services are the most credible strategy for re-election.
- RBM cannot be imposed from outside. It must be internally developed and given the highest level of support in the Civil Service. RBM must command African ownership. Care must be taken to ensure that it is not 'labelled' as a donor-driven project. Whilst donors are motivated to commit funds to programmes such as RBM in African public administrations, it is necessary that African politicians and administrators genuinely see the value of RBM in contributing to enhanced administrative performance.
- Finally, the time table to shifting towards RBM must be determined by country specific conditions as opposed to donor driven deadlines. The task of shifting to Results based Management in the Civil service is a long term proposition. It should be gradually introduced in a number of pilot Ministries and Departments with a view to noting mistakes and recording best practices that could be replicated in the wider public administration. To implement it in a rushed manner might destroy institutional memory and trigger administrative upheaval on an immense scale which would paradoxically jeopardize the very results (outputs & outcomes) RBM would seek to deliver.

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