Building Public Service Capacity for Development Management: Reflections on a Professional Public Administration and Training in African Nations

Peter Fuseini Haruna
Texas A&M International University

Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad
North-West University, Republic of South Africa

This is the first *JPAE* symposium focusing on how to build leadership and managerial capacity for professional development management in Africa. As the premier journal in the field with a large international audience, *JPAE* cannot afford to ignore the dramatic changes that have occurred across the continent over the past two decades, changes with tremendous implications for professional education, training, and competency development for the task of nation building. The continent has not only witnessed unprecedented economic growth but also experienced improved democratic governance, along with more citizen participation in governing than at any time in its history (UNECA, 2009; Africa Progress Panel, 2013). At the same time, Africa faces debilitating inequalities, systematic corruption, and persistent conflict. As African nations make a difficult transition from a predominantly narrow bureaucratic mind-set toward a more broad-based governance approach to development management, an important consideration is the quality of training and development provided to public managers. How can/should public managers be trained to sort through these issues and become effective development practitioners? What conceptual frameworks, practical tools and skills, and professional abilities do they need to be able to lead and manage effectively in the interest of human development management?

These questions go to the heart of the symposium, which examines how public service capacity for development management is being built through professional education and training as well as illuminates Africa’s responses to its development opportunities and challenges. The developments in the continent are occurring within a public service that has seen twists and turns in capacity-building strategies, including structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, good governance reform policies in the 1990s, and the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration in the 2000s. These initiatives have influenced the ways in which public administration education and training are redesigned and delivered. The African Training and Research Center in Administration for Development, African Capacity Building Foundation, and the Association of African Universities (with more than 300 members) play pivotal roles in training, research, and capacity building for public administration and governance. Together, they contribute to enhance networking opportunities, share know-
ledge of smart practices in good governance, and build partnerships among stakeholders. The symposium has assembled respected scholars to examine these developments and provide insights about national experiences with education and training for public service in the continent.6

The current snapshot of the argument is that while progress has been made over the last half century, much work remains to be done. Africa needs to better align professional education and training with transnational issues of training and development and also ground its students in the context of public service for development management. In light of the literature on good governance and development management, contributors argue that training curricula will benefit from (a) systematic blending of conceptual with experiential knowledge as well as traditional with nontraditional skills and abilities; (b) adopting competency-based assessment and evaluation; (c) connecting classroom instruction to the lived experience of communities; and (d) globalization of the curriculum.7 With the experience of development practice, professionals need broad education and training that equips them with conceptual, analytical, and practical competence to be able to act with a sense of duty and social justice on behalf of their fragile nation-states.

The first article, by Andrew Ewoh, titled, “Public Administration Education and Training in Nigeria: Problems, Challenges, and Prospects.” The author focuses on how Nigeria is coping with growing governance and development management challenges as Africa’s most populous and diverse nation.8 He traces multiple political and administrative reforms that occurred when Nigeria attained self-rule in 1960. He also analyzes how the reforms have contributed to shaping “the ecology of public administration” of Nigeria. Such reforms resulted in the creation of federal, regional, and local institutions with the responsibility of formally preparing individuals for public service, development management, and the overall task of nation building. Ewoh argues that the task of professional public service education has fallen largely on the premier universities and training institutes that tend to integrate American “specialist” and British “generalist” approaches in their administrative training and education models. His assessment is that quality control, curriculum development, and pedagogical methods have not kept pace with the growing unique needs of Nigeria. He concludes the article by extrapolating lessons and proffering suggestions for strengthening the public affairs training and education curriculum for development management.

The second article, by Frank Ohemeng, titled, “Challenges and Prospects of Public Administration Education and Training in Africa: The Case of Ghana,” examines challenges and future prospects of public administration education and training in that country. He focuses particular attention on the extent to which public administration education and training programs help provide practitioners with relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for achieving organizational objectives and overall national development goals. Drawing examples from universities and training institutes, Ohemeng identifies problem areas and several challenges, notably weak performance management systems, failure to connect public service needs and knowledge gaps to education and training curricula, weak theory-practice link, untargeted recruitment practice, inadequate remuneration and incentive, as well as negative image and perception of the civil and public service. Despite such challenges, he argues that public administration education and training has a bright future, especially as universities begin to develop marketing programs aimed at promoting public administration and preparing individuals for public service careers.

Following Ohemeng’s article is one by Al Bavon titled, “Preparing African Public Administrators for Development Management: Student Learning Outcomes Assessment for Performance Improvement.” In this article, Bavon addresses issues of quality assurance. He explains how public administration training programs can position themselves to meet the challenge of providing the requisite knowledge, skills, and
abilities to address problems associated with emerging developments in Africa. He describes the Getting To Outcomes® model to demonstrate how public administration programs can adapt it in framing a program assessment plan with active stakeholder engagement. The model involves doing needs and asset assessment, developing program goals and learning outcomes, designing strategies to accomplish the outcomes, developing methods to assess student proficiencies, and establishing indicators of program effectiveness. This process is applied to public administration programs in Ghana to assess student learning outcomes as a way of assuring programmatic quality. It also addresses the challenges of public service capacity building through professional training and development.

The fourth article, by Mogie Subban and Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad, is titled, “Public Administration Training and Development in Africa: The Case of the Republic of South Africa.” Here the authors offer an interesting case study of the Republic of South Africa. They examine how the curriculum of education and training addresses the shortage of competencies resulting from the transformation of the public service in the South African “developmental state.” They argue that competency building and talent management among public servants have become an imperative, one that aims to provide competent managers for conducting government operations in the transformative management and governance context. Because training has been criticized for being outdated, in South Africa there has been a focus on “soft skills” deemed to be critical for the national development agenda. The authors analyze training methodologies including problem-based learning and performance-oriented and situation-emergent training, as well as indigenous management knowledge, and consider their potential for closing managerial capacity gaps in the public service.

The final symposium article, by Aziza Zemrani, is “Teaching Public Administration: The Case of Morocco.” Zemrani discusses the history and analyzes professional training and development since Moroccan independence in 1956. She argues that higher education has contributed by providing the necessary education and training structures to support democratization processes in Morocco, especially since the Arab Spring in 2011. She also highlights how the system of higher education—especially universities, grandes écoles, and School of Public Administration—helps to develop public service capacity by producing skilled professionals (engineers, doctors, IT specialists, architects, managers, lawyers, and professors), to name a few. Although considerable progress has been made, several challenges remain, including the new role imposed on the state by societal changes, global and international environment, and the need to align public sector reforms with training and development for public administration. Zemrani concludes the article by making suggestions for improving education and training based on the OECD public performance analytical framework.

In sum, the symposium argues that the transition to good governance requires “a broader engagement with the environment of public policy and public services” and “greater attention to the issues of sustainability” (Osborne, 2010, p. 413). This change also presents African nations with the opportunity to re-conceptualize capacity building and reenvision the attributes that public managers need for effective development management. The symposium aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on how to reinvigorate African public service by realigning public affairs education and training programs with the emerging good governance environment. Though largely different, the national experiences shared by symposium contributors highlight an important theme of public affairs education and training in developing society: building capacity from the ground up by strongly connecting the curriculum to local need and circumstance. To this extent, the symposium contributes to advancing NASPAA’s goal of expanding sound international exchange of ideas in professional public service education and training.
NOTES

1 The convenors and coeditors wish to thank JPAE Editor in Chief Dr. David Schultz, Managing Editor Dr. Kristen Norman-Major, and all of the editorial staff for accepting and placing the symposium in the current issue.

2 The Africa Progress Panel, chaired by Dr. Kofi Annan (former UN Secretary-General), consists of 10 eminent individuals drawn from the private and public sectors. The Panel prepares and publishes reports annually that assess and evaluate development in Africa and make suggestions for improvement.

3 African nations are ranked among the most corrupt in Transparency International’s 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index. Although the 2013 Human Development Report indicates net gains in African nations, this has been accompanied in many cases by rising inequality in incomes.

4 The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank jointly imposed economic and fiscal reforms (structural adjustment) in most African nations during 1980s as a precondition for receiving loans.

5 The African Training and Research Center in Administration for Development (CAFRAD) was created in 1964 as an intergovernmental organization responsible for generating and sharing knowledge toward improving public administration and governance. The African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) was established in 1991 to strengthen existing capacity for development. Created in 1967, the Association of African Universities (AAU) serves as the voice of higher education in Africa.

6 Four regions with different political, economic, and sociocultural experiences include North Africa (Morocco), South Africa (Namibia), West Africa (Nigeria and Ghana), and East Africa (Rwanda).

7 Globalization is defined here to include economic, political, and social forces integrating nation-states and their people and bringing diverse parts of the world together. This implies a “borderless world” in which states and national economies fade, resulting in an integrated world market (Haque, 2002, p. 103).

8 Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation with an estimated population of 170,123,740 (2012) that includes more than 500 ethnicities and 250 indigenous languages.

REFERENCES


ABOUT THE EDITORS

Peter Fuseini Haruna is an associate professor of Public Administration in the Department of Public Affairs and Social Research at Texas A&M International University in Laredo, Texas. He received his PhD in Public Administration from The University of Akron, Akron, Ohio. His previous work has appeared in peer-reviewed journals, including Journal of Public Affairs Education, Public Administration Review, Public Integrity, Administrative Theory & Praxis, International Journal of Public Administration, and African Studies Review.

Shikha Vyas-Doorgapersad is an associate professor of Public Management and Administration at the Vaal Triangle Campus of North-West University, Republic of South Africa. She received her PhD in Public Administration from the University of Rajasthan, India. She has published several books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journals articles. Her teaching and research interests focus on public policy, gender issues, and municipal governance.