Dear S.G. Happy New Year and welcome on board.
Please find herewith my conference paper for the 25th A.A.P.A.M. Roundtable Annual Conference for the Gambia.

THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES:

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

DIMENSIONS OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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INTRODUCTION
Public Administration according to Vilella (2001) is the manner in which Central or Federal, Provincial or State and local governments, organise human resource and assets, institutionalize and managed with respect to revenue collection and disbursement to provide essential services (social, defence, economic, infrastructure, diplomacy etc) in a given nation.

In other words, public administration implies the manner in which public affairs are executed by public servants, council workers etc at all levels, for the benefit of the entire society. However, it should be noted that there are differences in the way public administrative structures are set up in different countries. Such differences tend to affect the way services are provided and influence the way workers behave and operate.

The public administrative institutions are the main media through which governments business is managed (ADEI, 2002). At the core of these institutions is the civil service. It acts as government machinery and is charged with the responsibilities for policy formulation and implementation; evaluation and control of projects and programmes. The organs of execution are the ministries and public agencies.

When government policies are properly formulated and implemented, the outcome is good and could be referred to as good governance, if not, it could be regarded as bad policies or bad governance.

The roles and operational practices of public administration are in most cases intertwined with the challenges of governance, poverty reduction and economic growth in Africa.

This paper will first give the historical background and settings in Sub-Saharan countries, how various regimes have operated in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular i.e. before and after independence. Secondly, it will try to assess what the public administration has done, what are the challenges and what prescriptions were made by the Bretton-Wood institutions, what measures our leaders took to promote sustainable development and fight poverty. Thirdly, I will try to present Cameroon’s strategies in reducing poverty and finally, the way forward.

A Brief Historical Background of Africa’s Public Administration.

The end of colonialism and the advent of independence saw African governments planning to accelerate development and compete with the developed economies. Such moves resulted in their formulating developmental programmes and policies that have left the continent worse off than it was during colonisation. The reasons are many even though we know that the most important is the weak economic base from which they started. Thirty years ago, the World Bank promised to reduce Africa’s Poverty level
by half by the turn of the century. Unfortunately, the result is the opposite (World Bank 1987). Over the years most African countries pursued the following programmes:

i) Growth and trickle down policies  
ii) Growth and income distribution policies  
iii) Socialism as self-reliance  
iv) Marxist policies and programmes.  
v) The Structural Adjustment Programmes (S.A.P.) etc.

Unfortunately, all of these programmes failed to resuscitate countries in Sub-Saharan Africa from its poverty syndrome. Instead, economic and political factors deteriorated. Reviewing the above-mentioned failed programmes, one turns to ask the following questions:

i) Is democracy weak in Africa?  
ii) Is the African Continent really poor?  
iii) Is growth and sustainable development not possible in our continent?  
vii) Can we have wealthy African States that have good roads, good education facilities, good health facilities, citizen participation in decision-making etc?  

In spite of the resources and tremendous efforts being put forward by some leaders, the socio-economic development remain very low and poverty reduction strategies continue to be an uphill task. Many African countries, on the ground show that significant segments of the population are too poor to live meaningful lives.

According to the World Bank Report (2000), close to 300 million people in Africa live on less than $.65 cents per day and that the number is on the rise. Moreover, this state of poverty is exacerbated by internal conflicts and inter-state conflicts in a number of countries coupled with bad governance.

During the last TICAD III September, 29th 2003 in Tokyo, it was clear that many African leaders continue to make promising and concerted efforts to effect democratisation and sustainable development process to get rid of poverty in their countries. Unfortunately, the failed results have generated debate on whether democracy, sustainable development and poverty reduction are compatible with the African situation. (Abdalla Bujra 2002).
Many schools of thoughts have developed three approaches. The first approach emphasises that democracy is a neo-liberal setting. The proponents argue that there is a correlation between democracy and a high level of development.

The second approach proposes that it is not possible or feasible to build democracy while at the same time pursuing sustained development. For those following this path, they believe that the first thing to do is to strengthen and expand the economic base in which accumulation of wealth is possible under an authoritarian political condition and then introduce democracy when poverty would have been out of the way. The people would then listen and accept democratic governance. Advocates of this approach quote the South-East Asian Tigers as examples.

The third school of thought bases itself on the synthesis of the two-above approaches. They think that prioritising any of the afore-mentioned approach is misleading. For Africa, the view that propose the simultaneous pursuit of economic development, democracy and poverty reduction is the appropriate direction to be adopted and implemented. This is because African countries have experienced terrible authoritarian regimes like late Muamba of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Badel Bokasa of the Central African Republic and I.D. AMIN of Uganda.

Furthermore, lack of the economic development through time leads to internal conflicts. To prevent the possibility of internal conflict when there is economic boom, the benefits must be equitably distributed among the citizens. If not they will continue to grasp more for themselves, while the poor who are always in the majority will grow impoverished in their misery and die or have a good reason for internal conflict.

Recent Development Trends in Africa.

Africa’s social political and economic crisis are products of weak agricultural growth policies both external and internal, the decline in industrial output, poor export performance coupled with lack of the spirit for competitiveness, the reduction of prices for our agricultural export crops (coffee, cocoa, tea, banana, etc.), escalating external debts, deteriorating social conditions, domestic policy deficits, the decomposition of the state and its institutions of governance and the worsening international economic environment.

The 1999 African Development Bank Report observed that large currency depreciations raised prices and reduced the demands for imports from the rest of the world and Africa as well. The continents export market share is under threat from intense price competition in the third markets for primary products from Asian countries.

According to the African Development Bank Report, (1994), figures for cocoa beans showed a 20 percent point drop of Africa’s global market share between 1970 and 1993 while Asia increased its share by the same amount.
Thirty-three African countries out of the forty-eight countries classified by the United Nations as the Least Developed Countries (L.D.Cs) in the World are in Africa. Forty-nine L.D.C.s account for nearly one quarter of the World’s population and their share of the World G.D.P. is less than 1 percent.

Since the beginning of the 1990’s the Official Development Assistance (O.D.A.) has been on the decline while the access to private finance for investment remains limited. It is clear that if this trend persists, agendas aimed at poverty reduction and social and human development will be at risk.

Response by African Countries to these Crises.

African countries have embraced development strategies which emphasised trade and comparative advantage in the export of raw materials and minerals; in short export - led growth. Specific responses from the Bretton - Woods Institutions came under a stabilisation programme commonly known as Structural Adjustment Programme (S.A.P.) whose standard prescription and conditionality included inter alia:

- Massive and repeated currency devaluation:
- Exchange and interest rate liberalisation ;
- Monetary control, usually by setting ceilings on domestic credit expansion ;
- Trade liberation, including the abolition of State subvention and subsides on basic foods, essential services, and energy sources for the poor.
- Public sector retrenchments, including wage freezes ;
- Public enterprise privatisation, liquidation and commercialisation ;
- A generalisation curb on state intervention in economic processes which is consequential for the regional economies
- Drastic budgetary cuts, especially with respect to expenditures in the social services and essential goods, thus undermining human conditions, while at the same time were encouraging “tradable” export commodities through price incentive in place of food production, which also led to undesirable environmental degradation which sometimes led to over production and a fall in their prices.
- Across the board credit sweeze which led to the contraction of the economy, thus forcing home-born industries to close down and an accentuated shortage of critical goods and services.
- Generalised devaluation policies involving open exchange market currency depreciation that have serious social, political and economic consequences. Such policy raised the domestic cost of imported inputs and undermine capacity.
Unsustainable high interest rates leading to shifts in the economy toward speculative trading activities which is a disincentive to productive investment.

Most African countries became too dependent on market forces for getting the prices right in structurally distorted and imperfect markets situation.

Lastly African governments followed doctrinaire privatisation, which undermines growth and transformation and jeopardises social welfare and human conditions.

Historical impoverishment of a continent.

The impoverishment of the continent dates back to the colonial legacy, the cold war, the workings of the international economic system and the inadequacies of and shortcomings in the policies pursued by many countries in the post-independence era.

Africa has been integrated into the world economy mainly as a supplier of cheap labour and raw materials. This meant the draining of Africa’s resources for the development of colonial masters (Britain, France, Belgium etc) to the detriment of Africa.

At independence, virtually all the new states were characterised by a shortage of skilled professionals and a weak capitalist class. Post-colonial Africa inherited weak states and dysfunctional economies that were further aggravated by poor leadership, corruption and bad governance in many countries. These factors coupled with the cold war, hampered the development of accountable governments across the continent.

After the baton stick changed hands i.e. from the colonial masters to our leaders, many Africa governments did not empower their people to embark on development initiatives to realise their creative potential. Today, the weak state remains a major constraint to sustainable development in a number of countries of which Cameroon is no exception. Africa’s chaotic Public Bureaucracy has in large part failed to meet the aspirations of the continent’s inhabitants for better living standards.

WHAT HAS NEPAD TO OFFER?

The New Partnership For African Development (NEPAD) posits the grand problematique that will enable the continent to attain sustainable human development and democratic governance simultaneously and
reduce the level of poverty in Africa. Although NEPAD is still in its infant stage, it already offers opportunities that can solve the problems and challenges that the continent is facing in the twenty-first century.

NEPAD has innovative ways to promote democratic governance and sustainable human development. It provides a gateway through which the state, the public sector and the government bureaucracy can be turned into vehicles to achieve sustainable human development and democratic governance that will alleviate poverty at the national, regional and the continental levels. The present forms of governance and policy making at the national, regional and continental levels should be critically questioned and interrogated to see if they address the twin goals that NEPAD offers.

This is important with respect to attaining the Millennium Development Goals set for 2015 by the United Nations, at which time the number of those living in poverty should have been reduced by half. Africa cannot continue to expect that the present economic growth pattern which merely promotes the formal sector will be enough to precipitate a sustainable human and economic development.

Secondly, within this same context, the state stands a chance to compete with the Developed Economies in the current round of World Trade Organisation (WTO) if there is both qualitative and quantitative growth of African Economy.

CAMEROON GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES TO FIGHT POVERTY

INTRODUCTION

Successive programmes of macroeconomic stabilisation and structural reforms in recent years have only succeeded in consolidating the government’s fiscal position and improving the business climate, as well as the overall competitiveness of Cameroonian economy. As a result, Cameroon enjoyed a 4.5 percent annual economic growth rate over the last five years, despite the decline in oil revenue sector. Income per capita rose slightly by 2 percent over the period 1996/2001

Social conditions, however, continued to deteriorate considerably over the last two decades as a result of the economic and social crisis. Consequently, indicators of public health, education and the access to basic services remain alarmingly low and even worse than they were in the 1980s.

In recognition of this situation, the government decided to commit itself to a new generation of economic and social reforms. The objective on one hand is to consolidate the achievements of the previous programmes and stimulate economic growth, and on the other hand address the social sphere and to ensure that economic performance is translated into real improvement in the living condition of all Cameroonians.

To this end the government prepared an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP) in August, 2000. The completion of the I-PRSP was followed by a series of priority sectoral studies in the area of health, education and the rural sector.

The PRSP is intended to bring shape and coherence to the new generation of economic and social policies and provide a frame of reference to Sustainable Human Development in Cameroon.
The macroeconomic situation.

I will like at this juncture to present a sequence of events that took place in Cameroon before the economic crisis. Until 1985, there was a strategy growth pattern for over two decades that brought Cameroon into the front line and was regarded as a reference for better management in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the 1970’s agricultural output and export recorded a 6.5% growth rate and by the end of the 1970’s the country started exploiting petroleum reserves and Cameroon recorded average real growth rates about 8% for the next ten years period.

During the 1985/86 budgetary session, export revenues had declined sharply owing to the drop in world prices of Cameroon’s export commodities. The collapse involved both oil and agricultural products (coffee, cocoa, cotton, banana etc). The drop registered was 8.2% of G.D.P. about CFAF 329 billion. Growth rate turned negative and between 1985 and 1988 the terms of trade deteriorated by half.

To address the crisis, the Bretton-Wood Institutions (World Bank and I.M.F.) asked the government to adopt the Structural Adjustment Policies. S.A.P. had its limitations and drastic consequences. Economic indicators continued to deteriorate and the steady decline in income led to a 40 percent fall in per capital consumption between 1985/86 and 1992/93. The external debt stock rose from less than one-third to more than three-quarters of G.D.P. between 1984/85 and 1992/93. Investment declined from 27 percent to less than 11 percent of G.D.P. leading to serious deterioration in government finances. Faced with unsustainable cash pressure, civil service wages were drastically cut by 72 percent in 1993 (Ministry of Finance).

In January 1994 the C.F.A. currency was devalued by 50% thus compounding the sufferings of the masses.

Two new structural adjustment programmes concluded in 1994 and 1995 under stand-by arrangements with I.M.F. ended up in failure like the previous. In particular, the objectives of restoring fiscal balance and servicing the external debt could not be met. Civil Servants lost all their fringe benefits (free quarters, car loans, free water and electricity, free telephone etc). Employment and recruitment were freezed in the public sector.

In August, 1997, after satisfactorily completing a staff-monitored I.M.F. programme for the budgetary year 1996/97, the government was able, for the first, to enter into an Enhance Structural Adjustment Facility(ESAF) arrangement.

The Socio-economic situation

The improved macroeconomic performance has not been accompanied by a comparable improvement in the living conditions of most Cameroonians. Though it is clear that the economic crisis did a lot of harm to the economy and reduced the living standards in Cameroon for many years, embezzlement and endemic corruption has done worse. The provision of basic social services has been severely hampered for lack of public finances. The road infrastructures has deteriorated very badly for want of maintenance. The rural
population has been cut off in many areas and they find it very difficult to evacuate their produce. Water engineering and electrification programmes are lagged for lack of financing. The heath and education infrastructures have deteriorated for lack of maintenance. In some cases only very limited staff operate in most of these facilities.

These factors have combined to produce a sharp decline in the quality of education and high rates of child and maternal deaths.

Definition and Perception of Poverty

According to the United Nations Development Programme Poverty Report on Cameroon (1998), poverty refers to inadequate of resources and deprivation of choices that would enable people to enjoy decent living conditions. Poverty has a multiplicity of dimensions, including poor health and education, lack of access to knowledge, the inability to exercise civil rights, lack of dignity and personal confidence, degradation of the environment, discrimination etc.

Assessing the poverty status of a person, group or individuals is not an easy task. Within any human group, the poor are schematically that portion of the population whose living conditions are manifestly below the observed average. (UNDP). In Cameroon, it is possible to identify the “poor” population using a variety of sources and a broad range of characteristics that are often closely linked to the sociocultural setting. These include who your parents are in the society, what your income is, what you possess and your standard of living.

According to a reflection group on Democracy, Good Governance and Poverty Alleviation Conference by D.P.M.F in Addis, Poverty was defined to be a condition where people cannot attain a minimum standard of living to access basic needs such as education, good health and empowerment. Income was considered as a very important indicator though inadequate.

Household living conditions survey.

The quantitative or monetary approach to poverty is based on the method of basic food and non-food needs, identified using data from the two Cameroonian Household Surveys(ECAM I and II) that were conducted nationwide in 1996 and 2000. They provided a clear picture of the status of poverty and living conditions in Cameroon.

The 1996 household survey was conducted to measure the impact of the economic crisis and the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme on Cameroonian that had lasted for almost a decade. The second ECAM II survey was an update of the degree of poverty and served in preparing benchmark indicators to monitor the progress made in reducing poverty and provided the basis for the final document for the PRSP.

The Cameroonian government is fully aware of the scope of these social problems and the need for a comprehensive medium-term development framework for coordinating all of its economic and social strategies. Hence, the government took some important decisions in this respect in the form of its Poverty Strategy Declaration in December, 1998. This is in consonance with the Millennium Development Goals (M.D.Gs, September, 2000) for which the Cameroon Government subscribed to.

In substance, the PRSP offers an empirical and integrated framework for the development of Cameroon, one in which macroeconomic, sectoral and social policies work together to promote growth, reduce poverty and improve other dimensions of human development (education, health, security, infrastructure, etc.)

The P.R.S.P. will be able to achieve its objectives only if sufficient political will and public resources can be effectively mobilised and targeted at the strategic issues indicated in the paper and the concomitant programmes are properly executed.

The government with the support of the U.N.D.P. and the World Bank has again launched a “Comprehensive economic study on the growth for reducing poverty” to identify competitive industries and recommend support policies.

At the same time, the government has undertaken a large-scale study on the competitiveness of the Cameroonian economy. The initial results were used to formulate the P.R.S.P. and the final results will provide inputs to the revised version of the P.R.S.P. The U.N.D.P. has also initiated a series of regional studies on the socio-economic stance of the region (Central Africa). These studies will serve as effective instruments for monitoring the execution of the strategy and to measure this impact in the region.

The ultimate objective of government’s strategy is to achieve a sustainable and visible improvement in the standard of living of Cameroonians by tackling the grass root causes of poverty. The authorities believe that implementing policies designed to create conditions that will sustain economic growth and align its poverty reduction policies with the Millennium Development Goals (M.D.G.s) will go along way to reduce the number of people who live in poverty.

More specifically, the government’s target for 2015 are as follows:

1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by halving the proportion of Cameroonians living below the poverty line and suffering from hunger;

2) Achieve universal primary education by making sure that all the children complete primary education;

3) Promote gender equality and empower women, by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary schools and also ensure a balance in recruitment;

4) Reduce by two-thirds infant mortality and among children under 5;

5) Improve maternal health, by reducing the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters;

6) Combat and possibly stop the spread of HIV/AIDS, control the incidence of malaria and other major diseases and reverse their spread;

7) Ensure environmental sustainability by reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water, achieve significant improvement in housing by integrating sustainable development principles in national policies and reverse the current degradation of environmental resources; and
8) Create a global partnership to develop information and communication technologies and to implement policies and strategies that offer decent and productive work prospects to Cameroon.


For Africa to move away from its poverty syndrome and compete with the rest of the world (global village) our public administration must be both mentally and resource equipped to overcome the major challenges. In the book “African Public Administration” (Mukandala, editor, 2000) the major challenges confronting public administration in Africa are:

- The crisis of institution;
- Continued domination of the colonial logic in public administration;
- Poor or non-implementation of legislated policies;
- Persistent and endemic corruption;
- The articulation of structural adjustment programmes and privatisation and civil service reforms;
- Cross border conflicts; and
- HIV/AIDS pandemic.

The crisis of institutions is an endemic problem in Cameroon. One of the institutions call the National School for Administration and Magistracy, popularly called (ENAM) in the French acronym was initially designed to train administrators and magistrates. Today there are other courses in Finance and Management. The initial ideology of the school had been to train civil servants who will take over from the experts after independence. Unfortunately, it has become a passport for corrupt and bureaucratic officials and if you do not go through “ENAM” whatever qualification one possesses means nothing. This country is being destroyed by graduates from ENAM. Something must be done to change that mentality.

In Cameroon there is what we call ‘Texte d’Application,’” that is the text of application, if this text is not signed by the head of State, no matter how good or how long a text had been legislated by the National Assembly, it will not be implemented.

The public administration has over five percent European workers (mostly from France, our former masters) who positions of confidence in the ministries and even our security network. It is difficult to plan as an Africans without interference.
Corruption is our number one enemy. Despite all the anti-corruption strategies and commissions being put in place, and the monitoring agencies in Cameroon, corruption thrives very well and has been institutionalised at all levels. This can only be contained if punitive measures are put in place.

There are too many conflicting programmes and very draconian measures Cameroon has undergone through the Structural Adjustment Programmes. Unfortunately, the Brettonwood Institutions cannot stamp out capital flight. All they are interested in is to see that their accounts are balanced or repaid. Africa needs corrective programmes with the human face.

Africans must learn to live as brothers not wolves. Where is our Pan Africanism? Let the foreigners not use Africa as a dumping ground for their weaponry. We need to feed the hungry masses.

African leaders must spend more to fight the HIV/AIDS and other resurfacing pandemic diseases in Africa. It is time for action and not mere words and meaningless conferences the way we operate in Africa. Patrimonialism and too much bureaucracy must be put to rest, if we want Africa to compete with the rest of the world. The old approach to governance is defective because it lacks a normative, analytical scientific and development ethos. The new approach calls for a synergy and participatory model of governance that gives room to all the stakeholders to make contributions that will affect their lives.

According to Mc Lennan, (2000) unless new explanatory models are developed that are capable to address issues of transformation and change which we need, our African public administration will simply be “Stuck with ox-wagon”.

The new Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) is predicated on the need to promote Africa’s development on drawing synergy from both internal and external resources. Sharing the struggles and the fruits of sustainable development therefore calls for concerted efforts from all stakeholders.

The Way Forward

Poverty reduction and sustainable development are the key challenges facing our continent today and many believe that good governance is a necessary condition for meeting these challenges. Recent empirical works by the E.C.A. has shown that increases in per capita income are usually, though not always, accompanied by reduction in poverty rates. There is also evidence that democratic institutions have positive impact on poverty. Additionally, there is evidence that popular participation in local and national decisions helps to increase the realisation and improve the quality of government projects.
In the realm of sound economic management, the obligations of the capable state are many: ensuring a stable macroeconomic environment; designing and implementing poverty-reduction policies; successfully convincing the political leadership of the urgency to act on key policy matters affecting the economy or the welfare and security of the of the State; and providing space for all stakeholders to contribute to and benefit from the nation’s economy.

Good Governance, sustainable development and poverty reduction are closely related and core objectives of the United Nations. The U.N. member States believe that the world community must make advances on all three fronts simultaneously to ensure the very survival of the world community, and reduce the burden of 1.2 billion living in absolute poverty.

In the second U.N.D.P. annual report (UNDP 1991a) emphasis has been on putting people at the centre of development, a point that was reiterated at the conference on Democracy, Development and Poverty: The Debate and the Struggle Continues, at the 6th Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF) on December 4-6, 2001 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia:

Human development must, therefore, be the development of the people investing in their education and health—for the people, generating adequate incomes and satisfying their basic needs—and by the people, offering sufficient employment opportunities and allowing them to participate fully in every process which affects their lives. (UNDP, 1991a)

The second UNDP annual report (1991a) is a reminder that whatever development plans our African leaders have in the making must focus on improving on the living standards of their citizens. Development should not be sterile just for the sake of giving the impression that the government is fulfilling its obligations.

African leaders should learn to draw up development plans that will cater for the welfare and social needs (education, health, food and infrastructures) of their population and at the same time foster prosperity in our societies. If poverty is to be eradicated, the needs of the poor must be in the forefront of our development policies.

In adopting the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade (1991 to 2000), the U.N. General Assembly noted that special attention was required for poverty alleviation, human resources development, the environment, family planning and the elimination of hunger.

The principal objective of the strategy is therefore the strengthening of the relationship between economic growth and human welfare.

The DPMF conference on “Democracy, Sustainable Development and Poverty Alleviation (December, 2001) re-emphasised many international policy framework:

1. that commitment is necessary by African governments for the alleviation of poverty and should be the centre objectives of their national development plans and programmes;

2. that concerted efforts are necessary to effect democratisation and sustainable development processes to get rid of poverty in our societies;

3. that there are neither simple solutions nor quick fixes in poverty alleviation efforts, that coordination action by all stakeholders in development (African States, non-governmental organisations and agencies and the international community) is necessary;
4. that the fight against corruption, embezzlement of public funds, capital flight, too much of bureaucracy and patrimonialism must be overcome;

5. that anti-poverty programmes should first use the community’s own resources, build on the talents and skills of the community members, build on the people’s confidence and capacity so get themselves out of the poverty trap and that better results can be achieved when flexible arrangements are adopted that let the poor organise themselves to overcome their own poverty.

The government identified seven priority areas for the reduction of poverty in the medium-term:

1. promoting a stable macroeconomic framework;
2. strengthening growth by diversifying the economy;
3. revitalising the private sector as the main engine of growth and a partner in delivering social services;
4. developing basic infrastructures and natural resources while protecting the environment;
5. accelerating regional integration in the framework of Central African Economic and Monetary Community;
6. strengthening human resources and social sector and facilitating the integration of vulnerable groups into the economy; and
7. improving the institutional framework, administrative management and governance.
CONCLUSION

Public Administration is known and accepted as the key apparatus for the execution of government or state functions. It is represented by the executive and bureaucracy at the national, federal, provincial and local levels, together with the various statutory and parastatal bodies that perform a number of regulatory, monitoring, production and service delivery functions.

At the dawn of independence, statutory and parastatal bodies proliferated most African countries irrespective of whether they proclaimed themselves to be socialist or market oriented. There was a general belief that statism was the best way to promote rapid economic development and guard against political and social instability, hence the expansion of the role of government into many spheres. Unfortunately, following the international recession of mid 1970s and subsequent natural disasters, declining terms of trade and social upheavals, poor policies, corruption and of late the HIV/AIDS and other pandemic diseases, the states have encountered financial crises and the inability to deliver qualitative and quantitative services, sustain its personnel, service its debts, stop the drain of both human and financial capital from Africa.

The World Bank in its report entitled Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa (1981) known as Berg Report identified a number of problems that militate against economic growth and equity thus ushering in poverty and misery.

On the basis of the problems that African countries underwent and are still undergoing, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on their part resorted to stabilization and structural adjustment programmes for most of the governments as pre-conditions for borrowing from them. Unfortunately, the outcome were corrosive and compounded Africa’s problems than had been envisaged.

The policy to fight poverty should be home grown. Our political leaders must promote accountability in the public administration, promote sustainable growth with equity (sustainable human development) remove
bureaucratic red tapes and promote the ideals of NEPAD and ensure that democracy, human rights and freedom and good governance reigns.

During the third Tokyo Conference on African Development(TICADIII) last September, 2003, African Heads of State met and discussed on how the Japanese government could help in development and poverty alleviation in our continent.

I hope that taking the right step in the right direction with total commitment will help to improve the lives of many Africans living in abject poverty.

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