HUMAN CAPACITY BUILDING CHALLENGES TOWARDS IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY IN AFRICA

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1. **BACKGROUND**

Organizations are “rational instruments established to accomplish specific ends”. These ends are organizational goals. One can posit therefore that worldwide organizations are set-up for pre-determined goals and objectives, the attainment of which is to satisfy pre-identified societal needs and aspirations.

Organisations no matter their size (small, medium or large) and nature (formal or informal) consist mainly of materials, money, methods, men and market. In other words, capital, equipments and men have been identified as the basic factors of production in all organizations. However, of all these resources, the human resource (or personnel) have been identified as the most important. The degree of importance can be better appreciated if it is view from its perspective as an organization’s life-wire – as it is the human element that move the organization in the direction of meeting the societal needs. One can posit therefore, that, the most critical resources in all sectors of the economy is its manpower.

Therefore the human factor is indisputably acknowledged as a critical factor in the development of any action. This is because the human resource constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations rather than capital income or material resources, which are passive factors of production. For the human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations for the development of its citizenry.
With reference to the Africa continent, the public service has come intense criticism from within and outside for its epileptic service delivery. The citizen (customer) perceives the public service as oppressive, unjust, imposing, non-existent, unproductive and inefficient (Sekoto andStraaten). With the changing role government from been the engine of growth to one of facilitator and partner with the private sector, the public sector has been identified as a clog in the wheel of progress. It has indeed being described as prostrate and inefficient.

The inability of the public sector to effectively initiate, design, implement and monitor development programmes, projects and policies have been blamed for the relative backwardness of the continent which has been tagged a ‘fair continent’. Viewed from this perspective, Africa public service delivery mechanism has failed – albeit woefully.

However, given the internal and external pressure for change, deliberate attempt to transform and improve the image of the public service has led to the introduction of customer-focused based private sector practices. This aims primarily at improving public service delivery which hitherto has been characterized by the culture of non-delivery thereby bringing about improved efficiency and productivity.

The primacy of the customer dictates that it provides services that are responsive to the needs of its primary customer - the public. The main objective of a customer-focused approach is to improve service delivery and is characterized by consulting users of services, setting services
standard (s), increasing access, ensuring courtesy, providing more useful information, increasing openness and transparency, preventing mistakes and failures (and ensuring timely correction when they occur), providing the best value for money, enhanced accountability, encouraging innovation, rewarding excellence and building partnerships with the wider community.

Achieving the service delivery dreams in Africa public service calls for a deliberate and systemic capacity building initiative for the entire public service. It requires equipping/empowering everyone with the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude to be able to achieve service delivery and understand while service delivery is germane to the overall turnaround of the African state from a failed state.

2.1 CONCEPT DEFINITION

2.1 CAPACITY BUILDING

‘Capacity’ refers to the people, institutions and practices that enable countries to achieve their developmental goals. The compound word ‘capacity building’ entails the ability to identify and analyse problems, make rational choices, formulate solutions, and implement actions designed to achieve set objectives (World Bank, 1996).

Ani (1997) defined capacity building as the ability to formulate plans, identify and select viable options, execute, monitor and evaluate implementation of plans. Ani compared capacity building to the supply-side of an equation while capacity utilization represent the demand side,
and pointed out that both must be seen as equally important element in the overall development process. On his part, Akinola (1997) sees capacity building as the utilizable ability of people, institutions and practices within a country. It entails the creation and strengthening of this utilizable ability for development.

Highlighting the objective of capacity building Muhtar (1997) posited that: “The objective of capacity building is the ability to create the framework for the identification and analysis of problems and the formulation and implementation of solutions to enhance sustainable human development.”

2.2 WHY CAPACITY BUILDING

The World Bank submitted that investigations have revealed that in sub-Saharan Africa, there are severe constraints in all sectors, characterized by the following: a shortage of skilled staff, weak institutional environment, which undermine the proper utilization of existing capacity and inadequate training facilities and limited capacity to satisfy the need for skilled personnel. The essential technical tools required to promote development and the capacity to formulate and implement polices, and to manage the economy are weak or non-existent.

Supporting the World Bank findings, Carvalho (1997) identified capacity building as the missing link in Africa’s development and identified the adverse effect of this on national development, basic social services and inappropriate policy formulation.
In the same vein, Singh (1997) emphasized that the missing link in Africa development has been inadequate capacity building. Capacity building Singh noted was needed in all sectors of the economy and should be incorporated into all systems of development.

On his part, Williams (1997), traced capacity building and utilization in the public sector to the pre-colonial era in Nigeria, when emphasis was on maintenance of law and order rather than on capacity building for economic development. With the advent of independence, Williams posited, the tasks of government increase in magnitude and complexity, making it necessary to lay more emphasis on formal education and training to build the required skills.

Chinsman (1997) stated that the UNDP had identified capacity building as being compulsory for the growth of human capital stock, and hitherto, paucity of trained and skilled manpower coupled with weak institutions were identified as the root causes of development problem. The UNDP believed, stated Chensman, that a large investment in human capital development was necessary to correct the anomaly.

With regards to service delivery, capacity building is a sine-qua-non for various reasons. This include the need to:

(i) Change the orientation of the public servant from business-as-usual to one of result-oriented and customer focussed;

(ii) Acquire new knowledge and skills;

(iii) Have an attitudinal change etc.
2.3 SCOPE AND FORMS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

2.3.1 Fajana (1997) viewed capacity building from two stand points: Technical capacity relating to machine and equipments and capacity which relates to people, institutions and processes. These two concepts Fajana argued are relevant to economic growth and development. He described the scope to capacity building to cover training, setting up of institutions, utilization and retention of managerial, professional and technical personnel in the public and private sectors of the economy.

2.3.2 FORMS

Capacity building can take any of the following forms:

- Country-specific
- Programme/Project-related
- Organisational-related
- Job/Task specific-related

With regards to capacity building for service delivery, the scope should be the ‘total’ organization. However, a piece-meal approach can be used to introduce the change starting with areas ( key result areas – KRA’s) that can bring great impact quickly.

In terms of form, country specific, organisational specific and job/task specific approach are suggested. However, the peculiarity of each country, organisation and job should also be taken into cognizance.
2.4 **FOCUS OF CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SERVICE DELIVERY**

For effective implementation of service delivery, capacity building should focus on the following.

- Strategic Management
- Policy Development and Management
- Ethics of Good Governance
- Performance Management
- Human Resource Development and Management
- Target Setting
- Benchmarking
- Project management
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Entrepreneur development
- Team Building
- Managing and Leading Strategic Change
- e-Government and Management Information System
- Time Management
- Customer care
- Effective Communication skills
- Negotiation Skills and Management
- Total Quality Management
- Business Forces Re-engineering
- Change Management
- Crisis Management
- Creative Thinking
- Problem solving and Decision making
- Poverty Alleviation
- Investment Appraisal
- Reform Management.
- Service Delivery, Performance and Customer focus
- Etc.

3. **CAPACITY BUILDING TRENDS IN NIGERIA PUBLIC SERVICE**

   Using Nigeria’s foremost capacity development institute, the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON) as a case study. We shall highlight the number of public servants trained by ASCON between 1980 – 2005 The categorization is based on the following:

   (a) Long duration programmes (6 – 9 months)
   (b) Regular programmes (previous 4 – 6 weeks, now 2 weeks)
   (c) 3 months specialized programme (CEDAP & PGDCS)
   (d) Ad-hoc programmes.
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**Sources:** ASCON Records Centre/Archive

**SUMMARY:**

- Long Duration Programmes: 16,050
- Short Duration Programmes: 24,576
- Total: 40,806
When we compare the total figure of trained participants by ASCON since inception of 40,806 with what the Malaysian Institute of Management (INTAN) trains in just one year, about 55,000 participants we can conclude that training for service delivery requires a much more “topping up” than presently being done.

For service delivery to be achieved, “EVERYONE” must be trained. From the operational management staff to the strategic management staff.

4. **CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE CAPACITY BUILDING**

   (i) Non-existence/non-robust training policy: Most countries do not have training policy the whims and caprices and discretion of individual organization. In places where a resemblance of training policy exists it isn’t robust enough to ensure systemic human resource development.

   (ii) Inadequate budgetary allocation/Viement to other sub-heads. Training has always been the least funded budget item and whatever was budgeted is always to be the first casualty through viement whenever there are shortfalls in other budgeted sub-head.

   (iii) Lack of common understanding of the importance of capacity building which is responsible for the non-systemic and ad-hoc training method.

   (iv) The use of ‘mushroom or portfolios carrying’ consultants who lack requisite capability and capacity to conduct effective training.
(v) Lack of belief in the bulk of training and education programmes been run by MDIs as they are perceived as not been relevant to the Public Service as end-user

(vi) Impact of globalization: MDIs trend to design programmes that are externally influenced rather than internally-driven.

(vii) There exist ineffective collaboration between the public service (as customer) and the MDIs (as supplier). The implication of this is that both have not been able to strike the right cord.

(viii) Mischief on the part of Trainees: Some Trainees see their nomination for training as a ‘relaxation period’. They report late at training venue, attend class at will and do not show any sign of willingness to learn.

(ix) Orientation to Training: In most organization, training is not job-focused. Rather the two most common influence are welfare and political considerations. In this respect, the same group of people keep attending training programmes because of their closeness to Chief Executives of those responsible for training. This has grave implication for institutional memory building.

(x) Training cost: For some countries, the economy for a variety of reasons cannot absorb the training cost of most of the workforce even if they have genuine desire to train them.

(xi) Mismanagement of funds and corruption: Training funds are being mishandled by those saddled with its disbursement.
Dwindling external support for human capacity building. This arises partly due to non-transparent disbursement of training funds from Donors.

5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Achieving both NEPAD and UN MDG requires concerted effort at improving Public service delivery. However, given the challenges highlighted in the previous sections, the following recommendations suffices:

(i) Conduct/Convene a regional conference on the need to have a virile capacity building framework for the continent using the NEPAD & UN-MDG platform. This should lead to a region-wide ITN. The conduct of which should be done by consortium of African MDIs.

(ii) Countries without training polices should as a matter of urgency develop one, while those with one should re-assess their relevance. The import is to make each staff attend at least one training programme per year.’

(iii) Budgetary allocation should be increase to at least 15% of personnel cost and effective mechanism put in place for its monitoring.
(iv) Training and educational programmes by MDIs should be reviewed to reflect the challenges facing the continent and not just has one been tagged as excellent by the developed society.

(v) There is need to urgently improve collaboration between the Public Sector and MDIs as this will enable the MDIs know the mind of the public servant their concerns, worries, and challenges and be able to proffer solutions that goes beyond training – non training solutions.

(vi) Trainers should be made to submit a report as well as share experienced with colleagues in their department as to what they learn from the training that can be useful to them. Report should include an Action Plan.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


ASCON: Brochure of Courses for different years


World Bank: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development in sub-Saharan Africa: A World Bank Agenda (Development In Practice). Washington DC.