

# **PUBLIC SERVICES AND PUBLIC SERVANTS IN SSA: Capacity, Competence, Conscience and Competence**

**By Reginald Herbold Green**

Probable possible my black hen  
She lays eggs in the relative when  
She doesn't lay eggs in the positive now  
Because she's unable to postulate how.

- Anon

We must appoint a committee...  
A committee of inquiry...  
One secretary will do for several committees...  
And the rising cry of the people  
resign! Resign!! RESIGN!!!

- 'Fragments of an Ode for a Statesman'  
T. S. Eliot

It has often been said that nationalism is the  
last resort of a scoundrel. In Africa today  
Africanness and authenticity are often the last  
resort of a failing neo-colonial dictator.

- Philip Ndegwa

## **I.**

### **A CULTURE OF CAPABILITY**

Good governance requires the **capacity to deliver**. No amount of participation even allied to political will can produce what the woman in the field or market or the man on the shop floor or the street considers good governance without the capability to articulate and to deliver.

The ordinary citizen - in SSA as elsewhere - wants peace and security to go about daily life; access to education-health-pure water; ability to reach and to participate in reasonably unrigged markets; a climate of taxation, extension services and access to inputs (knowledge,

land, credit, jobs, etc.) enabling earning a decent livelihood. The dominant bottom up view of good governance is whether or not these are provided.

This is not to say participation in decisions, transparency, accountability, freedom of speech do not matter. Their absence is usually the hallmark of repressive dictatorships or Platonic Guardians whose concern "for the people" may be highly different from what "the people" actually want or need. That absence - in Africa or elsewhere - creates the conditions for mounting discontent demanding change - often violent change. But unless there is capability, the resultant government even if decent, well intentioned and listening will not be well regarded. By its absence of works it will be judged and condemned.

### **BUREAUCRACY (PROCEDURE) AS CONVEYOR BELT**

It is fashionable to denounce bureaucracy as user unfriendly or as 'non-African'. In part this represents simply transforming a technical term into an epithet and in part a confusion between context and culture.

**Bureaucracy** - in the Weberian analytical tradition - is about setting up a **set of parameters** (e.g. standing orders) **to ensure routine decisions are taken promptly, uniformly, efficiently at field level**. More complex cases are referred up - as few levels as possible - leaving senior officials time for designing guidelines for new activities and for in-depth attention to policy. "Post bureaucratic" arguments for flexibility in fact assume a functioning bureaucracy so there is time for flexibility and consultation on non-routine cases.

Bureaucracy need **not mean deprofessionalisation**. An extension worker, a primary school teacher, a medical aid should be professionally educated and working in a system calling on her/him to act professionally in the field, the classroom, or the clinic. What standing orders do - or should do - is to free time to do just that by reducing time needed to deal with routine administration and/or having to refer everything up for decision.

In this sense, bureaucracy is not the main problem of most SSA governments - quite the reverse. There is bad bureaucracy and multiple layers of orders and checks which are very user - and time - unfriendly, but systems with no standing order models to allow decentralisation and with decisions not made, done totally inconsistently or referred up (so Permanent Secretaries sign petrol chits and allocate hourly vehicle use) are examples of the **high cost of no bureaucracy**.

Is bureaucracy then "un-African"? In the sense that pre-colonial states (and until very late most colonial as well) did not have large civil services, Africa and Africans have limited bureaucratic history. Most public servants/bureaucrats are teachers, nurses, extension workers, civilian police and magistrates, road and water technicians and artisans. Until

delivery of these services to all or most citizens became a staple government activity (in the late 19th Century even in Europe and North America, albeit earlier in China and some other areas in Asia during periods of strong governance) there were few public servants and especially few scattered field level ones. Thus there was little bureaucracy needed or possible. This situation can be overstated. The Code of Hammurabi and some Pharaonic Egyptian and Roman Edicts are in practice standing orders - with special emphasis on constabulary, magisterial and tax collection functions.

**But Africans and African societies do set value - often very high value - on order and on predictability** Customary codes are about "how it should be done" to ensure equity and consistency. In that sense the basic purpose of bureaucracy is African - if only because it is human rather than culture specific.

### **PUBLIC SERVICES NEED PUBLIC SERVANTS**

Stated in that way, the need for public servants in order to have public services - and trained, committed ones to have reasonable quality public services (especially under constraints of limited resources) may appear self-evident. But if one studies civil service and public service reform literature one cannot help but feel that the focus on public servants is often, at best, diffuse. Institutional structures, productivity schemes of great complexity and opaqueness, picking numbers to be "redeployed" (made unemployed) on external budget criteria with little attention to targeted service delivery levels (and their staff requirements) or to the difference between overstaffing and retraining and/or replacing non-competent staff holding posts which are necessary, all appear to receive disproportionate, even dominant, attention.

Further, the **balance of attention between the top 1% to 3%** of senior policy alternative presenting, decision advising, policy/operation articulating and monitoring, analytical and inspectorial staff and the - say - **75% of non-military personnel who are basic service providers** is disproportionately biased toward the former (perhaps 75% to 1% in the opposite direction!). The reasons are probably threefold: a) a public service without a top level capacity to inform strategy and to articulate its implementation will not be very successful; b) top level posts are intellectually more interesting (especially to economists); c) the advisors and consultants (especially, but not only, the foreign ones) are literally and culturally much closer to the senior personnel.

The problem is not primarily the attention to senior posts and personnel. It is the apparent failure to realise that education cannot function without competent, motivated primary school teachers (and field level inspectors); law and order (household and individual security) cannot be maintained without constables and magistrates committed and equipped (in training and time as well as other resources) to do so; no tax system however econometrically sound,

bureaucratically logical and efficiently structured institutionally can actually raise the revenue due unless field level tax collectors understand their duties and seek to fulfil them.

### **NO PAY - NO PRODUCTIVITY**

"What you pay for is what you get" is not quite a truism - you may be cheated. But **what you do not pay for you rarely get**. As the 1980s Polish civil servants put it: "The government pretends to pay us and we pretend to work".

The idea of a general **pattern of overpaid public servants** in SSA was always overblown and over-generalised. Today it is - with a few exceptions - **ludicrous**. A 1995 UNDP/UNICEF study headed by Adebayo Adedeji found that in five SSA countries (Mozambique, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Mali) many basic service professionals and skilled workers received \$25-50 a month whereas households of six absolute poverty lines ranged from \$60-125 a month. Roughly comparable medium and large scale private sector posts paid 3 to 5 times as much (up to 8 times for UN agency local staff).

Those levels suggest that - perforce - many African public servants have to act on the Polish comment. They **have to cope**: be absent from workplace to earn; be at workplace but do private business; charge decentralised privatised user fees; engage in corrupt activities (e.g. one-quarter tax for government, one-quarter for 'collector', one-half for 'taxpayer'). The direct impact on services - and especially poor people's access to them - is evident and the downward multiplier or divider via tax non-collection forcing wages down yet further is not analytically hard to grasp.

At senior levels the situation is more diverse partly because opaque, unequal and usually inequitable allowances have multiplied to allow visible lowest to highest pay ratios of 6 to 10 to one and to conceal actual ones of up to 90 to 1. But even so the number of senior personnel receiving over \$250 a month is very small and - excluding 'unofficial' or 'informal sector' incomes - of those receiving over \$1,000 a month minute. A scale with a 10:1 top/bottom ratio and the floor for basic services providers two-thirds the household of six absolute poverty line (\$400-8000 a month at the top and \$40-80 at the bottom) would (except in Ethiopia whose 1993 reforms have moved teaching and begun moving other services to approximately that pattern) double pay for about 90% of public servants (even if allowances were limited to genuine job required cost reimbursement and - perhaps - housing at 15% of pay) and reduce it for a small fraction of 1%.

Low pay - relative to the absolute poverty line and to the private sector - is **not efficient**. **Loss of productivity** per person month more than affects lower person cost per month. To restore productivity, probity and professionalism first and then pay accordingly is literally an

impossible scenario. Most public servants **cannot afford** to work full time, honestly and without charging private fees for public services. Oddly, the exceptions tend to be rural - because other household members can grow food and build housing and/or because if the public servant is serving, the service users often can and will provide food, time to help with crops, home building and maintenance because they know someone must pay him/her for the services to continue and the state is not doing it.

### **PROFESSIONALISM AND POLITICS: MEANING WHAT?**

The debate on clashes between professionalism and politics is confusing (perhaps because confused) especially in Anglophone Africa:

- a **decisions on strategy** - and often on policy - are **by their nature political**;
- b. but they should be **informed by public service analysis** of alternatives and their probable direct and indirect costs and benefits,
- c. which probably does mean a political decision taker needs a handful of top advisers and analysts who **broadly share his/her outlook** and - more problematically - some top administrators he can trust to articulate - implement - monitor decision implementation (rather than to block it by inertia or transform it into what the public servant feels should have been decided).

Those elements suggest a Francophone Cabinet du Ministre system or a modified British one in which the particular postings of the top 1% (or less) of public servants (though not their promotion to or continued employment at those levels) are political as well as professional decisions. That is not - *pace* civil servants who apparently really believe in political servants and professional masters - an attack on professionalism.

Detailed political intervention on professional issues is perhaps rarer than supposed. In Tanzania the typical cases cited were of differences on goals (e.g. 30 to 1 versus 10 to 1 pay scales) or lateral transfers of senior civil servants who either could not develop harmonious relations with Ministers or who were fairly unambiguously unsuccessful but not (under the rather strict civil service regulations) incompetent or delinquent enough to fire. In Ethiopia the bulk of middle and upper level civil servants had careers progressing normally across the Imperial-Dergue-Revolutionary Government divides. Mengistu did impose nominal party membership as a key to promotion, but neither active membership nor informing nor even recasting the public service to fit the particular goals of the Dergue was either compulsory or common. Even when the new government - briefly - dismissed all 'Party' members only about 3% of public servants were impacted and that number was reduced by nine-tenths when actual 'Party' activist roles were substituted for nominal membership as the disqualifying criteria. The

political action before reflection did have costs in terms of morale, dislocation and cleared public servants who chose not to return. "Don't just do something Think it out first" has much to be said for it as a maxim for political decision takers as well as for public servants.

However, at least six very real problems do exist:

1. **corrupt politicians force public servants to be corrupt.** Corruption, as used here, includes appointments and promotions made for reasons other than, and inconsistent with, the public interest. In a basically non-corrupt system this can be (often is) resisted by referring up in the public service and across to top political decision takers. But if the system (or some large chunk of it) is corrupt a very real problem exists. However, it is not one of professionalism but of corruption and ultimately one for public (preferably electoral) pressure;
2. politicians **do not always seek or use information** and, therefore, make very problematic (or pretty clearly unsound) decisions;
3. **both politicians and public servants do believe that knowledge is power and seek to monopolise it.** The "need to know" principle is **anti participatory**, anti accountability and anti democratic in the UK as in Singapore, in Uganda as in Côte d'Ivoire. The transformation to a principle "**need to make known unless clear and present public harm would demonstrably result**" is **hard to achieve in SSA as it is elsewhere**. This is a **cultural** problem but the **culture of secrecy is hardly unique to Africa**. In its more extreme forms the same knowledge is power principle "justifies" holding back data from other public servants and political decision takers and ultimately and pathologically for state and society in seeing public information as a key source of private power and profit (a perception exemplified in the North by insider trading and contract rigging);
4. **public sector penury** (whether no pay and/or no complementary resources to do the job), **corruption** (rendering honest analysis and advice nugatory or at best secondary) and **oppression** whether random or systematic are ultimately political and cultural and do erode or even destroy public service morale, morality, professionalism and capacity whether in Serbia or Burma, Bolivia or Burundi,
5. perceived **external control** over national decisions, an overkill of **parallel** donor and NGO **delivery channels** and excessive **expatriate personnel** and a perception that foreign advice and advisers are automatically preferred to domestic do ultimately demoralise, decapacitate and deprofessionalise public servants. No matter how benign the foreign intentions or those of domestic decision takers who go along with them, such a cultural-political pattern creates a downward dynamic recreating and deepening

weaknesses in the capacity to decide and to deliver it seeks to cure. In a relatively strong state "Have a headache? Take two expatriates!" may do little harm, in a weak one it is necessary to remember overdoses of aspirin are toxic. The external and internal political cultures of neo-Platonic neo-colonialism and of accepting external guidance and responsibility are anti professional in Washington and in Bonn, in Manila and in Port of Spain, in Dakar and in Accra. They are also addictive;

6. **civil servants' own interests** (including in procedures and accountability) can be in **tension with other aspects of public interests**, e.g. reducing gender bias, making providers accountable to users, deploying staff to remote rural areas. In such cases proper (or at least arguably proper) political decisions will certainly not please public servants and may well be seen as 'anti professional'.

### **WHICH CULTURE CLASHES? FOR WHOSE ENDS?**

To claim that public service as a professional means to facilitate decisions in the public interest and the delivery of public services of acceptable quality and quantity to the public is inconsistent with African cultures is either nonsensical, self-exculpatory or racist. It tells more about the frustration, weak observation, racism or personal purpose of the asserter than about Africa, Africans, public servants or public service. In fairness, the commonest motivation may well be despair - the number of failures in public services (in both senses) in SSA is appalling.

The previous sections do set out a number of **culture clashes** from secrecy versus accountability and external guidance versus responsible self-reliance to public service versus private gain. These clashes are **very real, are cultural and exist in SSA**. But **none is in any unique way African**. Posing problems to Africans in Africa, yes. Reasons African states cannot have professional, proficient public services, public processes and public deliveries of services to meet public requirements, no.

Certainly there are **contextual differences**. Unadapted and unexamined imports in this sector are no more (indeed rather less) likely to be functional (let alone optimal) than in other sectors. But that is hardly unique to public services or to Africa. What is rather more surprising is how well only moderately adapted public services functioned - in terms of policy advising and of service delivery - in several African countries up to 1980, and how resilient some have proven in the face of adversity. Nor is it likely to be accidental that civil service reform/renewal discussion in Addis Ababa, Asmara and Hargeisa has hauntingly familiar overtones to those who participated in similar dialogues in Accra or Lagos in the early, or Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in the late, 1960s. What is being sought - often by men and (occasionally) women with no personal background in colonial or immediate post colonial

public services - is very clearly a moderately adapted and more professional/less administrative variant on a (somewhat idealised) model of late colonial British public service.

That similar nostalgia is not so evident in Dakar or Maputo is unsurprising. Senegal inherited an overload of expensive senior personnel from a defunct regional government and also pay scales tied to French ones that prevented any drive toward universal access to any services (beyond a state security focused gendarmerie and a law-order-taxation centred set of local outposts of central administration). Portuguese colonial administration in practice - as opposed to on paper - was *ad hoc*, arbitrary and - to the bitter end - anti African in a way British and French were not. Further, no independent Lusophone African state inherited a functioning system nor an historic memory embodied in a substantial hold over cadre (expatriate or citizen) of middle and senior public servants.

**Arguments that African societies are based on affinity and have no broader public accountability principles or obligations simply do not square either with most historic records or many present observations.** Affinity - family, social group, cultural - is an influence anywhere and not inherently a malign one. "Old boy networks" (literally - one of their problems is that they tend to perpetuate historic male dominance) do serve to provide reasonably competent candidates with whom incumbents know they can work - neither an insignificant positive factor. The problem - in SSA or anywhere else - is ensuring public services do have equal access for equally competent persons. As the windrows of anti-nepotism and equal opportunity regulations and laws in the North indicate, this is not simple anywhere.

Similarly, the arguments that **human rights, pluralism** (in the sense of multiple social sector organisations), **checks and balances and accountability of leaders** are alien concepts to Africans is either based on a handful of special cases, an ill-advised attempt to find direct replication of an external observer's home country verbal and institutional, racism, a desire to exculpate the self-interest of authoritarian rulers or despairing confusion.

The African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights and Responsibilities is both recognisably within the broad stream of the conceptual evolution of universal human rights and recognisably African. It does place **greater stress than historic Northern formulations on rights of persons and groups of persons within society and it does link rights and reciprocal obligations in ways which are culturally African**. But in doing so it arguably is in the advance guard of current global evolution of rights thinking. Certainly it is logically stronger in setting parameters for public servants.

Similarly, in Africa - as in Asia, in Latin America and in Europe - there are leaders who believe in **Platonic Guardianship** - deciding **for** the people not accountability **to** or decisions **by**



them. So long as their states do deliver and are neither wildly inconsistent nor ubiquitously oppressive, these leaders may well have the passive support of many of their subjects. That again is - at least historically - a universal not an African phenomenon. And the breadth, depth and unconditionality of popular acceptance of such doctrines is open to doubt - such leaders (whether in Singapore or Uganda, the Dominican Republic or Kenya) are not prone to allowing either "level playing field" elections or in depth, confidential interview analysis of people's views by independent observers.

Certainly, public services - and indeed the articulation of the concept of public service - involves culture. Equally certainly it involves **cultural tensions** (both bureaucracy and universal access to basic services are societal/cultural constructs and fairly recent ones at that). Certainly these **vary with historical, geographic and resource availability contexts** which do - and should - influence both form and substance. But to describe these realities as an **inconsistency between African culture (more accurately cultures of Africans) and modern public services, is to misrepresent**.

## II.

### **GOOD GOVERNANCE AS BASIC SERVICE DELIVERY**

From the perspective of the field, the street, the shop and the workplace - if not necessarily State House, university or consultancy firm - **good governance is very largely about delivery of basic services in user friendly ways by public services perceived as broadly within the same socio political and cultural ethos as the users**. Assuming a viable state, this does imply a precondition of independence and of a government not dominated by a narrow clique.

Basic services can be summarised as:

1. **Peace, Security and Certainty** - constables, magistrates, laws and practices to ensure ordinary people can go about their lives without arbitrary interference and especially without being the victims of violence (private or public) and confidence that violators will at the least be deterred and - preferably - sought for, found and subjected to sanctions (not left to themselves, overlooked and/or sanctioned in the sense of licensed or approved).
2. **Education** - primary, applied, adult- perceived as both relevant to household and local aspirations (including, but not limited to, enhanced livelihoods), adequate in quality to be serviceable and delivered in user friendly (as to location, cost and - especially for adults - style of teacher/student interaction) modes.

3. **Basic Health Services** - preventative, educational, primary curative and linked agro/nutritional - again accessible (as to location and cost), serviceable and respectful of patients/students.
4. **Water** - household (including human, livestock and crop with different relative stress in different contexts) supplies accessible at acceptable cost (including opportunity costs of going to and transporting it and of maintaining facilities).
5. **Food security** - in respect to ability to produce (land access, relevant extension services) and to reliable safety nets, e.g. work for food, food for work and/or ration distribution programmes when natural (e.g. drought or flood) or manmade (e.g. war) events prevent production (of food and of other income sources).
6. **Access to physical infrastructure** - especially roads and bridges, as well as the infrastructure for the services listed earlier. The opportunity cost of walking to roads and the cash cost of buying or - especially - selling other than on roads are frequently very high in rural areas and those of isolation (by physical gaps or costs) from central workplaces and markets are often nearly as high in cities.
7. **Access to markets** - goes beyond physical infrastructure. It is the business of the state to ensure that poor households are not - as producers and as consumers - exploited by collusive oligopsonies and oligopolies (private, public or licensed quasi social sector such as many co-ops). What this requires varies widely - e.g. access to transport, to credit, to places to buy and to sell for small to medium rural based enterprises are often relevant and in agriculture geographic and floor price buyers of last resort and catastrophe price capping stock owners (not necessarily operators) may be as well.

## **BASIC SERVICES, THE STATE AND THE SOCIAL SECTOR**

There is a very strong pragmatic and moral case for public sector provision of these services:

- a. all are characterised by **economies of scale** (e.g. one primary teacher with a class of 30 versus 3 tutored pupils, mass produced versus limited run texts);
- b. all involve **heavy up-front expenditure for cumulatively larger future** (up to lifetime especially in respect to education, health and nutrition) **gains**. Therefore, given the radical imperfection of credit markets, any full cost present payment system will exclude poor households and especially poor children and women;
- c. **universal access provision cannot be made profitable** and therefore cannot be provided primarily through private market mechanisms.

Each of these considerations is global but each applies with special force in Africa.

Unless the state is the dominant strategist and financial provider, universal service access in Africa is and will remain a daydream (as it would have in the USA, the UK or Sweden). It is possible to envisage substantial domestic social sector roles in actual service provision (e.g. by churches, mosques, temples, women's groups, trade unions, civic associations) and some by private enterprises, but only within a state designed and monitored context. The most successful domestic social sector operations (e.g. in health and education in Ghana, Namibia and Tanzania and in nutrition by local women's groups in Tanzania) are co-operative state/domestic social sector ones and meld state, social sector institution and user resources. Analogously user fees can have a secondary role to play, especially in cases in which benefits are immediate and costs of present alternative supplies can be redeployed as user fees (e.g. water, but also health and education where relatively high cost/low efficiency services have been purchased primarily because no decent quality public sector ones were to hand).

To insist on a **state monopoly** - including banning amenity services provided at full cost in the private sector - is rather **blindly ideological** (especially when the banned include the domestic social sector). But to insist on **primarily private and/or user fee financed provision** is either remarkably unobservant and analytically **inept or based on the ultra ideological premise that universal access to basic services as a medium term goal is not a priority - i.e. that poor people do not matter**. That is to deny the political economy and moral economy principle that no society can be great and prosperous the majority of whose people are poor and miserable, a proposition central to the work of socially concerned conservative economists such as Adam Smith.

#### **UNIVERSAL ACCESS: SOME GENDER CONSIDERATIONS**

It may be useful to note the **gender implications of a universal access approach strategy**:

1. universal access is disproportionately favourable to those initially disproportionately excluded - i.e. to women and girl children in almost all SSA cases;
2. household health and water services are almost entirely on the female side of African household (cultural) divisions of labour except in respect to initial facility building which is primarily on the male side. Therefore, universal access in these sectors (including less distance to facilities) does reduce women's and girl's - workload and facilitate better own health, child care, nutrition, environmental sanitation and educational attendance;
3. because provision and maintenance in respect to water and nutrition are seen as primarily female responsibilities, user committees are often seen as logically dominantly female. Because men do value water, food and healthy children, success by women in running

such committees improves their status both directly and (probably) by increasing their access to other leadership posts.

Those points suggest the importance of **mainstreaming gender issues**. Some public services are particularly important to women and universal access is generally empowering for them. To ignore those realities is not to be "gender blind" but gender biased - however unintentionally. And some programmes to be user friendly to women need to be different from those for men because their tasks are different - e.g. it makes little sense to teach water maintenance or weeding to men if women in fact do the work. If women farmers have different crop and work patterns than men, it is no more sensible to have identical programmes for men and women than for - say - pastoralists, mixed farmers, annual crop growers and tree cropping farmers.

But by the same token separate women's programmes appear an unsound general approach. In practice they will be marginalised and weak. And the agricultural analogy applies - a separate ministry of women's agriculture is as sensible as a set of separate ministries for livestock, tree cropping, irrigated farming, mixed farming and rainfed annual cropping.

For the avoidance of doubt it is not being argued that gender tensions or inequities are unique to Africa. They are universal. However, forms and priorities vary. This is graphically illustrated by the final infuriated retort of a South African enforced rural resident woman at a gender conference in the UK to her persistent northern feminist 'supporters' - "But you just don't understand. I don't want to know how to get rid of my husband. What I want is to be legally and financially able to live together with him and our children".

The gender aspects increase the case for public sector provision since equity and universal access plus external economies (economic and social) are involved which could hardly be pursued (or the gains from them captured) by a private, 'for profit' enterprise. As more generally the case for user-domestic social sector-state partnership is strong in respect to gender aspects.

## **BASIC SERVICES AND BASIC CADRES**

The professionals, para-professionals and skilled workers/artisans providing these basic services comprise over half the non-military public service in virtually all SSA countries and around three-quarters in most. Indeed, in some - e.g. Mali, Ethiopia - primary school teachers alone are virtually half. In most cases the second largest cadre is that of nurses and health para-professionals and the third civilian police. It is rare for these three groups of field level basic service providers not to add up to half the public service. For example, in Tanzania they

are 100,000, 50,000 and 25,000 respectively of a total of 325,000 and in Mozambique 40,000, 15,000 and 7,500 of 110,000.

### III.

#### WHY THE 1980-95 DECLINE AFTER 1960-79 IMPROVEMENT?

Over 1960-79 many - not all - African public services improved in range of services provided and numbers served; to a degree in quality of services and of bureaucratic procedures; markedly in range and depth of analysis and advice to decision takers as well as in average levels of training and experience. To view 1960-79 (or the first post colonial period for countries whose independence dates to the late 1960s through 1980) as a golden age would be romantic - there were plenty of limitations and exceptions even then and, as subsequently demonstrated, what was achieved was all too fragile and readily reversed. Nonetheless, the **overall trend was upward** and forward and nothing in the 1960-79 record gives a basis for projecting either the scope or the scale of 1980-95 deterioration and decline.

Judging from expenditure data adjusted for price changes, **SSA government spending per capita on basic services has fallen 40% since 1979**. Adjusting for quality deterioration suggests a **real per capita fall in average basic service availability in the 40% to 50% range**. In practice this average understates the fall in most (not all) poorer countries and to most poor households in poorer and less poor countries. Budget curtailment has been most severe in poorer countries while, with a few exceptions, basic service deterioration has been greatest in outlying rural areas and small towns and failure to expand to match population growth most marked in peri urban areas whose urban newcomer populations are dominantly poor.

Parallel to the decline in real expenditure and causally linked to service delivery deterioration in quality, accessibility to poor households and - less markedly - absolute quantity have been **falls in real remuneration of public servants**. These have rarely (economic success cases like Botswana, Mauritius, Seychelles, are exceptions as are 'buy in' former settler ruled territory agreements preserving or limiting falls in real white official wages but evening up those of African public servants) been less than **50%** and in **some cases appear to exceed 80%**. For example, in Ethiopia, nominal public service pay scales had been static for two decades prior to 1993 reforms.

**The falls in per capita resource allocation and in real pay to public servants are clearly the dominant causes of public service and public services declines** The falls in turn are largely the result of sustained economic unsuccess. That constraint has been accentuated by -

largely external - ideological pressures to cut both public service emoluments and numbers parallel to responses - both domestic and external - to fiscal exigencies (including increased debt service and - often - defence demands as well as revenue squeezes often related to collapsed real emoluments of tax collectors) leading to constricting the largest chunk (usually 30% to 35%) of public spending, the civilian payroll.

However, in assessing both the present crises confronting most SSA public services and the reasons for decline - to identify ways to achieve turnarounds not to allocate blame - more articulated identification of causal factors is useful.

### STEPS ON A DOWNWARD PATH

**Numbers** of basic service providers are **seriously inadequate**. In most countries they peaked in the late 1970s or early 1980s and have declined since - while populations have risen on average by 40%. In Tanzania, for example, total central and local government public service employment was of the order of 350,000 in 1974 and 320,000 in 1995 while population had risen by about three-quarters. Even allowing for reallocation (heavily away from an - admittedly inefficient - field level set of agricultural extension and research services and a large cadre of non-functional former local tax collectors) the implications for primary and adult education and especially health, water and roads are dire.

Mali illustrates how inadequate the numbers can be in primary education. To provide universal access with a maximum of 40 students per class (an average of 35 given population dispersion in much of the country) would require five times the present primary teacher cadre which is half the public service. In health, Mozambique with 16,000,000 people, has 19,000 health personnel, versus 55,000 for under 30,000,000 in Tanzania, which (with major retraining and some reallocation) probably has about the minimum level required for universal primary health service access.

It is quite true that **employees surplus to requirements** - largely messengers, cleaners, drivers, cooks, bottle washers and junior clerks - are on most payrolls in SSA (as elsewhere). But a reasoned estimate can hardly exceed 5% on average and their share of the payroll 2%. To concentrate on this to the exclusion of the glaring shortages is hardly a route to public service reform if reform is intended to enhance delivery. Nor is it evident that massive retrenchment programmes whose gestation, conflict and morale costs are high (and which usually lead to severance and training payments wiping out two to three years fiscal savings) are more efficient than enforced non-rehiring on retirement, dismissal or departure which over 10 years could cut employment in the surplus prone cadres 25% to 40%. The exception to this rule is "ghost" workers which are substantial in some services and should be exorcised promptly on probity and professional as well as fiscal grounds.

Similarly, many basic service providers - quite possibly half - either lack adequate **initial training** or are long overdue for **retraining and/or refresher and upgrading courses**. And among them are some **unsuitable holders of necessary posts**. But in these cases **retraining and/or replacement, not net reductions are needed**. Training adequacy - in quantity, quality and date is a major cause of decline. Training budgets have frequently been butchered of muscle, not merely trimmed of fat. Many Tanzanian primary health care workers have not had updating training for well over a decade while knowledge in respect to PHC (especially in respect to prevention, education and relationships with users and user groups) has changed radically over that period. Perhaps a quarter of Mozambican primary school teachers have so limited a knowledge base (including lack of a working knowledge of the language of instruction) that replacement - not retraining - may be needed.

**Bureaucracy** - in the sense of routinising the routine and allowing implementation to be decentralised, prompt and by field level officers - has **deteriorated**. In areas as varied as primary textbook delivery and allocation of mobility (vehicles and fuel), known, standardised procedures operated at base level on delegated authority have often eroded to the point of disappearance. **Referral up to clog** senior personnel's desks with myriads of micro actions, **inconsistent** (and often patently inefficient) decisions at field level and - perhaps most commonly - **neither referring nor acting** (i.e. not attempting to get the job done) do nothing for service delivery or public service reputation (or morale).

**Complementary resource constraints** limit the effectiveness of competent staff in place and seeking to do their best. Lack of drugs, texts, mobility, spare parts, basic furniture and equipment, training - the litany of woes is all too well known to anyone who has talked to field level - and indeed to operating ministry national director - level. "Give us the tools and we'll do the job" may be too simplistic, but "Give us too few, too decrepit tools and we cannot do the job" is a statement of fact.

**Pay levels prevent a majority of public servants from working full time on public business unless they charge generalised, privatised user fees of one variety or another**. This is not a matter of morality or greed but of necessity - often dire necessity. In a majority of SSA public services primary school teachers and similar level professionals are paid 30% to 35% of household of six absolute poverty line budgetary requirements. Even allowing for income of other household members 50% would appear to be the short term floor - and 66<sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub>% the medium term target - to make possible full time public service without private user fees collected by public servants for their own use.

**To argue that these pay levels are set by market forces is either an absurdity or an obscenity**. The state is in these markets a **dominant oligopsonist** to a near monopolist. Comparable **private sector wages by middle and large enterprises tend to be 2 to 5 times**

**as high** (and aid agency including UNDP/UN in the 6 to 8 times range). The former are set by what employers think prudent to achieve worker probity and productivity and the latter by what agency personnel consider minimum socially decent pay levels for local staff under local conditions. True, governments can pay lower emoluments and keep many staff (usually not the best) but only because private sector opportunities are quantitatively limited, 30% of needs is better than a risk of 0% and coping mechanisms fill the gap. What none of these provide are efficiency, motivation and probity. Further, the demonstration effects of government as grossly exploitative employer are presumably socially and economically negative.

**Coping** (perhaps better styled survival tactics) keeps public servants, and their households, alive and most in post. But almost all variants corrode performance, probity and morale even if in their absence performance would often be even worse because many would perforce exit the public service:

- a. **non-attendance at work** - from frequent lateness and absenteeism to "ghost working" is a dominant element in coping - to free time to earn elsewhere; as is
- b. **non-performance of public duties** while at workplace, because engaging in private earning; often
- c. using **public facilities** (e.g. computers) and materials (e.g. vehicle spares) to carry on private business; and/or
- d. **charging** privatised, generalised, decentralised **user fees** (e.g. for stamping and posting letters, allowing past reception, hearing lectures key to passing exams, gaining access to primary health care or to bedpans in hospitals) which has become ubiquitous in many countries; verging into
- e. **corruption** proper (e.g. charging vehicle/driving fines at half rate, off-the-record and into-the-pocket or splitting tax due, perhaps one-quarter - one half to Treasury, 'collector' and payer); but also
- f. **exodus** - at one stage half of all qualified Ghanaian teachers from primary level up, were working outside Ghana, three-fifths to two-thirds of Mozambique's citizen tertiary graduates now work abroad (many at sub-professional levels); while
- g. **other family members** - including children - are required (by necessity not patriarchy) to **earn more** and avoidable expenses (including time for attending classes and going to clinics) are cut out.



**War** (or violent, generalised, continuing social disorder) destroys physical assets, engrosses resources (including trained personnel), diverts attention, poses physical threats to public service personnel (especially in rural areas) and blocks or at least hampers access for service delivery. For example, in Mozambique and Angola, about three-quarters of basic health and education facilities were damaged, destroyed and/or abandoned at least once in the 1980s. In Ethiopia, the "peace dividend" - reallocation of about three-quarters of the former 'Defence' Budget has been enough to finance a near doubling of public service real wages. Collapse into near anarchy - e.g. Somalia, Liberia - evidently involves the near liquidation of public services in both senses. Neither a safe context nor resources exist. The most serious long term economic - and fiscal - effect is the loss of output base as a result of investment - physical and human - not made. In 1990, Mozambique's output was less than half of what it probably would have been in the absence of war and Tanzania's (despite having managed to avert significant fighting on its own soil except for the 1987 Amin invasion) at least 25% lower. Even restored growth is, and continues to be, from a lower base. This loss is magnified if a weak public service - at analytical and policy and/or at basic service delivery levels - retards rehabilitation, reconstruction and renewal of livelihoods, infrastructure and basic services.

**Corruption** whether from need or greed erodes quality and increases cost decision taking and of implementation. It also corrodes the morale (and erodes the probity) of honest public servants. When systemic it can virtually totally destroy both probity and professionalism with massive negative effects on quality and quantity of services. Systemic corruption, once entrenched, is hard to reverse especially when the dominant ethos (even if criticised) has been that the basic purpose of public office is private gain. Among less poor countries, Nigeria, Zaire and Liberia, and among very poor, Sierra Leone, illustrate this pathology.

It is necessary to accept that corruption is not everywhere and always incompatible with the continued existence or even emergence of a professional, competent public service. Korea in the 1960-90 period and the UK in the first half of the 19th Century illustrate these two points. However, both seem to suggest that the kind of corruption matters. In the UK corruption was apparently primarily a user fee to speed up delivery of services to which the briber had some claim or a screening device among multiple candidates which did not directly distort macro patterns of decisions. In Korea it appears to have been more an *ex post* tax (dominantly by political decision takers not public servants) on beneficiaries of decisions taken on public policy criteria and professional advice. Those patterns are morally undesirable and cost raising, but - unlike the many cases in Africa in which the bribe leads to the decision - do not necessarily distort patterns of decision taking. The difference is important but narrow; widespread corruption of any kind places decision takers and officials on the slippery slope to the nadir in which maximisation of bribes becomes the chief strategic principle in selecting

decisions to be made as well as of 'partners' to whom to award contracts, concessions or other resource flows.

Violent **oppression** is destructive - whatever the pay levels - especially when it is arbitrary and unpredictable. Public servants cannot operate professionally and - in the context of apparently capricious action - cannot safely operate at all. Uganda under Amin and the Central African Empire are illustrative. As in the war case, exodus of public servants as refugees or to safer jobs abroad is frequently large.

**Politicisation** in respect to damage to the public service is usually a synonym or prettification of corruption, war and/or oppression. While political interference in day to day decisions in an arbitrary manner can - by destroying predictability and preventing professionalism - be severely damaging cases in the absence of systemic corruption, oppression and war do not seem to exist in SSA. It is true that participatory, decentralised democracy or quasi democracy can constrain public servants (especially at policy advising and senior administrative level) simply by being unpredictable and threatening - even though not inherently improper - but this does not appear to be a major causal factor even in cases - e.g. Tanzania, Mozambique, Ghana - cited as examples and in others - e.g. Kenya - it would be simpler to describe the interference as enforcement or corruption and oppression.

**Culture conflict** is indeed a factor in public service weakening but not in the sense of a clash between an inherently 'North-western' public service and an inherently 'African' social and/or political culture. Cultural clashes between order and professionalism and arbitrariness and personalised intervention do exist as do those between serving the public and using (abusing) public office for personal gain. But the clashes are intra African in SSA just as they are intra European in Europe. Indeed some - e.g. the culture of 'need to know' versus that of 'duty to be accountable' are often within public services and not closely associated with attainment of reasonable levels of performance and professionalism. Sweden's public sector openness and Britain's official culture of secrecy have both proven compatible with competent public administration and service delivery.

**External domination/domestic loss of self-confidence** (and in some cases self-respect) are initially consequences of decline but once entrenched feed back as causes in a decapitating dynamic. The creation - usually in the hope of short run delivery gains - of a plethora of parallel service delivery channels (bilateral, international, external NGO) is cost inefficient, public service and domestic social sector debilitating by diversion of resources and even more debilitating because of the loss of external, user and public servant confidence in the public service. Frequently - mostly notably in Mozambique - it exacerbates decapitation, thereby becoming a major part of the problem to which it purports to be an answer. Analogously the flood of expatriate personnel whether advisory, nominally in public service posts or in

externally run public sector quangos (e.g. many World Bank project managers/projects) are ultimately dynamically problem deepening in ways more selective support for domestic institutions is not. Many of the personnel replace public servants driven out (or rendered ineffectual) by collapse of emoluments and complementary resources. Others have such limited contextual knowledge as to provide exceedingly ill-conceived advice and to create real culture clashes (temporary, external advisors not bearing consequences of decisions versus permanent domestic public servants who have to live with them). In general - even when competent, concerned and informed - if they come to dominate, or to be seen to dominate, decision taking they decapitate domestic analytical and advisory capacity, self-confidence and morale. This is the case even if the reverse is intended. By making the domestic be seen as inferior and efforts to produce independent advice and analysis (let alone strategy) pointless, they 'capacitate' only cultures of dependence, self-doubt and bitter resentment. Hardly surprisingly they - and domestic decision takers seen to be "in their pockets" - are frequently the last to be aware of these dynamics even if senior public servants and domestic social sector personnel (and often a few expatriates perceived as "on our side") feel them only too clearly. **The problem is not primarily advice or criticism - it is advice and criticism seen as not open to reasoned dialogue and systematically backed by financial sanctions** More welcome expatriates, agencies and NGOs are by no means uniformly less forceful in expressing ideas, proffering advice or criticising, but are usually much more listening and open to dialogue and virtually never are in command of financial big battalions.

#### IV.

### CULTURES AND VALUES IN CONFLICT AND TENSION

Clearly, any institution will function imperfectly if it is in violent conflict with the cultures in which it operates and whose members it is supposed to serve and especially if its internal culture is in radical conflict with the non-workplace cultures of most of those who staff it. However, to set up public services and African culture as inherently contradictory is simplistic in the extreme.

**Cultures are plural, varied and overlapping** To speak of African culture is not unrealistic in certain respects so long as it is recognised that it is equally true to speak of African cultures which are by no means identical. Indeed if one ran a range of African cultures from that of the remnant hunter gatherer San of the Kalahari to the middle class black urban culture of Johannesburg and from Cockney London to the near medieval peasant farming plus migrant labour of Tras os Montes in Portugal on certain bases some African cultures would be closer to some European than to the most different African and *vice versa*.

The **pluralism** - at least in the late 20th Century - **applies to most persons too** - household, religious, socio-political and workplace cultures (and behaviour patterns) are not identical. It is true that less technological, less mobile, more nearly unitary cultures in which household lineage, religion and governance comprise a nearly seamless whole have existed historically, but few survive in that form today in SSA or anywhere else.

Further, **cultures change**. This is not surprising as they are human constructs and the possibilities and the aspirations of human groups change over time. **Both multiple overlapping cultures and change** (especially rapid change) **do create cultural (and other) tensions**. Ability to change - preferably pro-actively and endogenously - is under most circumstances a *sine qua non* for the continued strength of a culture. The exceptions are largely small, socially complex, technologically simple, resource constrained isolated community cultures - e.g. the San cited earlier and the small hunter gatherers of the Zaire/Uganda border mountains and rain forests. These cultures tend not to transform endogenously and to collapse tragically rather than adapt in changing contexts.

Certain general sets of tensions (or open conflicts - i.e. unmanageable or ill-managed tensions) can be identified:

- a. **urban/rural** - based on the more mobile, looser linkages possible, functional and/or desired in urban (and modern large scale farming) areas than in small family farming plus supporting occupation based rural areas. Because more recent and subject to more pressures for change, African urban cultures are often weaker than rural (not that this is uniquely African - inner city cultural decay, rather than transformation or even adjustment, is very marked in the North);
- b. **pastoralist/cropping** - especially when the former are quasi nomadic. African public services have in general done a poor job of adapting basic services delivery to meet nomadic group needs and a worse one of providing user friendly access to water and drought year reserve pastures (both of which tend to be engrossed by sedentary croppers). Since pastoralists do pay indirect taxes and licenses and believe governance should serve them, they are aggrieved. Arguably, the roots of conflict in Mali are not so much ethnic as nomadic pastoralist (Tuareg) perception that they are getting a raw deal;
- c. **Ethnic** - while interlocked with economic (as in pastoralist/cropper cases), frequently misunderstood (e.g. Inkatha and its most bitter enemies are both Zulu - one largely the heirs of the Zulu Empire and the other descendants of Zulu who had fled from its advance) as well as manipulated (as Belgium - not always intentionally - did in respect to Hutu/Tutsi relationships) do have a clear reality especially in times of great stress. Bosnia, Chechnya,

East Timor all illustrate this arena or vehicle of cleavage and conflict just as much as do Liberia and Zaire

Arguably, some cultures place more stress on the **person in society** (in the context of inter personal and inter basic group relations) and others on the **individual**. Historically this is a differentiation on which most of Africa and parts of Asia do diverge from Europe and the Americas. However, these **differences are rarely binary** - either/or - but **usually a matter of degree**. Possibly that too is an area of historic divergence Asian (as in the yin/yang interpenetration symbol) and African cultures (some - e.g. the Akan - with similar symbols) usually have in practice built in more complexity (and perhaps balance), and European more binariness and individualism.

### AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Pre colonial African states - as noted - did **not have large public services**. This is quite different from saying that they were not really states - though some were very small, limited and inchoate.

Most did have an **executive** (usually a king plus advisors-counsellors-administrators-generals), some **representative elements** (e.g. age groups, lineage heads, elders, religious leaders), a **security function** (usually undifferentiated military/police), **revenue collection** services, a **body of laws** and enforceable customs with some **forms of judicial process and local administration**. What they lacked - as did Europe until the 19th Century - was a large cadre of specialised mass service delivery officials. Health and education services were certainly not unknown, but were much less specialised than today and their provision was much less perceived as part of the governance function. In that sense colonial (not that mass service provision played much part in them until the twilight years of the colonial era!) and post colonial public services do represent a new culture.

Many of the problems in African public services ascribed to culture probably relate to this novelty. The workplace culture of even a user friendly, efficiently bureaucratic public service is not (one hopes) identical to that of any household or family. Understanding and adapting to these differences takes time for individuals and cultures.

More specifically, one is tempted to argue that the notably weak record and file keeping, as well as communication answering, characterising almost all African public services may be a result of the dominantly verbal and face to face nature of historic African cultures. One objection to this reading is obvious. Egyptian and Sudanese states have had written records and - at least at elite and government official levels - recorded as well as face to face verbal cultures for at least 3,000 years, but are not notably better at record keeping or

communication. And *per contra* lack of historic memory (exacerbated by weak files and archives) is rampant in African public services - surprisingly in the context of cultures in which oral tradition has been important. This may be the price of a rather over enthusiastic importation of the European (especially the British) public service culture of frequent post, substance and location shifts of personnel.

That said, the supposed 'un-African' features of public services tend to disintegrate on examination:

1. **large scale analytical, communication and data handling and basic service delivery** functions are **new elements** with which pre-19th Century European and pre-colonial African cultures and governance structures had little or no experience. While cultural and other contextual elements require secondary - and occasionally major - variations, the functions and their scale do impose certain parameters on effective ways of dealing with them. These are common constraints in Ghana and Canada, the UK and Sri Lanka, Singapore and South Africa and ignoring or violating (whether negligently, corruptly or dictatorially) them decapitates and corrodes both the public service and public services.
2. As principles, **delegation, decentralisation, standard procedures and user accountability are not alien to Africans** nor to most African cultures. Many pre-colonial African states were substantially decentralised - certainly the larger ones had to be given distances and communications technology. Some powers were delegated but some were effectively vested in local officials and in bodies - e.g. age groups, religious groups - outside the central executive. In at least some systems failing officials and counsellors (civil as well as military) were dismissed (sometimes with more extreme prejudice than a modern public service termination) and 'user' views played a part in such actions. Similarly, kings, omanhenes and other rulers were frequently both hereditary and electoral (choice from a lineage or family but indirectly elected within that range) and impeachment (in the evocative West African forest term, "destooling", and the rather more ominous savannah one "deskining"). Certainly modern Civil Service Commissions and multi party elections (indeed standing parties as such) were unknown, but the principles to which they are means were known and often practised. Certainly practice was often imperfect and sometimes absent, but the same can be said of Civil Service Commissions and of multi party elections in all continents.
3. **Political Policy Decisions, Service Delivery Articulation and Implementation** universally (not only in Africa) produce tensions. It is public servants business to **advise**, to **produce options**, to present data to **inform decisions** and to **accept and seek to implement** decisions in good faith or to resign. Public servants should not aspire to being undercover Platonic guardians ventriloquising political decision takers. Tensions are

greater (and less likely to be creative) when the decision takers have little claim to political legitimacy or competence. However, action to restore legitimate government is not (and cannot be) a public service function even if persons who are public servants may feel (and be) obligated to undertake it in their personal or cultural group capacities. On articulation and implementation (operational means as contrasted with strategic ends) public servants can - and should - be proactive and emphatic. With competent decision takers they will usually be given a serious hearing if (and only if) they clearly do accept the decision and indicate how it **could** be implemented (not just that the Minister's means won't work!). Clearly there are always tensions and occasionally conflicts but in workable systems of legitimate political decision, takers and professional public servants these are resolvable and can even be creative. Mwalimu Nyerere once remarked that on a major policy decision it was the two civil servants who had advised forcefully against it (and achieved revisions) who had also taken the lead in articulating ways to carry it out which could achieve intended gains and minimise the costs they felt should have led to a different decision because they (the officials) clearly felt both halves were their professional duty. That is not an optimal resolution - neither he nor they had achieved an agreed position on the decision - but public policy dialogue and implementation had been carried out rationally and professionally.

4. **"Open objective criteria" versus "old boy networks"** is a universal - not a uniquely African - source of tension. There is a need for a certain degree of **common culture** (including educational background and styles of interpersonal relations) **within a public service**. There is a valid case for senior policy advisory, articulating and administering officials to have **broad sympathy with the overall objectives** (even if not necessarily all details timings or proposed means) of the political decision takers to whom they work. There are **limitations to the information provided by standardised examination results** and paper records. The **limitations of personalised, personal preference** (or prejudice) related recruitment (not least in respect to women) are also well known. Nominally wholly objective systems usually build in (not necessarily intentionally) cultural biases as do even independent, stylised interviews. **Both objectivity and subjective personal judgement** are needed, getting the balance right is difficult - in Africa as elsewhere.
5. **Corruption is corruption** and is no more African or conceptually difficult for Africans to understand and to recognise than for people of any other continent. Nepotism, extortion and bribery do exist in Africa - as elsewhere - but have never been general African values. To assert the contrary is an expression of despair, of denigration, or of self-exculpation.

- 6 **Repressive dictatorships are repressive dictatorships.** Historically they have neither been uncommon nor the norm in Africa (or anywhere else). Exclusion from decision taking, oppression and state violence are not beloved of nor acceptable to African peoples, even if at times they have been endured. The recurrent crises in certain pre-colonial African states with personalised, inherently violent, quasi totalitarian governance (e.g. the Zulu Empire and Abomey Kingdom) strongly suggest the reverse. Again the advocates of this thesis are usually either despairing, beneficiaries or external observers out to justify their attitudes toward Africa and Africans or to use Africa as a symbol of impending generalised, global chaos.

The last two points should serve as a warning against accepting "African culture" as a reason for rejecting public services on guidelines and with parameters not fundamentally different from those of Singapore or Taiwan, the USA or the UK - or for accepting 'guided one party systems' which are in fact mal-guided, no party, dictatorships. It is necessary to ask "*qui bono*" (who gains) from the contention, if it is accepted, and why it is being put. All too often 'authenticite' is the last defence of a scoundrel seeking to justify the unjustifiable.

There are plenty of cases of expressed desires of ordinary Africans and of African public servants to achieve - or regain - public services and governance patterns which in broad terms (if not necessarily in secondary features) would be perfectly recognisable to public administration and governance analysts and practitioners in the North (or Asia). The now largely domestically driven civil service reform programmes of Ghana and Tanzania fall into this pattern. The totally internally generated (and rather faster moving) Ethiopian one is very much about regaining what was found and lost and now must be sought and won back under unpropitious resource availability circumstances. The same is true in Somaliland where the 'authentic African' official system of Siad Barre is dismissed with contempt and the necessary first step is seen as recreating the public service and public services which had begun to emerge in the twilight of British rule over 1947-60. The memory of the law and order, health, education, water, veterinary services, basic infrastructure capacity of that period (even if surely somewhat romantically remembered because of the mounting 1960-1991 dynamic of disaster) is one of the driving elements of "The Somaliland Idea".

**Africans have for at least half a century increasingly demanded basic services.** Some governments have - not unsuccessfully in popular legitimacy and re-electability terms - made their delivery a **central strategic goal**. Botswana, Mauritius and Tanzania are historic examples and the new Ethiopian government - like that of Mozambique - seems set on the same trajectory. What services are demanded and what quality is perceived as minimally acceptable varies with knowledge and past experience. Somalians (not Somalilanders however) do not, judging by a research study, realise health is a service the government can be



expected to provide. Probably the basic reason is that in Somalia (but not Somaliland) it never has in practice done so. Veterinary and water services - which were at one time provided relatively widely - are expected. Tanzanians have remarkably firm (and broad ranging over the whole range of basic services cited earlier) expectations and views as to acceptable quality. Both the political culture (not just the views of Mwalimu Nyerere) and 1960-1980 developments built that cultural characteristic. And in the context of relatively accountable governance (with frequent reposting of officials and defeat of politicians who were seen as unaccountable) that cultural expectation has enforced real (and by no means totally unsuccessful) effort to maintain - and in some areas, e.g. vaccination, nutrition - extend and transform basic services during over a decade and a half of extreme overall and fiscal resource constraints. The idea that bureaucracy to ensure replacement seed corn reached senior female household members via a joint state-church effort in refugee impacted Ngora District or that the police around the huge (and internally violent) refugee camps and the army forces watching the border to keep Rwandaise violence in Rwanda were un-African external imports which should be rejected would (once comprehended) be rejected by Ngorans with some vehemence, as opposition political parties trying to campaign on those themes in the 1994 local government elections discovered. The Ngorans clearly **believed in public services from public servants and the public service operated on the basis that it was its duty to provide them. Arguably, Tanzania is atypical. What is assuredly not, is un-African**

## V.

### ELEMENTS TOWARD WAYS FORWARD

Public service reconstruction and revival for the provision of public services as a part of improved governance is hardly in itself a controversial objective. Disputes - it would be unwise to style some as dialogues - turn on role, timing and key elements.

Three key elements are in large part beyond public service reform - or at any rate larger than it - although it is at the least a significant contributing element to their success, or failure:

1. **Peace and security** require an end to (and avoidance of future) war. To a limited extent this depends on military forces: e.g. Tanzania's keeping violence across its Western borders from spilling over for 35 years with only two major incidents and one substantial failure. To a much greater one it turns on political negotiations (with success apparently partly contingent on fatigue and a mutual belief neither can win the war and each can win in peace). Public services are relevant afterward to winning-deepening-preserving peace, especially because wars weaken civil police and magistracy and often leave a culture of

disorder and/or a rising tide of crime partly explained by loss of societal cohesion pressure of war and partly by "demobilised guns" with users and combatants without jobs.

2. **accountable governance** including access to data to call to account and processes to re-elect/de-elect, promote/dismiss is also not primarily a product of the public service. However, producing accounts (which are one key element in accountability) and the physical running of elections are public service functions and ones in which professionalism is critical if either accounts or electoral processes are to be credible. In this case professional has two senses: competent (accounts can be an 'honest' mess as can election arrangements) and independent of the wishes of interested parties where these conflict with the public interest.
3. economic - **including overall output, external account and fiscal** - stability and at least modest growth adequate to mount a public service and public services in a development strategy national project. This is what structural adjustment should achieve and economic good housekeeping preserve. Again achieving and sustaining that condition requires both policy alternative analysis, preparation and monitoring and basic service (tax collection in particular) capacity and integrity but is dependent on the nature of the political system not just competence of public servants.

Beyond - and to sustain - these broader conditions rehabilitation and renewed development of public services requires structural and transformational public service reform. This is a medium term continuing operation, not a sudden once for all cutting binge and - over time - is likely to result in rises in total numbers and is certain to require increased real payrolls. A possible interim phase (or **first step**) to tackle **pay-productivity-professionalism** during stabilisation and return to growth may be prudent - it does feature in the Ethiopian though not the Ghanaian nor, to date at least, Tanzanian exercises.

### **PAY - PRODUCTIVITY - PROFESSIONALISM: FIRST STEPS**

The three P's need to be tackled in parallel. **Present pay prevents** professionalism and enforces reduced productivity. However, because of **past erosion** of attitudes and procedures and because there are fiscal limits on pay well beneath probable optimum levels pay restoration above could well be inadequate. Therefore **productivity requirements and professional career structures, qualification and training schemes and procedures** are needed at the same time as initiation of real income restoration:.

1. **pay** for all **basic service providers** should be raised to at least two-thirds the household absolute poverty line, i.e. \$50 a month in countries such as Tanzania and Mozambique with a probable SSA range of \$40 (e.g. Ethiopia) to \$100 (e.g. Mali, Côte d'Ivoire). A

medium term (5 to 7) year goal should be a minimum **equal to** the household absolute poverty line. It is quite absurd economically to suppose a lower pay scale for professionals crucial to human investment and macroeconomic growth will send "the right signals" or get the right results. Present artificially (State/IFI collusion) pay is a clear example of wilfully "getting the prices wrong".

2. the **range** should be of the order of **10:1**, e.g. to \$500 a month if the base is \$50;
3. **allowances** which are disguised salary should be cut out leaving only those which are **reimbursement** of actual work linked expenditures, plus - where long standing and widely accessible - continued **housing access** at 10% to 20% of base pay (usually set when this was a near economic rent);
4. **privatised user fees** should be eliminated or converted into user group funding of additional expenditures including but not only pay supplements - e.g. at a rural school food for teachers, but also for noon feeding, and help with teachers' house maintenance, but also with provision of desks, tables, cupboards (for teaching materials) and classroom repairs;
5. **requiring** (and monitoring) **attendance at workplace and to work**;
6. setting up simple **productivity goals** specific to tasks, e.g. kilometres of tertiary roads maintained per foreman-artisan team-road gang;
7. **requiring** public servants to accept needed refresher, backup, upgrading training partly on released and partly on own time;
8. operating (unless clearly irrational) existing **appointment-promotion-disciplinary** provisions transparently to begin reconstruction of professionalism within the service and internalised by public servants.

## **PUBLIC SERVICE REFORM FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE**

The previous proposals can be seen as the first stage of structural and transformational public service reform but a first stage to be carried out - if at all possible - in parallel to data collection, analysis and dialogue on the further stages. This is particularly true in cases in which some sectors p-p-p packages can be introduced more or less immediately but others may need to follow with 1 or 2 years lag because no viable p-p-p package is now to hand. Beyond tax services (because their rebuilding is vital to sustain the overall exercise), which sectors should be stage 1 is a contextual matter. Ethiopia has chosen Education while any Mozambican exercise would surely include Health. Tanzania might well include civil police

but to do so in Ethiopia would not be possible until a civil police ,service wholly separate from the army had been created (seen as a priority now in hand in Somaliland but not, to date, in Ethiopia).

Again, the key elements and logical broad sequence are moderately easy to identify - if time is used for reflection not wasted on false starts. Most actual programmes have not followed them or have come back to them after wasting years rushing about at random down dead ends on the apparent principle 'Don't just stand there! Do something!! Fire someone!!!'.

The logical trajectory for public service reform does not begin with dismissing staff or reducing payrolls. Indeed, in one sense it begins outside the public service which - as its name suggests - is not a self-constituted and self-justified institution, but one to enable the state to provide public services. Therefore the logical sequence of planning reform is along the following lines:

1. **What are State objectives?** For example, does it seek to ensure law and order with access to police protection and to a functioning magistracy? Is famine viewed as a matter of national dishonour to be prevented by structures able to warn ahead of and to mitigate the impact of drought? These goals can be broken down into articulated targets with dates for attainment. The next set of questions concerns:
2. **Who is to do what and by what instruments will the State act or influence actions?** At one extreme it is unlikely a state would envisage privatising the courts and at the other that it would consider growing all food (or even all commercialised food) itself. Between these extremes, real choices among state operated; state financed but wholly or partially domestic social sector or enterprise operated; state influenced by regulatory processes; state influenced by market management' (including both the revenue and expenditure sides of fiscal policy). These can be articulated to match policies and instruments/institutions to articulated goals and with parallel timings. From this stage it is possible to determine:
3. **How many public servants, with what qualifications are needed where to do what?** For example, if Universal Primary Education is a 20 year goal, 60% enrolment a 5 year goal, 80% a 10 year and 90% a 15 year, it is possible to project numbers of teachers required on a geographically disaggregated basis. Assuming specified goals as to content and quality, it is possible to determine qualifications required. Comparing present numbers and qualifications provides a basis for projecting pre-entry, upgrading and refresher training numbers. This exercise can be repeated across the board, albeit views on numbers at analysis and policy design/articulation level are less technically constrained. A spin-off at this stage is identification of surplus posts and post holders for retraining to fill present and projected gaps (genuine redeployment), not replaced on retiring (or otherwise leaving

the service) or retrenchment. A more important - and time consuming exercise - is identifying presently non-qualified staff needing retraining and irremediably non-qualifiable ones needing to be redeployed or retrenched and to be replaced. To make efficient use of the personnel requires consideration of :

4. **What bureaucratic and other structures - including professional career patterns - are needed to facilitate productive efficiency?** Efficiency here relates to cost (whether in financial or personnel terms) per unit of output, e.g. students completing primary cycle, primary health care consultations. Care needs to be taken to define an output or proxy appropriately - arrests is not a good index of police efficiency nor patients discharged dead of hospital output (even if both have been used as such in the UK in the not so distant past). Civil Service Commissions, Standing Orders, in-service training and promotion procedures, personnel management and what used to be styled O and M (Organisation and Management) all fall into this category.
5. **What emoluments levels are necessary and prudent for efficient conduct of public business/efficient delivery of public services?** Quite clearly pay so low as to force coping is not cost efficient (nor does it create respect for the State as a moral entity fulfilling its duty as a decent employer). Nor is low base pay camouflaged by opaque incentives - usually concentrated on those in a position to manufacture and approve their institution. Certain guides such as a 10 to 1 range and a floor of two-thirds of household absolute poverty budget have been suggested. Socially acceptable household budget standards and medium/large enterprise pay levels for roughly comparable skills and responsibilities are useful guides - once the floor has been attained. At this stage the issue of incentives arises. These are not easy to formulate because they need:
  - a. to be based on measures beyond beneficiary manipulation (e.g. if agricultural extension officers are given incentives related to hectares of a crop planted and also report the estimated plantings, an escalation in reported hectarage quite unassociated with real will result - as happened for cotton in Uganda in the 1960s);
  - b. to be tied to a good proxy for desired output (e.g. number of patients seen or prescribed drugs is a weak proxy for this purpose because its use is likely to lead to under-examination and over-prescription);
  - c. to be visibly fair (e.g. cotton output would not have served well in the Uganda case because it was highly weather dependent, nor would primary school completion exam results serve well given very different average pupil backgrounds among schools).

Standard recorded annual evaluations, promotion speed up (and efficiency bars, less onerous procedures for justifying retirement in the public interest could do a good deal as a first stage.

6. **What levels of complementary resources are required?** Without mobility (vehicles, spares, fuel, bicycles, in-house or hired repair facilities), field staff cannot deliver services. Without funds to cover out of pocket travel expenses reimbursements, they will not. Without vaccines, basic drugs, medical supplies, clinics with basic services and equipment, primary health services will be crippled. To articulate, quantify and add up (physically and financially) is tedious (not surprisingly as it is a shadow demand side present and perspective budgetary exercise) but poses no insuperable intellectual or methodological problems. But a final question remains:
7. **How and over what time period can it be financed?** Clearly cost considerations must be addressed earlier than at this stage of the exercise. However, they should not be used in a way which straight jackets and predetermines results. Probably a rough guideline ceiling based on present expenditure, plausible resource growth projections and some reallocation/efficiency gains should be procured early on, **but** used as a target not as a procrustean bed. When - and unfortunately it is when not if - this ceiling is broken, an iterative prioritisation, recalculation, trade-off process will be required. It should begin at question 1 **not** 4, 5, 6.

Downgrading some aims, rephrasing others, spinning off all or part of some to the domestic social sector is more likely to be efficient than to attempt to keep all the targets in principle but to resource each so inadequately as to waste much of what is available (as underpayment is currently doing with public service personnel capacity).

However, by the same token **augmenting resources and using them more efficiently is better than cutting or deferring output targets**. Better tax collection, shifting half of expatriate salary and external training technical assistance to domestic budget and institutional support, achieving external debt service writedowns, exorcising ghost workers, lower domestic interest rates (and thus debt service), cutting military budgets rapidly and radically as peace is restored are ways which, cumulatively, could over five years double resources available for basic services/infrastructure/data collection-analysis-policy advice in most SSA economies.

#### **NOT FAREWELL BUT FARE FORWARD**

The lessons to be drawn from public service deterioration or even disintegration in much of SSA over the past decade-and-a-half are bitter. But they give **no cause for despair**. The

reasons are perfectly identifiable, comprehensible and more than adequate to 'achieve' the observed results. **What is surprising is the tenacity with which many public servants have tried to hold on to both the forms and the substance of a professional public service and the demands of many of the public that they do so.** When serious reform reconstruction, refinancing in a context of decreasing war/increasing household and national security and of at least minimally public purpose oriented, accountable governance have been attempted and sustained, positive results have been observable.

Three key conditions for sustaining and generalising that recovery and pressing forward to new ground are:

- 1 **using imports selectively, with pre-studied contextual adaptations.** There are today too many parallel delivery services by donors and their NGOs as well as too many technical assistance experts operating outside any nationally coordinated or accountable context;
2. **reasserting African Agendas** which are contextual but equally are hard-headed (if hopefully soft-hearted) in respect to analysis, argumentation and sustainability;
3. **prioritising resources for priority purposes** including public policy and deliver services to the public.

It is perfectly valid to say each of these goals will be hard to attain. Equally, because most African states need net external resource transfers and all are globally marginal up to barely secondary in both geopolitical and economic terms, reasoned compromises with external preferences and an "Argue Don't Shout" tough negotiating stance will be needed. In some cases at some times the result will be partial temporary failure. But not even to try is to ensure failure and one may reasonably assume African cultures and African history will not be forgiving of those who do not try. Why should they be?

African cultures do embody the principles of service to others, of order, of predictability, of fairness (equity) and of regard to the most unfortunate. These are the foundations for public services to serve the public. Two 'cultures' - in Africa as elsewhere - cut against them. The first is the 'culture' of predatory politics which engenders despair and cynicism (with its concomitant 'principles' of "protect your own back" and "the devil take the hindmost"). The second is the increasing 'culture' of exploiting the public servant which sends strong disincentive signals, degrades their image (who is not paid and, largely as a result, does not perform is not respected). What one refuses to pay for one cannot expect to get. **It is these two 'cultures' of disintegration which have nothing specifically African about them**

**which are the mortal enemies of building public services for serving the public in Africa today.**

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## AUTHOR NOTE

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- a. 'Bureaucracy And Law and Order: Have Something To Be Said ABOUT and FOR Them', paper presented for University of Warwick Conference in London, March 1995, in press.
- b. 'Poverty, Basic Services, Survival and Development in SSA: some issues of public service professionalism, productivity and pay', paper presented at North South Round Table Society for International Development **Moving Africa Into The 21st Century: An Agenda For Renewal**, Johannesburg, 15-18 October 1995. (To appear in SID Journal)
- c. Adedeji, Adebayo and Janha, Abdou, **Pay, Productivity and Public Service: Priorities for Recovery in Sub-Saharan Africa**, A study for UNICEF and UNDP excerpted from a forthcoming study by the same authors, UNICEF/UNDP, New York, June 1995.

His recent views on strategic goals they might serve have appeared in:

- a. 'African Leadership for African Agendas', **Leadership for Africa: In Honor of Olusegun Obasanjo on the Occasion of His 60th Birthday**, Hans d'Orville (ed), Africa Leadership Foundation, New York, N.Y. 1995, pp 165-169.
- b. Philip Ndegwa and Reginald Herbold Green, **Africa To 2000 And Beyond: Imperative Political and Economic Agenda**, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1994
- c. 'Not Farewell but Fare Forward Voyagers: Africa into the 21st Century', **Issues in African Development: Essays in honour of Adebayo Adedeji at 65**, Bade Onimode & Richard Synge (eds), Heinemann (Nigeria) in association with the African Centre for Development and Strategic Studies, 1995, pp. 264-303.
- d. 'South Africa, Southern Africa and Beyond: Exploration Toward Regional Integration' paper presented at ACDESS Workshop, Johannesburg, 24-27 January 1996. (To appear in Conference Volume)