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**“Building a Developmental State:
Strategies for Attracting and Retaining
High Quality Staff in the Public Service in Africa”**

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“Building a Developmental State: Strategies for Attracting and Retaining High Quality Staff in the Public Service in Africa”

00: Introduction

0.1: Just a word on the term “Developmental State” and its relevance to the African situation: It is difficult for us to start a discussion on strategies for attracting and retaining high quality staff in the public service for building a developmental state in Africa without first making some observations on the notion of a “Developmental State in Africa” itself. We need to bear in mind that the term “Developmental State” has been employed mainly in international political economy to connote state-driven economic development processes, especially in reference to industrialization. Mostly the Developmental State is contrasted to the Regulatory State. In the African context where state capacity to drive economic development, especially industrial growth, is largely as weak as the capacity of the State to regulate and enforce standards to protect the public against abuses of market failure, one wonders whether African scholars should not revisit the true meaning of a Developmental State, or even rework its meaning to suit the African situation, to provide development actors with an appropriate enabling framework for scheming development work. The underlying understanding of this paper is that a Developmental State, in the Africa context, especially given the levels of poverty on the continent, will have the capacity to collaborate with all partners, mobilise national and international resources, and inspire its population to embark on and sustain socio-politico-economic development based on home-grown socio-politico-economic and even cultural visioning, strategies, and policies. A Developmental State in this context will be a multi-tasking state which will undertake effective planning as well as regulatory work while leaving sufficient space for private and civil society actors to engage freely in the developmental process. A Developmental State in the African context of today will have a firm grasp of the socio-politico-economic and cultural situation of its people and make adequate strategies for address it, be very conversant with regionally agreed development strategies especially the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and ensure that its development strategies integrate regional ones, take into account the internationally agreed development agenda including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and include them in its development strategies. In this paper we strongly underplay the notion that a “Developmental State” refers to only State-led macroeconomic planning and industrialization. We need to recall that when Chalmers Johnson coined the term “Developmental State”¹, he was giving testimony to the Japanese development situation and process of its industrialization. He was not prescribing what Japan needed to do. Africa need not understand “Developmental State” in the same way as Chalmers saw Japan. A developmental State in my understanding, given the obtaining socio-politico-economic situation in Africa, would refer to a State that has high concern for the well being of its people and therefore will engage efforts to create political, economic, and social conditions that will ensure a reasonable level of well being to free the initiatives and energies of the people for development.

Be that as it may, which ever we conceive the “Developmental State”, whether in a limited sense of State-led economic planning and industrialization or in a more comprehensive and

¹ See Chalmers A. Johnson: MITI and the Japanese Miracle: The growth of Industrial Policy, 1925 – 1975

all embracing socio-politico-economic and cultural development engineering, the ever compelling truth is that a State would need institutional and human capacity to spear head and sustain development which is the subject matter of this paper.

0.2: In Development People Matter most: In this paper we depart from issues related to how to attract and retain the best talent in the Public Service in Africa to enter into a discussion on the problematic of inadequate human and institutional capacities linked mainly to the degraded image of the Public Service in many African countries. Beginning with a brief analysis of the contextual background mainly composed of Public Service Reforms, the paper poses and discusses critical questions related to the challenge of how to attract and retain the best talent in the Public Service in Africa. The paper adopts a strategic outlook and discusses issues of how to increase the pool of talent in Africa, how the Public Service can beat the competition with the private sector for the best talent, the reasons why the public Service needs to attract and retain the best talent, the influence of governance on the ability of the Public Service to attract and retain the best personnel, the kind of talent that is needed by the Public Service in Africa, the need to provide institutional and systemic support to efforts of developing the human capacities, and what needs to be done, more than what is already being done, to strengthen the human resource capacities in the Public Service in Africa in order to effectively provide support to the operations of a Developmental State.

1: Contextual Background: Serious Development Challenges that Need Serious and Competent Public Servants

A “Developmental State” in Africa is that State which is capable and willing to address the development challenges facing its people. In April 2007, the International Monetary Fund noted that Sub-Saharan Africa's growth performance during the previous three years had been the best in more than three decades². However, in general, Africa is confronted with numerous serious challenges related to its needs for socio-politico-economic development. Beyond development related challenges, “some countries continue to face serious problems including the humanitarian catastrophe in the Darfur region of Sudan, the economic collapse in Zimbabwe, conflicts and political unrest in Ethiopia, Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia, and security problems in the oil-rich delta region of Nigeria, which are likely to dampen their growth prospects”³. On all the Millennium Development Goals African countries are largely lagging behind and many may not achieve the targets by 2015. In addition to the MDGs there are other internationally agreed development agenda including regional ones such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) which need to be translated into tangible results to uplift the Africa people from poverty. In other words, most African countries are in a situation of both hope and desperation whereby on one hand there is acknowledged growth and improvement in many respects including in governance while on the other there are lots of challenges that need to be addressed in order to get the people of Africa out of the claws of abject poverty.

Whether we take the very optimistic view that poverty in Africa is just a temporary obstacle, or a pessimistic one that Africa is in a hopeless situation of poverty, the issue at hand remains that the African State will need capable human resources to translate optimism to prosperity or to turn a hopeless situation into a promising one. Africa's challenges can be adequately addressed only by competent, committed, and serious people. And Africa needs to avail

² International Monetary Fund: World Economic and Financial Surveys: Regional Economic Outlook:: Sub-Saharan Africa (IMF Publications Services, Washington DC, USA April 2007)

³ Africa Economic outlook 2006-2007 UNECA

itself of serious, competent and committed people to spearhead efforts to address its development challenge. Commitments such as the MDGs, NEPAD objectives, as well as those expressed in numerous national development strategies and many more that are to come in future as Africa searches for a route to exit the poverty trap, will not come to fruits if they are not supported and sustained by adequate capacities, especially those in the Public Service. Capacity building in the Public Service in terms of institutions and human resources is a pressing and important prerequisite for development. The knowledge, know-how and skills, networks and attitudes of personnel in the Public Service are at the heart of the performance of States because it is through them and by them that services are planned and delivered, critical innovations conceived and realised and needed reforms carried out.

How then can the Public service in Africa overcome the numerous challenges to avail itself of adequate human capacity to enable it to fulfil the obligations of developing its people? The Public Sector must recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent⁴ This critical challenge for the Public Service poses a number of important questions including the following:

3: Critical Questions related to Staffing in the Public Service

- What is the current state of staffing in terms of numbers, knowledge, skills, attitude etc in the Public service in African countries? To answer such a question one would need to undertake a comprehensive stock-taking and analysis of Public Service employees in every country. This paper can not claim to have conducted such an extensive and laborious exercise. Reading through Public/Civil Service Reform documents in a number of African countries, it is evident that the public Service has for long been experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining competent staff. The situation may vary from country to country but it is generally acknowledged that recruiting and retaining professionally knowledgeable, skilled, committed and motivated personnel in the Public Service constitutes a daunting challenge in African countries. The worrying concern is that existing levels of talent in the Public Service in many countries in Africa cannot support and sustain the achievement of the development aspirations of the continent, let alone the Millennium Development Goals.
- If the stock-taking and analysis of the staffing in the Public Service arrives at such an unfavourable conclusion, then there is a subsequent critical question which is related to the first one. Where did the Public Service go wrong to have its attractiveness and capacity eroded and what can be done to reverse this process and address the situation? Where did it all begin? Where will it end? How can it end?
- If the Public Service must recruit and retain the best talent, what talent should be targeted? What are the talents (skills, knowledge, and attitudes) that are critical to the performance of the Public Service and through what approaches, methodologies and practices can such talents be identified, attracted, recruited, nurtured, developed, deployed and utilised?
- In the context of Africa where issues of poor governance are paramount on the table we need also to ask ourselves the question of to what extent the best talent can be utilised for optimum performance in the context of a poor governance environment. Is it realistic to expect the Public Service to attract the best personnel in the context of poor governance?

⁴ See Committee of Experts on Public Administration (22 -26 July 2002): Economic and Social Council Official Records 2002, Supplement number 24

What are the governance issues that must be addressed in order to provide a context that is conducive for the Public Service to be attractive and to recruit and retain the best?

4: The Need to Review the State of Staffing in the Public Sector and Reverse the Trend of its Human Capacity Erosion

In many African countries, there have been for quite some time now, in fact since the 1980s at the beginning of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), various efforts of Public Service Reforms. The reforms have gone through a three phased trend as follows:

- The first wave of reforms was from roughly the mid-80s to mid-90s with its preoccupation being the restructuring of the Public Service.
- The second wave mainly in the late 1990s focused on capacity building; and
- The third one which begun in about 2000 with the major purpose of enhancing performance in the delivery of services.

We cannot present in this paper a detailed balance sheet of the positive and negative impact these reforms have had on the nature and performance of the Public service in Africa or even on its attractiveness. Researchers and scholars in Public Administration would do a lot of service to Africa's Public Service if they put effort in studying and documenting these reforms in terms of their motivations, processes, and impact.

However, let us make the following observations about the impact of some of the reforms. In most cases the first generation reforms (the structural reforms) which emphasized reduction of the number of Public Servants and wage bills are assessed in terms of how many Public servants were retrenched and by what percentage the wage bills were reduced. For examples;

- **Ghana:** The "Programme for Economic Recovery and Structural Adjustment" of 1983 reduced the number of central government employees from 301,000 in 1986 to 260,000 in 1990.
- **Uganda:** Between 1990 and 1997, the numbers on the Government's payroll reduced by more than half, from roughly 320,000 to 147,000. The number of ministries was also reduced from 39 to 17.
- **Tanzania:** Between 1992 and 1997 Government workforce was reduced by about 30 percent from about 355,000 to approximately 270,000.
- **Zambia:** From 1997 when retrenchment earnestly started up to the beginning of 2000, the total number in government employment fell from 139,000 to 102,000.

This is well and good since these were part of the objectives of the reforms. However, we need to look at the long term impact this has had on the civil service. It is very much associated with loss of jobs, and summary retrenchment. This reduces the attractiveness of the Public Service. No one wants to join a Public Service that retrenches its employees at the whim of the IMF, the World Bank or any clever management consultant. Secondly, with the recruitment freeze that was associated with the first generation reforms the brightest graduates from Universities or the best job seekers were not looking in the Public Service and the Public service was not looking for them either. Therefore, the Public Service could not work towards being the employer of first choice since it was not recruiting anyway. Retrenchment and recruitment freeze also hurt performance of the Public Service even in critical areas such as education, health, and support personnel further eroding the image of the Public Service making it unattractive to the best talent.

However, we need to remind ourselves of the fact that the first generation reforms were, in some countries, a response to the seriously damaged nature, performance and image of the Public Service. For example, in Uganda;” as government had overstretched itself in terms of activities and employment against a background of economic decline, its financial resources were thinly spread and overstretched. Government activities came to be characterised by under-capitalization and under-funding. As civil service terms and conditions of service declined, the morale of civil servants sank, and corrupt tendencies grew by leaps and bounds”⁵ In such conditions working in the Public Service was not a matter of commitment to service but a spring board for survival and self aggrandisement. Part of the objectives of the reforms was to reverse the trend of Civil Service degradation.

While the pursuit of these objectives has been generally praised in the sense that it prepared Public Service to embark on capacity building, it remains true that the idea of working for government no longer inspires people with the best talent⁶. Being a Public Servant has become less attractive and less motivating than being a manager or an employee in a private enterprise. And this is a real problem for the Public Service in Africa. It is now critical that the glory of Public Service be reinstated. Without reversing the trend of Public Service human capacity erosion, it is impossible for the Public Service to attract and retain a fair share of the best talent. Each country should ensure that it is not left with a government or Public Service of the mediocre, locked into careers of last resort or waiting for a chance to move on to other sectors or jobs.

The second wave of reforms mainly in the late 1990s focused on capacity building: The key interventions in this second wave of Public Service Reforms included:

- Skills enhancement emphasizing on-the-job and short-term training
- Systems and structural development including those for human resources, financial and information management.
- Pay and incentives improvements
- Improving the work environment including raising budgetary allocations for operations and maintenance expenditures as well as office equipment and re-tooling.

Criticizing the public service reforms in some African countries, Kithinji Kiragu observes that “even in those countries where major downsizing of the Public Service had taken place, there was limited progress in pay reform. The resources released from retrenchment were not enough to appreciably lift the low salaries of Public Servants. Consequently, morale and discipline in the Public Service remained low, and unethical conduct in ways of bribery and corruption were on the rise. In the circumstances, service delivery continued to deteriorate in most countries throughout the 1990s”⁷. In other words, the Public Service remained unattractive to the best talent despite the reforms aimed at capacity building.

The third generation of Public Service reforms focused on improving the delivery of services. However, there seems to be a continued assumption that the services can improve without specific and sustained efforts for improving the image and quality of personnel in the Public Service. Because of this, the Public Service in most African countries is stuck with the

⁵ James Katorobo: “The Public Service Reform Programme” in Justus Mugaju (Ed.): Uganda’s Age of Reforms: A Critical Review (Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 1999 Page 62)

⁶ see Caesar James 2001, “lost Horizon” in Los Angeles Times, Book Review , 8

⁷ Kithinji Kiragu, “Improving Service Delivery through Public Service Reform: Lessons of Experience from select Sub-Saharan Africa Countries” (OECD, DAC Network on Good Governance and Capacity Development, Room Document number 8, February 2002)

challenge of how to attract and retain the best personnel in the Public Service, a question that should have been addressed as part of the Reforms right from the beginning. The paper will now turn to this critical issue.

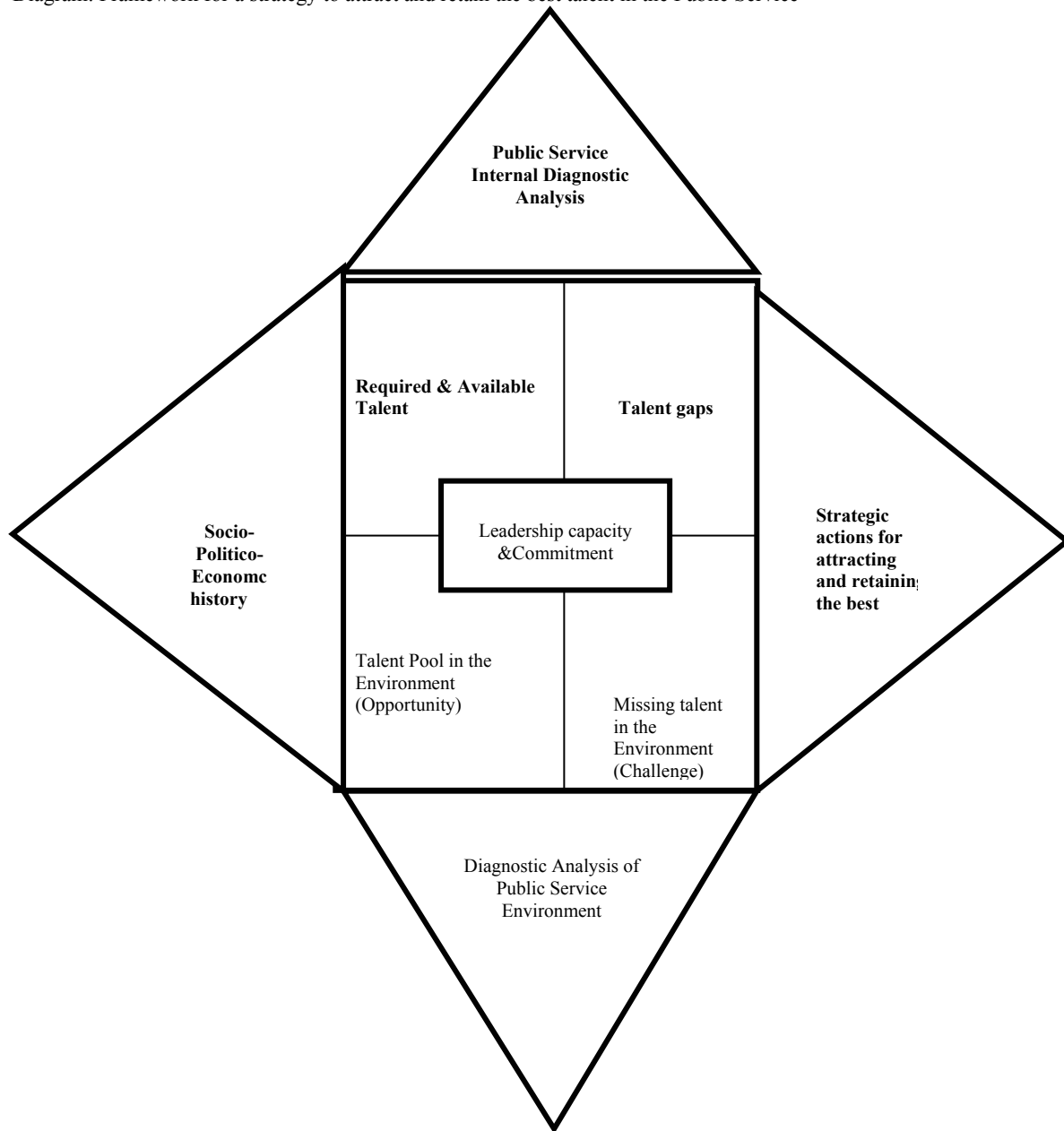
5: Attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service: A strategic Perspective

As the diagram below illustrates, attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service is a very strategic matter. A strategic out look of attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service, requires first and foremost an analysis of the internal and external environment of the Public Service to determine the supply and demand of the talent. A number of questions need to be addressed here.

- What talent does the current and future Public Service need given the development needs?
- Does such talent exist in the environment? If not what are the policies and strategies that can provide an environment full of the talent that will be needed by the current and future Public Service?
- Who are the competitors for the same talent?
- What strategies should the Public Service adopt to beat the competition, attract and retain the best talent?

In short, attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service is a highly strategic issue that requires in the first place high quality strategic analysis and planning. Therefore, another question the Public Service in Africa needs to address is that of ascertaining whether the Public Service, especially the Human Resource Managers in the Public Service, are well equipped with sufficient skills in strategic human resource management. What is mostly known now in Africa is that most strategic plans are designed by external consultants. This is not sustainable. The sustainable situation would require a cadre of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service who can serve as strategic advisers and internal consultants to the Public Service on matters of reforms especially those related to human resources including attracting and retaining the best talent.

Diagram: Framework for a strategy to attract and retain the best talent in the Public Service



5.1: Challenges related to attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service

At the moment a number of challenges related to attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service are teasing managers in Africa. They include the following:

- How to increase the talent pool
- How to beat the competition from the private sector
- How to block Head-hunters from taking the best employees for the Public Service
- How to repair the eroded image of the public service to make it attractive to the best.
- How to make Public Service jobs more challenging and satisfying
- How to uplift and increase the skills set of current employees
- How to withstand the Political pressure and recruit only the best performers
- How to overcome the Budget constraints and provide attractive remuneration

5.1.1: Increasing the pool of talent in the environment

It needs to be acknowledged that when fishing in waters that have few fish, one is most likely to catch few fish and may not have much chance for choosing big ones or even good ones. One is likely to take what one catches. First there is need to undertake an analysis and forecast of the talent that is needed for the best performance of the Public Service now and in the future given its strategic and tactical objectives. Then there is need to scan the environment (Universities and tertiary institutions including those abroad that may be providing education to Africans, as well as the Diaspora that may be attracted back home) to take stock of the talent that is available currently and that is likely to be available in the immediate, medium, and long term. The two sets of talents (those needed and those existing) need to be juxtaposed and compared to have a clear map of the gap of the talent that needs to be filled. Then there follows a deliberate interaction between the institutions (universities and tertiary institutions) that produce the talent to ensure that their programs produce sufficient human resources to fill the talent gap. In Africa there is all the time a quarrel between politicians and Universities on the issue of the relevance of training provided by the Universities. In fact this quarrel is misplaced. The approach needs to be a deliberate strategy which brings the universities and the Public Service Human Resource Managers together to determine what talent the Universities need to prepare for the Public Service. There is a shared failure between Universities and Public Service on this issue. The bottom line is that the Public Service will get the talent the environment provides. For the talent in the environment to be congruent to the needs of the Public Service, there has to be constant interaction between the two. The critical question to ask here is the following: Are the universities and the Public Service Human Resource Managers up to this task?

In terms of human resource planning within in a long-term human staffing strategy framework, there is need to have long term manpower and human resource development strategies and plans based on clear and accurate baseline data and information. There is need to bear in mind that the Public Service is not made up of one but many professions. Therefore, we need to consider having not only one strategy but several differential strategies to cope with divergent types or categories of needs in the Public Service. Probably we should be considering having an umbrella strategy but with a number of sub-strategies falling within two broad ones:

- a job - oriented strategy for the employment of skills roughly analogous to those used in the private sector for clearly definite tasks over limited periods of time;
- a career oriented strategy for the authority of the State where confidentiality, discretion, as well as continuity and a long-term perspective are critical determinants of quality of performance.

This point re-emphasizes the need to have an appropriate mix or hybrid between “career system” and “job or employment system”⁸ in the Public Service as the search for the best talent goes on.

⁸ This is quoted from the United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (22 -26 July 2002): Economic and Social Council Official Records 2002, Supplement number 24

5.1.2: Beating the competition from the private sector

Clearly, in the whole process of Public Service Reforms, especially during the first regime (structural) of reforms, with strong emphasis on the virtues of the private sector as the “engine of growth” and the Public Service needing minimization, the private sector became prominent, not least by the relatively superior remuneration for its employees. Consequently there is a competition between the Public Service and the private sector for the same talent especially in some professional and technical domains. Here, unfortunately, the competition is tilted in favour of the private sector because in most cases private sector enterprises have a merge of manoeuvrability especially in shifting their remuneration to attract the talent it needs. Adopting operational methods of the private sector in the Public Service did not help matters because it enhanced the competition for the same talent especially in areas of financial management, human resource management, strategic planning, performance management, application of information technology etc.

It is not going to be easy for the Public Service to win this competition by playing exactly the same game as the private sector. It certainly can not play the card of increasing remuneration continuously because it has budget constraints. It will have to play the card of public service and recreate the values and virtues that are cherished by the Public Service and those who commit themselves to serve. In this case, there is need to design specific personnel recruitment strategies, systems, procedures, incentives and practices aimed at attracting and selecting the best talent for the Public Service. Attracting and recruiting the best talent in the Public Service is not going to be an easy task because it will be working against negative public beliefs about the public service built gradually over a relatively long period of time stretching from well before the period of reforms. There has to be a sustained strategy that encompasses aspects of:

- Rebuilding public trust in the Public Service,
- Recruiting the best graduates from universities and tertiary institutions into the Public Service,
- Building a pay system that is not necessarily competitive with the private or civil society sector, but which is fair in the sense that it remunerates performance and is based on cost of living enabling those that chose to dedicate their working life to public service to live a level of life that their work deserves.

The fact to be confronted squarely is that a lot of attention needs to be paid to revamping the image and pride of men and women who devote themselves to Public Service. We need to bear in mind that while remuneration is important and needs to be part of the package, social recognition also plays an important role in releasing the best performance energies out of the best talent. Another caution that Human Resource Managers in the Public Service need to bear in mind is that while competing with the private sector in terms of high salaries in order to attract and retain the best personnel is self imposing, there is a limit to it in the Public Service especially in developing and poor countries. In situations of abject poverty as is known in most poor countries, the image of a starving Public Servant is revolting. However, equally or even more revolting is the image of a Public Servant enjoying a level of living that is far above the standard of living of the country he/she serves. Different ways rather than pursuing salaries that seek to out-compete the private sector should be pursued to attract and retain the best talent in the Public Service. Some of the levers the Public Service should lift in this competition should include the following:

- The Public Service being the choice of diversified work,

- Having an attractive compensation package (bearing in mind that for most dedicated Public Servants “attractive” does not necessarily refer to “grotesquely high”),
- Providing opportunities for advancement,
- Providing opportunity for the Public Servants to help people in an exemplary or model organisation
- Providing opportunity for Public Servants to access learning in a learning organisation
- Proving assurance and commitment to equity in employment,
- Ensuring an inclusive workplace especially in terms of gender, persons with disabilities, ethnic balance, religion and skills mix,
- Providing assurance for access to employment security and mobility,
- Enabling Public Servants to balance personal and professional lives

All the above will necessitate more high level strategic thinking than mimicking private sector practices or attempting to out-compete the private sector in terms of remuneration packages. If well thought through and well implemented it will be difficult even for the Head Hunters to take High-Performing-Public Servants from the Public Service. Head hunters from the private sector who dangle money as bait may not break through the amour of relatively comfortable remuneration that is in line with cost of living, great image, prestige, social recognition and dedication to Public Service which normally most high-performing Public Servants are satisfied with.

5.2: The rationale for recruiting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service

Why must the Public Service recruit and retain the best talent? In most Africa countries, especially since the period of the IMF imposed Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPS), there has been on-going arguments that the private sector is the engine of growth and therefore a lot of efforts have been dedicated to the development of the private sector some times at the expense of the Public Service. In the context of good governance which emphasizes collaboration, cooperation, participation and partnerships, the emphasis put on competition in this argument is misplaced. There are several reasons why the Public Service should attract and retain high quality personnel among its ranks, including the following:

- To be able to perform effective visioning, strategising, policy analysis, formulation, monitoring and evaluation to meet the complexities of globalization and often conflicting demands of a developmental State
- To be able to adequately blend the demands of efficiency and those of democracy and responsibility of a Developmental State
- To be an effective partner with, and referee between, other actors in the development process
- To be able to lead by example in employment and staffing matters:

5.2.1: To be able to perform effective visioning, strategising, policy analysis, formulation, monitoring and evaluation to meet the complexities of globalization and often conflicting demands of a Developmental State

To get the functions of the State effectively executed one would need the best talent at the service of the State – i.e an effective Public Service. Currently many countries are engaged in Public Service reforms, which invariably include re-thinking and redefining the frontiers and the core functions of the Public Service. In several Africa countries where there are limitations in human capacity most of these reforms (as we pointed out above) have been

designed with strong reliance on support from foreign experts thus raising issues of ownership of such reforms. To ensure ownership and home-grown reforms, countries should develop the intellectual capacity to design their own reforms at a pace adequate with their cultural, political, social and economic environment. What needs to be emphasised is to have “reforms by African countries and not to export reforms to African countries”. Without the Public Service attracting, recruiting, retaining and utilising the best talent such a challenge is difficult to meet. Together with reforms there is the function of policy and strategy making. African countries need strong capacities in visioning, strategising, policy analysis, formulation, monitoring and evaluation if they have to sustain performance improvement. This, one must realise, equally applies to the translation of the Millennium Development Goals and other intergovernmental commitments and action plans into national policies and development strategies. Conceptually and practically the over emphasis placed on the role of the private sector at the detriment of the Public Service had missed this critical point. A developmental State requires dedicated services of leaders and public servants capable of visioning, strategising and policy analysis and management.

Elsewhere the author has argued strongly in favour of brilliant visioning and strategic planning for strengthening capacities of the Public Service especially in post-conflict situations. Below we reproduce the extract that solidifies the argument for the need of the best personnel in the Public Service:

“Determining and agreeing a national vision and strategy that provides an appropriate answer to the question of the Public Service the country needs for the future must be based on a hard, harsh, and brutal diagnostic analysis of the reality of the situation, not only as it presents itself currently, but also as it presented itself in the past and as it will present itself in the future. Mobilizing the population to put their voice and mind into finding today the solutions of the problems of tomorrow is one of the critical roles of leadership after conflict. People must be lead to scan the past and future environment, scratch through the ashes and ruins left behind by the violence, and examine the painful socio-politico-economic wounds and scars to determine what kind of country they want to live in, what needs to be done to create that country, and what type of Public Service the country should have and how capacities of such a country can be constructed. Put in these terms, collective visioning sounds simple. But it is not simple both in concept and in practice. Designing and agreeing a national vision and strategy in post conflict situations often means cutting open some people’s secret ambitions and persuading them to abandon all or some of them, abandoning socio-politico-economic comfort zones for some people, questioning values and beliefs of others, and creating compromises along the way. Leadership needs to do this to provide a platform and a framework to guide the reconstruction of the capacities for public service. When this is missing it is most likely that the capacities that are reconstructed are not in line with the aspirations of the country and the hopes and aspirations that emerge after violence are likely to be shattered and the country thrown into another round of violence”⁹.

5.2.2: To be able to adequately blend the demands of efficiency and those of democracy and responsibility of a Developmental State

The entrenchment of private sector management techniques has created a need for Public Servants that are skilled and motivated beyond the level of simply applying Public Administration rules. What distinguishes Public Administration from private sector management is its responsibility to the public, which requires efficient management of its limited resources as well as effective realisation of specific objectives in a way that is wise, focused on the key goals and consistent with the demands of democracy. It is not the demands of democracy that make the Public Service operations unique, but also the fact that the Public Service must respond to the value system of the private sector as well. This means that one of the characteristics of the Public sector in most countries is that public managers

⁹ See John-Mary Kauzya: “The Role of Political Leadership in Reconstructing Capacities for Public Service after Conflict” in UNDESA, Building Capacities for Public Service in Post-Conflict Countries (United Nations, New York, 2007 pages 11-12). The Publication is online at www.unpan.org

have the same efficiency responsibilities as their colleagues in the private sector while still carrying out public operations with consideration for democracy¹⁰. The absurdity here is that in African countries, the job of public management has become more and more complex while the human capacity to do it has been going down.

5.2.3: To be an effective partner with, and referee between, other actors in the development process:

Governance and Public Administration looked at in a holistic way requires that all partners develop their capacities as equal partners in order for each to play their roles. The goal is not to out-compete and overpower each other but to support each other. The reality of Public Administration in Africa today is that it is increasingly becoming “public” as opposed to “bureaucratic” and self-contained. It is through partnerships and mobilization of all stakeholders at community, local government, national, regional and international levels that Public Administration will be able to address the development challenges facing African countries. The point to emphasize here is that partnerships cannot be constructed and operated within the spirit of cutthroat competition where actors try to weaken each other. Effective cooperative governance and public administration will be in place when the Public Service as well as the other partners has the best talent to enable them to effectively play their roles. We need to bear in mind that ultimately through law making, regulatory, and security related functions the Public Service is the guarantor of liberty, property and life because it sets the rules. But even this function, within the practical implications of participative public administration advocated for by good governance, is more complex than before because it now demands negotiated rule definition and highly consultative policymaking. If the Public Sector or the State is, so to speak, the referee in the partnerships, even the job of refereeing has become more complex calling on the sector to have the best talent.

5.2.4: To be able to lead by example in employment and staffing matters:

Beyond the needs of strategic leadership, visioning, and development policy making, we need to note that in most countries the Public Service is a critical and the largest employer. One could say that it is a model. What it does or does not do as an employer has far-reaching impact on employment practices elsewhere in other sectors. It makes labour policies, laws and regulations (including those related to remuneration, social security, etc) that are used as guidelines by other sectors. It sets ethics and integrity standards and should lead by example in following them. Certainly to play this critical role it needs to have at its disposal the best personnel.

6: The influence of wider governance issues on attraction and retention of the best talent in the Public Service

Part of the efforts to reverse the trend of human capacity erosion in the Public Service in Africa has to do with improvements in the wider governance environment. One of the things that cannot be over emphasized is that without good governance¹¹ the best talent cannot be

¹⁰ See Lennart Gustafsson and Arne Svensson: Public Sector Reform in Sweden, (Sweden, liber Ekonomi, 1999, page 58)

¹¹ Governance has been defined as a multifaceted compound situation of institutions, systems, structures, processes, procedures, practices, relationships, and leadership behaviour in the exercise of social, political, economic, and managerial / administrative authority in the running of public or private affairs and good governance as the exercise of this authority with the participation, interest, and livelihood of the governed as the driving force. (Kauzya John-Mary: “Local Governance Capacity Building for Full range Participation: Concepts, Frameworks, and Experiences in African Countries”: In 4 Global Forum on Re-inventing

identified, recruited and developed. Nor can it be effectively utilised. It is difficult to convince the best swimmer to take a dive into a dirty pool. It is most certainly even harder to retain him /her there to demonstrate his / her swimming talent. Good swimmers simply do not like swimming in dirty pools. Talented workers do not like working in environments of poor governance. Issues of governance are highly sensitive and do not present themselves in the same way in all African countries. Some countries provide governance environments that are conducive to individual initiative and committed work. Others can be tolerated. But there are certainly those that repel, repulse, or even expel individuals that possess the kind of talent that would be qualified as the best for the performance of the Public Service. Governance environments that do not provide the basics in effective rule of law and due process, justice, ethics, integrity, transparency and accountability in leadership, security of person and property, respect for basic freedoms and human rights, etc can hardly attract, recruit, retain or even effectively utilise the best talent in not only the Public Service but also in the other sectors as well. It is not the main point for this paper to extensively explore the relationship between the wider issues of governance and the attraction, recruitment and retention of the best talent in the public sector. However, the point needs to be made clearly and firmly that countries that aim at attracting, recruiting and retaining the best talent for their Public Service have got to first and foremost examine the appropriateness of their governance institutions, systems, practices, and leadership behaviour. Good governance and the best talent are intertwined because good people envisage, initiate, plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate good governance. While it is hopeless to attempt to attract good governors in a situation of bad governance, it is also futile to hope to have good governance without good governors.

7: What Talent do we need to attract and retain in the Public Service any way?: Critical human capacity needs for effective performance in the Public Service

Beyond numbers of Public servants, human capacity refers to knowledge, skills, attitudes, networks and cherished values as well as institutions, systems structural arrangements, tools and logistics. Any country that seeks to attract and retain the best talent in its Public Service must first and foremost assess and determine the talent needs in the Service. Clearly this question poses itself differently and calls for different answers depending on which country and situation being considered. Looking at African countries one would generalise to affirm that the following human capacities are in dire need:

Strong and committed Public Service leadership at all levels capable of coping with the complexity and conflict contained in the context of globalization, and dealing with all forms of diversity including gender, race, and ethnicity. The roles and responsibilities for orienting and activating the entire workforce of the Public Service in meaningful directions, as well as passing on core values require strong and committed Public service leaders including politicians, top bureaucrats, Heads of Public Sector Agencies, and top leaders at Local Government levels. Competent and committed leadership is necessary for providing and nurturing the environment within which the overall Public Service can serve citizens, ensuring fairness, equity and due process, providing a sense of purpose, legitimacy, values and ability to look outward and forward. In the Africa context, the Developmental State will emerge and be sustained through effective strong public service leadership that spearheads

Governance: Citizens, Businesses, and Governments: Dialogue and Partnerships for Development and Democracy: (United nations, New York, 2002 pages 360).

visioning and giving impulse and inspiration not only to the Public Service but to the population as well for development.

Knowledgeable, skilled and committed policy advisers: Given that governance and public administration includes the higher-order tasks of providing policy advice and critical assistance in developing grand designs of society and nations, one of the primary roles of the public service is to ensure a capacity to develop policies and strategies, forecast and anticipate future trends, react to rapidly changing global and local conditions, be creative, challenge the status quo and be self-critical.

Human Resource Management professionals: In most Public Services in African countries, positions responsible for forecasting, planning, developing, and managing the human resources are occupied by individuals who are not professionally qualified to manage the human resource. Consequently the basics in personnel management, let alone human resource management are ignored. This is the case in personnel records, human resources data and information processing, human resources development including training, succession planning etc. The Public Service requires professionals capable of adequately supporting the human resource management function if the Service has to develop strategies for attracting, recruiting, developing, motivating and retaining the best skilled personnel to man it.

The seriousness with which Public Service Reform Programs in many African countries were planned and conducted somehow did not consider that Human Resource Managers are the most strategic partners in reforming the Public Service. Neglecting issues related to the undeveloped professional status of Human Resource Managers in the Public Service in Africa and relegating the Human Resource Managers to non core and non strategic functions when they are supposed to be the top advisers and leaders of Public Service reform and leadership capacity development programs was a huge mistake. The end result has been perpetual dependency on external consultants for making reforms in the Public Service. Yet it is known that reform as a change phenomenon is an on-going process and should consequently be driven and directed from the inside. How could African countries develop Public Service leadership capacity by neglecting the planners, implementers, and evaluators of capacity building programs? This situation needs to be immediately reversed. First, by repositioning the function of Human Resource Management as a strategic function, and second, by creating a strong professional network of Human Resource Managers to champion the cause of professional development and strategic positioning of HR managers in Africa. It is not possible to sustain capacity building while neglecting capacity builders!¹²

Knowledgeable, skilled and ethical financial and other resource managers: In several countries currently there is what may be called a crisis in the area of transparency, accountability, ethics, and integrity especially related to the management of financial resources. Although one may argue that this does not only concern the Public Service, the issues are more critical in the Public Service because it concerns stewardship of the public good including public funds. To have the best managers of public finances is not only a matter of knowledge and skills in financial management and accounting. It is equally important to have individuals with integrity and ethical behaviour. There needs to be

¹² This point was strongly made by the author during the AAPAM Roundtable Conference in Mbabane, Swaziland in 2007 in his paper : “The Human Factor in Building Trust in Government: Leadership Capacity Development Perspectives in Africa”

deliberate efforts to attract, select, recruit, and develop such individuals in the Public Service. Given the relatively low remuneration in the Public Service coupled with less robust control systems, the Public Service needs to be able to attract and retain financial managers who, in addition to being excellent in this field, can say “I would rather die than steal public funds instead of those who even when they are experts in the field have the mentality of “I cannot starve when I am looking at money”.

Knowledgeable and skilled information managers: Effective policy and strategy analysis, formulation, planning, monitoring, and evaluation strongly depend on systems, processes, and practices of information management that can avail timely, accurate, well organised, and accessible information. In the current era of information and knowledge management the Public Service should have at its disposal a cadre of capable information managers to effectively harness information for managing resources and delivering services.

Public servants who cherish professionalism, ethics and integrity: While skills and knowledge are essential for performing any Public Service function, we must acknowledge that without appropriate values such as professionalism, ethics, integrity, the Public Service will remain under disdain. Inadequate integrity, unethical behaviour and lack of professionalism breed and sustain corruption and other forms of malpractices that have characterised the Public Service in many African countries. Many projects and programmes aimed at improving service delivery and reducing poverty in many countries miss their targeted objectives because their resources are embezzled and diverted by officials who lack integrity. It is critical that the best personnel in terms of ethics and integrity are attracted, recruited, and retained in the Public Service.

Public servants that are knowledgeable, skilled and committed in executing functions related to ensuring law and order, justice, audit and administrative control: Respecting laws, rules, regulation, and due procedures is a cardinal requirement for a well functioning Public Service system. It is the basis of the rule of law, democracy and fairness. However, its administration is not an automatic given. It requires dedicated and capable personnel.

8: The need to anchor human capacity on sound, institutional and systemic capacity:

However, human numbers, knowledge, skills, attitudes, networks and cherished values do not translate themselves into effective performance capacity unless they are operating within appropriate institutional, systemic, and structural frameworks. If the Public service is not professionalized, it is not easy to attract professionals in it. If the arrangement is such that policy at national level is dictated from supra-national institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF as has been the case in many African countries these past years (especially concerning Public Sector Reforms), then it cannot be easy to attract competent policy advisers in policy advisory positions since they will be aware that they have no job there. If there are no codes of conduct to guide Public Servants in ethics and integrity of Public Service, it is difficult to count on individual morality alone to ensure ethics and integrity in the Public Service. If the Public Service does not provide institutionalised guidelines for managing diversity in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, it is most likely that the best talent from women, people with disabilities, minorities etc may be sidelined in recruitment and deployment in the Public Service. In other words, human capacity goes hand in hand with and is facilitated and activated by institutional and systemic capacity.

9: One more Time: What should be done to strengthen the Human Capacity in the Public Service?

Strengthening human capacity in the Public Service, as a general subject is complex because countries, even in Africa are not homogenous. Even the public and the private sectors are rarely homogeneous. There are substantial differences even between categories of skills, calling for differential “strategies” for staffing for quality performance in the Public Service.

First we need to underscore the primordial role the overall governance environment plays in attracting and retaining the best talent in the Public Service. Governors in all African countries need to be mindful of the relationship between the kind of governance they practice and the quality of the human resource they need. The umbrella strategy required concerns how to revamp the image of the Public Service. As long as the image continues to push the best employees out of the Public Service while at the same time repelling young graduates, efforts of staffing the service for excellent performance cannot be successful. The New Public Management criticism of “rules-bound” administration notwithstanding, it needs to be emphasized that long term strategies cannot be put into effect without a sound institutional framework. It is what lends credibility and legitimation to particular actions and measures and thus dispels the impression of “politics as usual”. We need this credibility and legitimation not only to combat the presence or suspicion of clientelism and patronage, but also and most importantly, to enhance the image, prestige, and professional credentials of the Public Service.

Coupled with the need for an appropriate governance environment is the need for redefining the boundaries of the Public Service to leave it with the functions that it must perform and that it can best perform. The best talent given the functions and tasks that it is not cut to perform will not execute them effectively. But this debate has been on-going for sometime now and we need not belabour the point. In order to staff the Public Service for high quality performance, among the many things we need is to properly redraw the boundaries of the Public Service.

In practice, the term “Staffing” encompasses every activity in human resource management. It includes forecasting human resource needs, planning, prospecting, attraction, selection, recruitment, deployment, human resource development including training, career management and motivation, performance evaluation, discipline, remuneration, promotion and separation. At the same time it also implies a necessary relationship and interdependence between all of the above. Therefore, there is a strong need for a holistic approach. Fragmented measures cannot yield the needed results. They merely lead to waste, in a large number of cases. This underscores the importance of the two critical factors for effective staffing for excellent performance in the Public Service. One is a long-term strategy and the other is a credible and coherent institutional framework in terms of systems and structures, rules and regulations, procedures and processes, policies and programmes. This clearly points to the importance of each country, considering its specific situation, having an appropriate personnel system for managing human resources in the Public Service. Some countries would prefer the “career system” for Public Servants. Others would prefer the “job system”¹³. However, between these two there is a lot of room for creativity and hybrid systems that can be designed to suit specific situations, needs and preference for any country.

¹³ see Jean-Louis Quermonne: L'Appareil administrative de l'Etat, (Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1991, pages 137 – 153)

Human resource development systems and practices derived from strategies elaborated using reliable data and information: The Public Service knowledge and skills needs are evolving so rapidly that recruiting the best talent is not sufficient if it is not accompanied by deliberate efforts to continuously develop the human resources updating their knowledge, skills and attitudes according to the shifts of needs. Human resource development to enhance the best talent implies a number of strategic actions sustained over a long period in the Public Service which include:

- Having clearly elaborate human resource development strategies and plans,
- Ensuring a philosophy and practice of developing the Public Service as a learning organization,
- Building and utilizing high quality training institutions including Universities that are linked with the Public Service,
- Emphasizing various human resource development approaches other than classroom training including coaching, teamwork, attachments etc,
- Ensuring that training is not dedicated to only building the capacity of individuals but rather the entire organization (in this case the Public Service),
- Bearing in mind that trained individuals to work in poor organizations is one of the most de-motivating factors in the Public Service which contributes to pushing talent out of the Service

Professionalizing the Public Service: If the best professionals have to be attracted into the Public Service, it must be professionalised. This does not only mean that only professionals be recruited in the Public Service, but especially also that Public Servants work within an institutional arrangement that challenges and constrains them to work according to the codes of conduct, ethics and integrity of their professions. The case in the Public Service in most African countries is such that categories of Public Servants whose equivalent in the private sector have to belong to specific relevant professions to gain employment operate within professional fields when they are not necessarily professionally qualified or recognised to work in those professional fields. This is especially the case with financial managers and accountants, auditors, human resource managers, etc.

Building and utilising human resource managers in the Public service: if the best talent has to be attracted, developed and retained in the Public Service the job of ensuring this should be handled by professionals. As mentioned above the job of harnessing the human capacity in the Public Service in most African countries has been too much left to the non-professionals. There should be deliberate and sustained efforts in form of programmes to develop strong cadres of human resource management professionals in the Public Service.

Strategies and practices for tapping the best talent from women, people with disabilities, and minority groups: In many African countries, there are a number of human resource management practices that increase chances of leaving unutilised or underutilised some of the best talent in the society. Such practices include discrimination against women, people with disabilities and minority groups. It is very important that for such talent to be effectively attracted, recruited, developed, and deployed, the Public Service adopts strategies and practices that target these talents. Tools and guidelines for effective strategies and policies for managing diversity in the Public Service to tap and utilise such talents should be studied developed and disseminated and utilised.

10: The Last word:

A developmental state will seek out and develop the most talented people in all fields to drive its development agenda. Those that are placed in Public Service jobs are at critical positions and need to be the best because they are entrusted with the Public interest and are so to speak the central pillar on which the State stands. Africa Governments needs to reflect very hard on the quality of the people that serve within the institutions of the State. The State will be as developmental as the people that serve within its institutions.

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