



Africa Development, Vol. XXXIII, No. 4, 2008, pp. 15–30

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(ISSN 0850-3907)

Public Sector Reforms In Africa: A Philosophical Re-Thinking

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Abstract

Public sector reform (PSR) has been quite popular in African. However, the inadequate understanding of the philosophical basis of the reforms has led to many African countries to equating PSR with privatization and commercialization of public enterprises, downsizing of the public service workforce and the war on corruption. While many African countries are pursuing with the necessary vigour these policies, which were induced by former colonial masters and so-called development agencies, there has been little or no success as compared with the pre-PSR era. The aim of this paper is to bring out, in clear terms, the fact that the present PSR cannot achieve success because of the threat of sustaining continued control of the African economies and policies by the Breton Woods institutions, the sale of public enterprises to multinational companies, the migration of the best African brains to Europe and America, corruption and neo-colonialism. In essence, this paper advocates a philosophical re-thinking of PSR. This will start with reforming the minds of African leaders to reform the body politic. This study shows that PSR in Africa that fail to take note of the ethical and communal values and peculiar situations of various African countries will definitely fail.

Résumé

La réforme du secteur public (RSP) connaît une grande popularité dans les pays africains. Cependant, la mauvaise compréhension de la base philosophique des réformes a conduit de nombreux pays africains à assimiler la RSP à la privatisation et la commercialisation des entreprises publiques, la réduction des effectifs de la fonction publique et la guerre contre la corruption. Bien que de nombreux pays africains poursuivent avec la vigueur nécessaire ces politiques qui ont été induites à la fois par leurs anciens maîtres coloniaux et leurs supposés alliés en matière d'affaires internationales, il y'a eu peu ou pas de succès par

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rapport à l'ère pré-RSP. Ainsi, l'objectif de cet article est de mettre en évidence, en termes clairs, que la présente RSP renforce le contrôle des économies et des politiques africaines par les institutions de Bretton Woods, la liquidation des entreprises publiques au profit des entreprises multinationales, l'émigration des meilleurs cerveaux africains vers l'Europe et l'Amérique, la corruption et le néo-colonialisme. Ce document préconise essentiellement une nouvelle réflexion philosophique sur la RSP. Celle-ci va commencer avec la réforme de l'esprit des dirigeants africains pour réformer le corps politique. L'étude montre que la RSP en Afrique qui ne tient pas compte de l'éthique, des valeurs communes et des situations particulières des différents pays africains, est vouée à l'échec.

Introduction

Public sector reform (PSR) is now a household name in Africa, and almost all African countries are caught in its web. Good governance and efficient public administration are regarded as wishful thinking without PSR. Also, accountability, transparency and a merit-driven public service are thought to be unachievable except where PSR programmes are drawn up. Efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness of government to the yearnings of its citizens are likewise seen as only to be gauged through the lenses of PSR. African governments are churning out policies regardless of their relevance and impact on their people provided these policies are part of the new public sector management in the name of PSR. The international donor agencies such as World Bank, UNDP, OECD and some developed nations are not left out in the African mania for public sector reform. In fact, the idea of PSR is suggested and imposed on the African countries by those external interests. This is done, not out of altruism towards the African polity and economy, but as a way of furthering what Mukandala (2000) calls 'continued domination of the colonial logic' in every aspect of the African economies. To stress the importance attached to this agenda, the World Bank created a fully fledged Public Sector Group in 1997. A 12-member Public Sector Board, headed by a top-flight director at the bank's headquarters, governs this group. Its major role is to help the governments of donor and loan-recipient countries achieve efficiency and accountability in their public sector institutions.

While the African leaders innocently and ignorantly accepted the externally induced programmes of reform in their public sector institutions as a way of bettering the lives of their citizens, the developed countries that are driving the force of these donor agencies are interested in recolonizing African countries through the back door. It is a subtle form of neo-colonialism and consequent perpetual slavery. So, the two parties are working at cross-purposes, with different agendas, different minds, different focuses and different motives while operating on the same platform and policies.

This paper is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Its message is that we approached PSR wrongly in years past. Much literature was devoted to providing the parameters for carrying out successful PSR, but seldom was the need for PSR in Africa in the first instance questioned; and even when there was felt to be a need for PSR, its philosophical foundation was not examined.

This paper deviates from previous approaches. Here, we are looking at the foundational existence of PSR through the lens of philosophy; for it is when we are sure of the philosophical foundation of PSR that we can know whether there is need for reform in the first instance or not. This paper therefore looks at PSR in a meaningful context. This is important as many scholars do not appreciate the fact that the public sector cannot be divorced from the private sector. This paper also considers the historical development of PSR in Africa and the philosophy behind the current ubiquitous wave of reform in the continent. It examines how African leaders see PSR, for the way they see it is different from the way the donor agencies see it, and this accounts for the monumental failure of PSR. The final part of the paper offers suggestions on how African countries can free themselves from the doldrums of current PSR.

Public Sector Reform: Definition and Purpose

While there have been different views and definitions of PSR, many people and researchers see it as the attempt by governments to change ways of doing things. That is why Schacter (2000) defines PSR as the ‘strengthening the way the public sector is managed’. The presupposition is that things are not properly managed in the public sector, that unnecessary wastage has crept into the ways the public sector is being run, and that too many people are doing poorly what fewer people can do efficiently. So, changes from the old way of doing things must take place. PSR calls for a new public management style of achieving results in place of the traditional ways of doing things. To this end, there has emerged a deliberate policy as well as action to change organizational structures, processes and people’s behaviour in an attempt to improve government administrative machinery for performance at optimal level. The overall goal is excellence in performance in public sector management. Since reform means an improvement in something, a change for the better as a way of correcting wrongdoing or defects in a system; and as the public sector ‘can be understood to be the key apparatus for the execution of the functions of the state or government’ (Mhone 2003:12), then PSR is the total overhauling of government administrative machinery with the aim of injecting real effectiveness, efficiency, hard-core competence and financial prudence into the running of the public sector. This

rebranding of the public sector is targeted to meet the demands of a rapidly improving and changing global socio-political environment.

When we mention PSR, it is often the case that many researchers have a myopic view of it as confined within the government administrative machinery. It goes beyond that. For meaningful PSR, both the private sector and the civil populace have to be embedded in it. The tripod cannot be separated if any meaningful changes are to take place in a country. For it is an incontrovertible fact that the need for reform in the public sector derives its impetus from the perceived success of the private sector. Also, the citizens, who constitute the end users of the products of the reform, are driving both the public and private sectors. In essence, what would have been an appropriate name for public sector reform is 'body politic reform'. The wrong understanding of the foundational meaning of PSR accounts for the erecting of a defective edifice for public reform programmes.

The Purpose of Public Sector Reform

PSR was initiated against the background that governments required a departure from the traditional methods of administration and the urgent need for a renewed public sector to propel government in its quest for sustainable socio-economic, political and technological development. So, there was a need for structural re-engineering of the public sector with the infusion of new values of professionalism, accountability, responsiveness and a focused sense of mission for maximum efficiency in the economy.

Based on the above, the main objectives of PSR are as follows:

1. To achieve better delivery of the basic public services that affect living standards of the poor (World Bank 2000:ch. 6).
2. To create a climate conducive to private sector development (World Bank 1997:103).
3. To make the state or government institutional apparatus market friendly, lean, managerial, decentralized and "customer" friendly, in the hope that it would better meet its societal objectives of good governance as well (Mhone 2003:10).

From the above, we see that PSR aims at institutional restructuring of the public sector, with the application of principles obtainable in the private sector as a basis for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector institutions. Arising from this wrong notion of how the public sector should be run and managed is that government, which ought to be in service to the people, is now being seen as a profit-making institution to be driven by market forces. Thomas (2000:136) corroborates this view when he says that only government institutions 'associated with higher income growth'

are regarded as efficient and effective. In essence, PSR in Africa is carried out with the mindset of seeing government as a profit-making enterprise rather than in service to the people. In fact, that is why we see African leaders talking about a bloated civil service, which needs to be downsized, and the uncontrollable craze to privatize and commercialize all government enterprises.

Understanding Current Public Sector Reform in Africa

It is imperative for us to know how PSR enters the governance of African countries. This will help us appreciate the motives of the international donor agencies in conscripting African countries to embrace PSR. According to Mhone (2003:12) 'the call for comprehensive public sector reform was first articulated in the World Bank's 1981 report entitled *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa* (also known as the Berg Report)'. The focus of the Berg Report is economic growth and development in Africa. The report noted that African economies were witnessing retrogression rather than accelerated growth, and then identified four problem areas that were obstacles to economic growth in Africa.

These problem areas, according to Mhone, were as follows. The first was poor macroeconomic management in the form of persistent fiscal deficits, negative interest rates, price inflation and controlled exchange rates. The second concerned an over-extended public sector in which ubiquitous parastatals (such as marketing boards, nationalized import substitution industries and so on) were seen to be inefficient entities that squandered resources, while also distorting prices insofar as they had the mandate to control and regulate certain markets seen as strategic by governments. The third set of problems related to management of the trade regime, which was seen to militate against free trade internationally through high rates of protection and exchange rates that overvalued local currencies. A fourth set of problems concerned the fact that many governments that claimed to be socialist were spending too much money on public service itself as a guarantor of employment, on social services and other consumption-related expenditures, which were seen as unsuitable in the long term, especially when the prospects of the growth were dim in the global environment at the time (Mhone 2003:12-13).

The reason for itemising these factors militating against African economic growth, which PSR is intended to tackle, is to show clearly that the main philosophy behind current PSR in Africa is the vested economic interest of the international donor agencies, and especially the World Bank.

We can see that PSR was not designed to tackle malfunctioning of the public sector; it was not meant to evolve a blueprint for the infrastructural development of African states; and neither was it meant to develop the

abundant human resources of the continent. Rather, it was an accidental policy derived by the World Bank and UNDP to protect their loans and the credit facilities granted to African countries. PSR was driven by the idea of

a call to arms for advancing a new agenda of development assistance, the perception being that financial or technical assistance would not be put to good use until such concepts as transparency and accountability, due process, probity and efficiency were institutionalised in the systems of government of recipient countries (UN 2005).

In essence, the international donor agencies induced African countries to embark on PSR for the following reasons:

1. PSR would enable African countries to generate enough funds to service the debts they owed to international financial institutions. Through PSR, many state agencies, parastatals and enterprises were commercialized. This was meant to yield more money to the government purse – not to provide infrastructural facilities for the citizen, but to make government financially buoyant enough to continue servicing debts and credit facilities from the World Bank, IMF as well as Paris and London clubs. These institutions are of the view that insolvency on the part of the African governments would turn their credit facilities into bad debts. With PSR, they impressed on African governments the need for both a Debt Management Office and a Due Process Office to monitor the income and expenditure of government for their own purpose. In some cases, they would impose one of their own at the World Bank on African leaders either as the Minister of Finance or Chief Economic Adviser. In fact, this is the trend in most African countries nowadays.
2. Also, with the help of PSR, privatization has become the order of the day in Africa. Many state-owned enterprises, corporations and companies are privatized in the interests of core investors. The core investors require huge finance to buy up the controlling shares of the privatized companies. The international financial institutions are aware of this fact, which would shut out local players with little financial capability. At the end of the day, multinational companies with their headquarters in Europe and America, would buy up those privatized companies. Even when few Africans have the financial capability, emphasis would be shifted to technical expertise, which would give foreign companies an edge over the indigenous companies. In this regard, PSR is meant to empower foreign nationals and to help multinational companies have total control of all the sectors of African economy.

3. PSR is another subtle way for the developed countries to make incursions into African armed forces and national security for their selfish economic ends. In the name of reform, the developed countries suggest the need for professionalism in the armed forces of African countries. They offer appropriate technical assistance by bringing their officers to train local officers. In the process, they learn the strength and weaknesses of African armed forces, while also condemning these forces' current military hardware as outmoded and urging replacements to be supplied by the so-called developed countries. By this means, they establish ready-made markets for their manufactured arms and ammunition and promote their own economic interest.
4. Moreover, through PSR, wholly supervised by the international financial institutions and their collaborators, the concept of downsizing and rightsizing creep into the civil service. Through the exercise the best brains in the continent are identified and poached away to Europe and America to help develop their own economies at the expense of African economies. That is why it is so difficult to stem the trend of the brain drain now pillaging African countries.

It is apparent from the above that the philosophy behind current PSR in Africa is the furthering of the economic interests of the developed countries and the international donor agencies. The important question at this juncture is: Do African leaders realize this philosophical basis of PSR? How do they think of the reforms? This will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

How Do African Leaders Perceive Public Sector Reform?

Almost all African leaders see PSR in terms of initiated actions to change or better the existing situation in public policies. That is why Schacter (2000) sees PSR as synonymous with government. In the opinion of Schacter, like many African leaders and to some extent some scholars, PSR starts with government action and also ends with government. This is a wrong notion of PSR, which has contributed in no small measure to its failure in practice.

PSR should be seen in terms of an idea, initiated actions and, most importantly, the consequences of the actions. The consequences themselves are multifaceted in the sense of a minimal impact on government itself, a greater impact on the private sector and the greatest impact on the people. This is so because whatever actions initiated by government directly affect the private sector, which is the engine room and driving force of many economies. Furthermore, the general populace bears the brunt of government policies. In essence, it is the consequence that holds the key to the success of any reform and not the actions.

It is the myopic conception of PSR as an action alone that detaches government completely from the populace. What government calls PSR is actually the changing and swapping of policies, not for the betterment of the governed but for the donor agencies and countries. African leaders have forgotten the saying that 'there is no free lunch in Freetown'. The free market economy being preached by the donor agencies and international financial institutions does not allow doing business without making profit. There is a minimum effort with a maximum profit. So, there are no common and harmonized objectives between African leaders who are to implement the reform and their so-called friends, that is, the international financial institutions who imposed the reform on them. African leaders erroneously think that PSR will lead to improving the well-being of their citizens while the international financial and donor agencies see it as a way of finding outlets for their goods and services, and thereby dominating the economies of African countries. In clear terms, the African leaders see PSR in the following ways.

African leaders regard PSR in terms of privatization of government enterprises. This is the selling of government-owned enterprises and companies to private individuals and companies. The driving force of privatization all over the world is economic interest. According to Turner (1998), 'the basic economic argument in favour of privatisation is that it leads to more cost-efficient service for consumers, relieves government of expenditure burdens and reduces corruption'. As a result of privatization, many of the enterprises that represent the national pride of African countries have been sold off to multinational companies. A classic example is the African aviation industries. At present, few African countries have national carriers, the others having been privatized and bought by European and American nationals. The irony of the situation is that those countries at the forefront of privatization in Africa still have their own national carriers functioning well. We have British Airways, KLM for Netherlands, Lufthansa for Germany, Iberia for Spain, Air France, etc., but where is Nigeria Airways, Senegal Airways, Cameroon Airways and so on? Even the few existing national carriers in Africa such as Air Malawi, Air Tanzania, Air Mauritius, Air Angola and Air Gabon are meant to serve as feeders to the major airlines that ply European and American routes. These African national carriers are not certified to fly to major international airports. Rather, they are required to fly passengers from their various countries to South Africa, Nairobi, Lagos or Dakar from where the other European and American airlines take them to different parts of the world.

The argument that privatization would reduce corruption is also defective. Experiences have shown that it has institutionalized corruption into the body

politic more than before. Turner rightly captures the real situation of things in these words:

The process of privatisation creates new possibilities for corruption in the determination of the price paid for the enterprise, the terms of the privatisation agreement and the nature of the bidding arrangements. The possibility exists that favoured individuals and companies may acquire valuable assets at below-market prices. The winners would be the public officials who organized the deals and the new owner (Turner 1998:1).

Recent revelations concerning the privatization programme in Nigeria confirm this assessment. Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries and petrochemicals were alleged to have been offered to Blue Star Company at give-away prices lower than the real worth of these entities. The outcry that followed and the subsequent withdrawal of the company attested to this fact. The same fate befell the former Nigerian Telecommunication (NITEL), the country's only national operator, which was grossly undervalued before it was sold to Transcorp Plc, a company in which many Nigerian top government officials are shareholders.

The international agencies and developed countries have impressed on African leaders that government should not be seen as Father Christmas, rendering selfless service to the people. Rather, government should be seen to be creating wealth like any profit-making organization. To this end, African leaders view PSR as commercialization of all state-owned enterprises so as to make the required profit. Consequently, every sector of the economy is commercialized in the drive towards new public sector management. Water, electricity, health, education, agriculture, etc., are all commercialized in African countries whereas these services are heavily subsidized in the developed countries. As noted under privatization, commercialization also encourages official corruption rather than controlling it. With privatization and commercialization, government deliberately withdraws from direct provision of certain essential services and only concerns itself with the establishment of the bodies to control activities. Experience in this regard has shown the regulatory bodies being interested more in the number of tours made in the name of monitoring and evaluation than performing the actual function of qualitative, efficient and effective regulation.

African leaders also see PSR in terms of the downsizing of the national public workforce. The misconception is that government size is becoming bloated with the attendant deep cuts in national financial resources and little to show in terms of service delivery. The compelling goal here is to cut down on government expenditure, and the belief is that once the downsizing of the public service is carried out, government would use the excess of

money on the wage bill to carry out other meaningful projects. Just like the privatization and commercialization programmes, the idea of downsizing is based on a wrong presupposition. Experience has also shown that downsizing has never achieved the desired objectives. Many professionals and well-trained personnel are retrenched to pave the way for mediocre replacements who have godfathers in the system. At the end of the day, the considerable resources spent in training these professionals would go down the drain. The multinational companies, who have spent nothing on them, would now enjoy their services. The loss of the public sector would become the gain of the private sector. Most of the services being rendered by the retrenched workers would be outsourced to companies owned by top government officials. Here, we have another facet of corruption in the body politic.

Arising from the above, it is clear to a discerning mind that African leaders accepted the induced PSR without realizing the facts behind it. They thought it would give their countries a great social, economic and political leap forward. However, it was meant to pauperize their economies the more, it was meant to recolonize them and it was meant for their perpetual domination by the so-called developed countries. These discordant objectives account for the lion's share of the failure of PSR in Africa. Now we turn to the consequences of these disparate goals of the international financial institutions and African leaders with regard to PSR in Africa.

Public Sector Reform in Africa: What Went Wrong

According to the evaluation carried out by World Bank with regard to its programmes in PSR in Africa, a report of 1999 shows that only one-third of the Bank's projects had produced a satisfactory result. The report goes further to say that the sustainability of this one-third was not guaranteed (World Bank 1999). From this, it is clear that PSR in Africa has achieved little or nothing, despite the colossal investment in terms of finance and valuable manpower as well as loss in terms of integrity, cultural heritage and value system on the part of African countries. Even when the World Bank (2000:100) reported that PSR had 'great potential to reduce poverty', the Bank was displaying a false sense of security, having failed to realize that a reform without roots in the culture and belief of the people would definitely fail. No wonder that PSR in Africa has, in reality, increased poverty levels among people instead of reducing it, as envisaged by the World Bank.

The desired positive results from PSR in Africa could not be achieved for the following reasons:

1. The World Bank Report (2000a) and Schacter (2000a) lay the failure of public sector reform at the doorstep of the donor agencies, which

they accused of employing a technocratic approach to PSR. According to Schacter, this technocratic approach is based on a blueprint solution in which there is an assumption that public sector reform problems and their solutions could be fully specified in advance, and that projects could be fully defined at the outset and implemented on a predictable timetable, over a fixed period' (Schacter 2000:7). In essence, the concept, formulation and execution of PSR in Africa had been done in the cosy offices of the donor agencies far away in Europe and America for delivery on African soil. The fact that what they thought to be the situation is quite different from the actual realities on ground accounts for the monumental failure of PSR in Africa.

2. Another important factor responsible for the failure of PSR in Africa is the non-provision for participation of locals at the leadership level of the reform. This problem is a by-product of the first one. The donor agencies and the international financial agencies completely shut out locals both in the leadership and ownership of the PSR agenda. They are of the view that the required technical expertise, leadership qualities and financial capacity to carry out the reform can only be provided by them. For them, the local bureaucratic and political leadership are too inefficient and corrupt to be actively involved in the reform. This notion is anchored on a false premise that 'outsiders can build state capacity despite the lack of effective internal demand for more capable governments' (Brautigam 1996:99). While it is true that designing and managing a PSR programme requires a high level of administrative capacity, the fact cannot be denied that it is not only the so-called foreign experts who are endowed with high administrative acumen and technical know-how.
3. The international donor agencies and financial institutions fail to realize that it is not all developing countries as known in Africa that necessarily require reform of their public sectors. The very idea of reform means the existing situation is not right and requires change for better. However, many countries in Africa, such as Swaziland, Lesotho, South Africa, Botswana, Ghana, Ethiopia and Kenya, have public sectors that are well managed at present, even without the much-touted PSR. In these countries, there are possibilities for dislocation in their system if PSR is introduced. So, the idea that every developing country must undergo PSR is erroneous. The attendant failure of PSR in Africa can therefore be traced to the forceful introduction of the reform to countries that did not need it in the first instance.

4. Also, even where PSR is desirable, both the African leaders who are eager to embrace it and their allies in the developed countries fail to realize that PSR has a long gestation period for PSR before it can have a meaningful impact on the economy. For instance, the PSR carried out in Great Britain in 1854 took 30 years to achieve the desired result (Schacter 2000). However, the reverse is the case now. Driven by their selfish economic motives and coupled with the ignorance on the part of African leaders, the donor agencies expect the current PSR in Africa to yield the desired result in a shortest possible period. This has in no small measure affected the success of PSR in Africa.
5. The failure to take into consideration the ethical and communal values and peculiar situations in various African countries by the promoters of PSR has dealt a devastating blow to the reform agenda; for, it is quite difficult to change people overnight from their long-established ways of doing things as well as their cherished cultural beliefs. One does not require a soothsayer to know that there is a need for a fundamental restructuring of African thought with regard to its public sector reform. The earlier this is done the better, so as to avoid further damage to the system.

Public Sector Reform in Africa: Towards a Philosophical Re-thinking

Just as intense training of the body changes the body outlook, it is the intense training of the mind that will definitely give it a new orientation. In the same manner, the basic and fundamental approach of Africa to the reform in its public sector is the reform of the minds of African leaders. This is highly important because it is only a reformed mind that can reform the body politic. In this endeavour, African leaders must wake up from their intellectual slumber to ask themselves some simple but challenging questions. First, why is it that PSR in Africa heavily depends on donor agencies and the initiatives of the developed countries? Secondly, do African leaders genuinely understand the philosophy behind this externally imposed reform? Thirdly, does the designing and implementation of the reform fit into the cultural ethos and values of Africa? Fourthly, must reform be carried out just in the name of reform, even when it is undesirable? Fifthly, do not African leaders think that reforming themselves from their old ways to render quality service to their people is the necessary reform required? These and other pertinent questions could set in motion the necessary intellectual renewal towards what PSR represents.

So, for a genuine philosophical re-thinking of PSR, the following issues must be given serious consideration:

1. African countries require institutional leadership that can produce a strong united government built on what Jocelyne Bourgon, the former head of the Canadian Public Service, called 'a common mission, a common sense of purpose and common values' (Bourgon 2002). The issue of institutional leadership is vital to the overall development of Africa. As the World Bank noted: 'underlying the litany of Africa's development problems is a crisis of governance. By governance is meant the exercise of power to manage a nation's affairs' (World Bank 1989:60). This type of leadership would know what it requires to offer purposeful leadership to their countries. They will not be leaders imposed on their people by the developed countries. The process of bringing them to power has to be transparent. They must be able to appreciate the peculiarities of their situations as different from what is appropriate in another country. This type of leadership must have a reformed mind, which knows that not everything introduced by the developed countries and international donor agencies would be beneficial. Their minds must also be reformed from corrupt ways of doing things. They must realize that ill-gotten wealth would not give them lasting peace. Rather, they must see government as service to the people, in which they use their native wisdom in conjunction with some elements of contemporary appeals to offer quality service to the people, just as Nelson Mandela and Julius Nyerere did. So, African countries should redirect their attention first to institutionalizing selfless and purposeful leadership before talking about PSR. If this is achieved, government apparatuses would be managed well enough to deliver the necessary public goods that would render reform in the public sector irrelevant or minimal.
2. Where PSR is absolutely necessary, the African leaders should jettison the idea of accepting in full its presentation by the donor agencies and their counterparts in the international financial institutions. Instead, consideration should be given to how the overall package of PSR would work in their countries. It had been introduced earlier to other developing countries outside Africa. Report had it that countries in Oceania, especially Australia and New Zealand, who embraced PSR were quick to realize some of the salient virtues of their traditional administration as different from those embedded in the imported PSR. These cherished virtues were inculcated in their own PSR; so, it was not total acceptance of the already conceptualized and mechanized

PSR programme handed down to them by the donor agencies. Also, some East Asian countries such as Malaysia and Singapore accepted certain principles of the imported PSR while rejecting others. For instance, they accepted the concept of total quality management (TQM), which they injected into their public administration, but went for outright rejection of commercialization of their public utilities (Pollitt and Boukaert 2000). All these choices were made after giving consideration to their unique socio-cultural and ethical values. The result was a strong economy and stable polity. On the other hand, African countries wholly accepted the reform packages without thought and consideration of their socio-cultural milieu and the particular needs of their citizens. In essence, there is a need for the reorientation of African leaders who believe that whatever comes from the developed countries and a donor agency is perfect and fault-free.

3. There is also a need to exploit indigenous knowledge in carrying out any required reform in the public sector. It has always been a case of the donor agencies relying on their own foreign technical expertise and public management wizardry in implementing reform agenda in the African public sector. They have forgotten that PSR 'is a social and political phenomenon driven by human behaviour and local circumstances' (Schacter 2000:7). So, for a meaningful and impact felt reform to be successfully carried out, it must take into consideration the behavioural pattern, the social context as well as the cultural milieu of the people whom the reform is meant for, together with the vehicle of the reform, that is, the *dramatis personae*. There must be a departure from the situation whereby consideration is never given to the would-be recipient of the outcome of the reform and no inputs into the reform policy formulation by local technocrats and policy-makers are permitted. Professor Mhone suggested as much when he wrote that 'there is a need to indigenise the notion and practice of governance by exploiting and adapting indigenous knowledge systems, particularly those prevailing in non-modern sectors of African society by which the majority of African people live and abide (Mhone 2003:18). When governance is indigenized, it will enable people to understand the purpose of government, and this would reduce dislocation in the system, which usually accompanies PSR.

Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to redirect African thought to the concept of PSR. It is not meant to disparage whatever might be genuine attempts by the developed countries to render developmental assistance to the developing coun-

tries, especially Africa. Also, the paper is not meant to classify all assistance from the donor agencies as a Greek gift. Rather, the main objective has been to expose the taproot of the failure of PSR in Africa so as to find a lasting solution to it.

What we have done in this paper is to show that current public sector reform in Africa is completely detached from the people whose living standards the reform is meant to improve. Utilitarianism remains the ethical standard upon which this type of reform should be based. The maxim of utilitarianism is ‘the greatest happiness and good for the greatest number of people’. This has not been the case with the reform in the African public sector where public good is traded off for selfish interest. The consequences of our public policies and programmes should first be considered before the action is carried out. This is what this paper advocates.

The fact cannot be denied that the current faulty public sector reform in Africa has its own advantages. For one, it awakens the consciousness of people to how responsible governance can be achieved. Not that alone, public sector reform lays emphasis on government that is ‘open and responsive to civil society, more accountable and better regulated by external watchdogs and the law’ (World Bank 1994). Citizens are being regarded as stakeholders in governance rather than onlookers fitted with shock absorbers to accept whatever policies are churned out by the political leadership. However, the benefit of the current effort is insignificant compared to the retardation that it has brought to the socio-economic and political lives of African citizens, hence the need for a philosophical re-thinking that this paper calls for.

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