

**Part II**  
**Technical Papers**

# Towards a Culture of Cooperation and Quality in African Public Administration<sup>1</sup>

Since 1996, concerns regarding the efficiency of public administration have been attracting renewed interest. Therefore, the latest meetings of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS) have focussed on topics related to this subject.

African agencies responsible for public administration and development have not escaped this trend. The topic of this Second Biennial Pan-African Conference of Ministers of Civil Service, organized under the auspices of the African Centre for Administrative Training and Research for Development (CAFRAD), "Civil Service in Africa: New Challenges, Professionalism and Ethics," confirms this trend.

This statement illustrates a basic achievement: researchers, practitioners and users of public services are unanimous in the view that "good administration is not a luxury; it is an essential condition for development." (1)

Regarding the theme of this conference, African civil services have nothing to reaffirm in terms of ethics or professionalism. Everything must be invented, beginning with the citizens, who must reconquer their sovereignty to be capable of designing their own socio-political organization. (2)

This theme suggests that the question can no longer be put in terms of consciousness-raising but of action; what to do and how to do it. This action should be viewed from the perspective of organizational change and the twin areas of increasing institutional

capacity and positive changes in the organizational behaviour of public agencies.

I began to answer this question in a recent work. (3) This conference gives me the opportunity to pursue my thinking and to propose it to the African community. I firmly believe that it will not be possible to promote the role, professionalism and ethical values of African public administration if there is not sufficient awareness of how its failings have fashioned the organizational culture. I will not linger over the arbitrariness and corruption which are hardly exclusive to our administrations. On the other hand, I would like to highlight three other phenomena which are more pernicious: the lack of coordination among public institutions, contempt for the opinion of the people, and little interest in the quality of public services.

I will first present the facets of the situation of African civil services. To conclude, I will show how it is possible to promote the role, professionalism and ethical values of public administration. For myself, I propose there are three main paths:

- Refocus the role of public administration in relation to the State and society;
- Move from traditional bureaucratic thinking to organic, pro-active thinking;
- Foster within the civil service transforming and visionary leadership in place of traditional authoritarianism.

To support my points, I will take examples from various African administrations which are available in the recent literature, without

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assuming them to be typical of a particular situation.

## **Breakdowns in institutional infrastructure for dialogue**

### ***Institutional infrastructure***

Although the expression 'institutional infrastructure for dialogue' in many ways is According to the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), within that definition three specific elements of governance can be discerned: the type of political regime in a country, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of economic and social resources for the country's development, and the capacity of governments to define, formulate and execute policies and fulfill their basic functions. (5)

In my opinion, only the last two elements of governance have to do with institutional infrastructure, which can be defined as the structure of the government and the mechanism by which the government fulfills its functions. This includes, for example, administrative organization, systems and procedures and the choice of staff, non- or quasi-governmental organizations whose activities are related to the formulation and execution of policies. And I would like to specify that it is a matter of establishing in advance an institutional structure and mechanisms for dialogue to promote the role, professionalism and ethical values in the civil service, to clearly define my argument.

If it is true that the State is an organization which society imposes on itself to manage and guide itself, and if it is true that the human being is the means and the end of development, then a State which does not have internal mechanisms to coordinate its policies, which neglects the needs of whole segments of society when it develops and implements its policies, is not a competent State.

Dialogue takes many forms and fulfills many functions. It can be used to gather expert opinions, to define linkages and interaction between a particular policy and other policies conducted by the same Ministry or others, or

reminiscent of the concept of governance, I will refrain, on purpose, from using that word here, as its definition seems to me to be imprecise and still evolving. The World Bank defines governance as "the way to exercise power in the context of the management of economic and social resources for the development of a country." (4)

to gather the opinions of interested parties in the wider environment of society.

### ***The collapse of mechanisms for dialogue among public institutions***

If, through the magic of institutional mimicry, all African States were to display a structure resembling that of modern Western States, that would not necessarily be the same as mobilizing the attendant mechanisms. (6)

With regard to intra-governmental dialogue, a study conducted by ECDPM in Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania on the introduction of cost-sharing in the educational system has shown that in those three countries, the lack of adequate inter-ministerial relations was considered a major defect in the process of formulating educational policy and specifically the cost-sharing policy. (7)

In the majority of African States, this lack of intra-governmental dialogue can be detected. The Councils of Ministers of cabinets are similar to customary courts which convene on an irregular basis and whose opinions are advisory and without binding effect in government actions. (8) In the policy formation process, it can be noted everywhere that constitutional advisory bodies are scarcely used. In Cameroon for example, the Economic and Social Council has not functioned since 1985, when its mandate from that last Chamber expired. (9)

Just as for dialogue, the coordination function deserves to be strengthened, even more so because, when examining the objectives and missions of the Ministries, sometimes several areas of interference, overlap, even covering up, can be noted. This is a situation which considerably dilutes the sense of responsibility and compromises transparency and quality of services.

## **Public administration and its consumers: strained relations or zero quality**

Our second cultural look at African public administration has to do with the relationships they maintain with their environment, more specifically with society. Several of the most current concepts are related to the concept of quality. Those most often used are: excellence, productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, yield, performance and total quality. Without becoming too academic, I would simply like it to be retained, for the logic of our main argument, that the authors maintain that the concept of quality has the function of encompassing the other concepts raised which express its many aspects. (10)

Indeed, an examination of the concept of quality reveals that the major idea conveyed by its definition is that of client orientation. Quality is achieved when the priority concern is the satisfaction of the client for which the goods or services are intended:

“Quality is the level of excellence which the enterprise has chosen to attain in order to satisfy its target customers. It is at the same time the extent to which it reaches that level. A service achieves its level of excellence when it meets the needs of a target clientele.” (11)

The concept of quality actually contains three essential aspects: the quality of the product, the quality of the service and the quality of the individuals providing it. In other words, quality refers to what the client obtains (quality of teaching, care, documents, etc.), the manner in which he obtains it (the degree of friendliness of the worker towards the client, quality of the client-worker relationship, etc.), the motivation, competence and working conditions of those who serve the client (commitment, skill, integrity and job satisfaction of the worker). (12)

More concretely, before looking at the matter of client orientation in African public administration, it would be useful to see how certain public administrations have updated the concept of quality by using the

the citizens. To analyze this relationship, I have chosen to rely on the concept of quality which took hold in the public management world a few decades ago.

### ***The concept of quality***

Government of Canada as a model. (13)

Quality, as seen by the Civil Service Committee of the Canadian Government (1990), is defined by eight principles:

- Agencies focussed on the client are supported by values, standards and beliefs strongly centered on the client;
- The leadership of upper management is critically important to the organizational culture centered on the client;
- Agencies centered on the client require open relationships with clients and promote consultation;
- Agencies treat their management and staff well;
- They seek and accept the opinion of clients about the quality of services received;
- Effective management of providing services places as much importance on their quality as on their type;
- They are convinced that all the agency's employees can contribute to the quality of service;
- Agencies centered on the client use information technology effectively.

Using this model, it is easy to see how African public administrations integrate the concept of quality, through the relationships they maintain with civil society, the citizen-users, and through the general status of public servants.

### ***The divorce between the administration and civil society***

The term ‘civil society’ refers to bodies located outside the government, but which are expressed through their relationship to the State. These are forms of association or interest groups which might, for example,

represent a sectoral concern (professional organizations, chambers of commerce, unions, etc.) or a particular political view (pressure groups). These bodies constitute the mechanism by which a varied range of viewpoints is transmitted to public decision-makers and integrated into the dialogue. They offer the possibility of influencing government policy without necessarily having a political mandate. They establish a link between the individual and the State.

(14)

At best, relations between the administration and civil society are fraught with suspicion, mistrust and reciprocal rejection. The report on a study conducted in Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda on the process of policy formulation is revealing on this subject. I will use it here to illustrate the situation:

“The Tanzanian study found no sign that there had been prior dialogue among the decision-makers and the other actors or interested parties...The dearth of dialogue can probably be explained by the fact that it simply was not part of the process. The high-level officials were stunned by the importance of what had escaped them, through lack of dialogue.

“In Uganda, the committee to evaluate educational policy had solicited the opinion of individuals, groups and institutions. On the whole, the frustration experienced, particularly in Ghana and Uganda, came from the inability of governments to communicate regularly and effectively with the members of civil society, not to mention the almost total absence of information-sharing, when earlier their opinion had been solicited.” (15)

Thus, the weakness of client-orientation in administrative actions (which was the case here) gives rise to the frustration of citizens (contributors and clients of the administration), inefficiency and inappropriate policies implemented (poor product quality).

### **Relations between public officials and users**

Along with the winds of democratic change blowing in Africa since the beginning of this decade, which is about to end, most African countries have liberalized their laws on associations. Nevertheless, observations show that relations between the administration and these associations remain timid, if not conflicted. In order to make themselves understood, most non-governmental organizations have had to choose the path of insurrection.

To close this overview of client-orientation in African public administration, I would like to get to the heart of the relationships which the two parties maintain on a daily basis. The sociologist J.M. Ela states that, on the basis of the offices of the various public services, a sociologist would be able to reconstruct the universe of fraud and corruption and by identifying their actions and strategies, the main branches and networks of complicity. This universe has its own language and practices which are part of daily life. Since the eighties, it is well known that you can't get anything from the administration in Africa without “galoshes” or an “umbrella”. The investigations of Mr. Ela lead him to the following conclusion:

“The most minor State official demands ‘incentives’ for any service, sometimes he demands ‘gasoline’ from clients: ‘do you think the car runs without gas?’ In this civil service where everyone is king of his office, one must do everything to make sure that the user understands that ‘the goat grazes where it’s tied,’ ‘how do you think I’m going to do it?’ They are skilled at demanding that all their ‘goats’ be ‘fed’ in order to delay or advance the consideration of any case.” (16)

Another African researcher has looked into communication between the public administration and its users. Based on this research into interactions between supervisors and farmers, he drew the following conclusion:

“Communication between the administration and its users, even at the grass-roots level, is carried out through a network of bureaucratic

views and assumptions far from the organizational model and the socio-cultural construct held by the groups served by the public administration. Membership in the bureaucracy that links these grass-roots agents with an administrative apparatus whose impotence is perceptible in the current political-historical context undoubtedly acts as a rigid barrier to communication among these officials and their clientele.

“The communication which the  
With regard to these images, it is clear that African public administrations do not distinguish themselves, either through the quality of their services or their relations with their clients, and even less through the moral integrity and efficiency of public officials. To the extent that it essentially constitutes a means of communication between the power and the population, an administration that does not communicate or does so poorly, either through a lack of channels or through using them poorly, is necessarily in crisis. This administrative crisis, which is found in most socio-cultural contexts, is in many ways a communications crisis, both within the administration and in its external relationships. (18)

We know today that there are techniques and mechanisms for consulting users and potential beneficiaries that could help to improve the quality of public services. As an illustration, here is a study described in the World Development Report 1997:

“Based on data coming from 121 water supply projects in 49 countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, researchers have recently tested the relationship between the participation of users and the results obtained. Participation was measured on a continuous scale ranging from simply sharing information to in-depth dialogue with the beneficiaries to decision-making by the beneficiaries alone, after joint decision-making.

“The authors observed a close correlation between the participation of the interested parties and the

administration of this country currently maintains with its users through the relationship between officials and their clients is the prime example of ‘sender-oriented’ communication. It has only one goal: making the users carry out—in this case, agricultural workers—the plans determined and established by the administration, without taking into account their real needs and aspirations.” (17)

quality of the results of the various projects. Out of 49 projects where there had been little dialogue, only 8 per cent had achieved good results; on the other hand, of the 42 projects where the beneficiaries had a high level of participation, 64 per cent had positive results.” (19)

The project that underlies the theme of this conference is, as a matter of fact, aimed at expanding positive relationships between administration and society in Africa. How can we achieve this?

### **The keys to the problem**

After the analysis just made of some of the breakdowns in the organizational culture of African public administration, it would be pretentious of anyone to claim to know what must be done so that the desired changes will happen as if by magic. Thus, I will put forward my proposals with all the necessary humility and care.

In order to come into the light, we must sketch the lines of the debate properly. As for me, I mean by “promote the role, professionalism and ethical values of the civil service” to change the standards of behaviour of public agencies, and therefore, their agents, the civil servants. It is a matter of knowing how to make the role, professionalism and values of the civil service evolve from the current situation to the desired or desirable situation, which meets the expectations of the community.

From this viewpoint, it must already be understood how standards of behaviour are changed and what factors determine them.

What is the desirable level for standards of behaviour for public officials in terms of professionalism and ethics?

### ***Desirable standards for professionalism and ethics in African public administration***

#### ***Professionalism among public officials***

It would be difficult to set *a priori* the standard of professionalism expected from

Almost everywhere, evaluation criteria are vague, lending themselves with difficulty to practical application and measurement. They are so unclear that even the outlines of the concept of professionalism are lost. However, if professionalism refers to the ongoing search for excellence in performance and quality of work in all its dimensions, respect for the client, a love for the product, a concern for detail, a taste for beauty, moral concerns, mutual assistance, updating of knowledge and skills, attention paid to tools and especially, the full development of the human being, then I propose that professional behaviour of African civil servants should be evaluated based on the model shown in Figure 1 (next page). This model identifies six main dimensions which characterize professionalism, with two sub-dimensions to each:

- A passion for excellence (motivation);
- Competence (initial and ongoing training);
- A professional awareness (sense of public service, service to the public, marketing skill);
- Experience in the field (individually and through others);
- Effectiveness (management techniques, individual performance);
- Personal qualities (inherent abilities, acquired skills).

In addition, this model has the advantage of describing what makes up each of the dimensions of professionalism, in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

#### ***Ethics in public administration***

When looking through the basic texts governing the civil service of African States, a chapter dealing with the rights and obligations of civil servants can always be found. In most cases, (maybe because of common origins?) the official is bound by the obligation to serve and to dedicate himself to service; to renounce personal interest; obedience; confidentiality and professional discretion.

These ethical values, although very appropriate, are not enough, in my view, to preserve or promote moral integrity in the behaviour of officials. And for good reason! Although these obligations tell civil servants what they must do, they do not tell them how. Therefore, I propose, in order to set the standards for morally desirable behaviour of officials, to take it to the deontological, or purely theoretical level, and show officials the way to direct their behaviour in various circumstances, based on accepted ethical values. By this I mean that to define morally acceptable standards of behaviour for officials, we must rely on ethics. Many countries of the world have understood that and have developed codes of ethics for their civil services. But need I remind you that a code of ethics is only useful and effective if it is accompanied by an ongoing monitoring process, and if various organizational mechanisms are available to make it appropriately concrete, if it is linked with clear and tangible rewards and punishments, and if, when a major ethical crisis occurs, steps are taken to rebuild the organization's credibility?

As an illustration, I will give the summary of the code of ethics of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). It would be desirable for African countries to imitate it, but

public officials. Already, the definitions of the concept found in the literature remain very general and not practical. Moreover, updating professional behaviour depends on the situation and the context. That is why I will simply answer a question by borrowing this image from Alain Chanlat:

absolutely out of the question that we should ape it in every detail. Each country should therefore, as a function of its highest beliefs and values, develop an appropriate code of ethics. In the ASPA model, each principle is accompanied by commentary on the appropriate types of behaviour. (22)

The eleven principles of ASPA are:

- Respect for the law;
- Responsibility and accountability;
- Commitment;
- Rapid reactions;
- Knowledge and skills;
- Professional development and full realization of potential;
- Balance between the role of informed citizen and the requirement of political neutrality in professional activities;
- Conflict of interest;
- Justifiable denunciation;
- Public information and confidentiality;
- Professional ethics.

Because fraud, arbitrariness and corruption are so widespread within the civil service, many African countries have understood the need to elaborate a code of ethics for the civil service. In addition to macro-societal actions, some have already drafted or plan to draft a code of ethics for public officials in the short or medium term. Furthermore, in most African countries, efforts are being made to reform the civil service, as noted by World Bank experts: