The Need for Teaching Diversity and Representativeness in University Public Administration Education and Professional Public Service Training Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Preliminary Thoughts and Observations on Civil Service Reform

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Introduction

Public administration is a multidimensional and multifaceted discipline, which consists of many sub-fields and specialty areas. More than fifty years ago, Luther Glick, a prominent scholar in the early development of public administration in the United States, described the tasks of public administration as POSDCORD: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. Herbert Kaufman, a noted scholar of public bureaucracies, points out that during this era, “the ideal public service was portrayed as a neutral instrument...[where] policy-making was envisioned as a universe apart from administration....” (Kaufman, 2001:24). This was the so-called “politics/administration dichotomy.”

Contemporarily, public administration consists of several dimensions, including political, legal, bureaucratic and managerial, and much of the day-to-day responsibility for making public policy falls in the hands of professional public administrators. In other words, it is the professional public servant who determines the standards and regulations of public law. Stated another way, it is professional public servants who make interpretive decisions involving a myriad of public policy areas. Further, according to Kaufman (p. 19) the actions of public administration officials stray into the legislative, judicial and executive areas:

Their official powers include the issuance of regulations of general application and effect (a form of legislating), the application of laws and regulations to specific individuals and organizations (a form of adjudicating), and the employment, direction, and management of staff to perform these duties (the essence of the executive functions).

Kaufman (p. 21) continues and asserts:

Not only do public employees shape policy directly by the way they do their jobs, they also influence the policymakers who give them their powers and tell them what to do. That is, they play a prominent part in formulating the directives they receive.

Similarly, but in a more global context, Riggs (1994: 39) notes:

Instead of viewing bureaucracy as a non-political force that can and should perform only administrative functions, we need to understand that in all countries bureaucrats are political actors in both a positive and negative sense. Positively, they intervene to help shape public policies and thereby to influence every country’s political system. Negatively, although good public administration strengthens any regime, poor public administration undermines its viability; thus even ostensibly non-political actions by a bureaucracy have significant political consequences.

These observations point to the importance of the role of professional public servants in any governmental system and its processes. Indeed, professional public servants are major players
and if their roles and activities are underestimated then an accurate assessment of their impact on society can be easily overlooked or ignored. Consequently, it would seem that the degree of diversity or representativeness of a public bureaucracy can profoundly impact how professional public servants carry out their activities and functions and how well they deliver public services to all groups in society. According to Olowu (1999:123), “public service delivery is the primary function of any public administration system and service delivery is the raison d’etre of the public service.” Das (1998:10) argues that “in developing countries where the ambit of state action is sizable, civil servants exercise enormous power in defining the character and scope of public law and programmes, and deployment of government resources.”

The central focus of this paper is on the topics of diversity and representativeness and the professional public service in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The paper offers preliminary thoughts and observations on the need for incorporating diversity and representativeness perspectives in Civil Service Reform Programmes in SSA. The major point of this paper is that students and public service professionals in SSA studying public administration in universities and participating in professional public service training programmes must receive course work and training in diversity and representativeness and develop ethnic-cultural competencies to become skilled and effective public administrators, public managers, and public service delivery personnel. The first section of the paper presents a perspective on teaching diversity and representativeness in a graduate programme in public administration in the United States. The next section addresses the notion of teaching diversity and representativeness in university public administration and professional public service training programmes as a prominent part of Civil Service Reform in SSA. The concluding section suggests that implementing diversity and representativeness in the professional public service is critical to the social and economic development of SSA.

A perspective on teaching diversity in graduate public administration education in the United States

In the United States, graduate course work in public administration consists of many of the following core courses: Legal Foundations in Public Administration, Public Personnel Administration/Human Resources Management, Understanding Public Policy, Policy Analysis, Public Budgeting, Public Administration and Management, Organizational Theory and Behavior, and Research Methods/Quantitative Analysis. Students studying public administration are taught such topics as the origin and development of the field of public administration as an area of study and academic inquiry, how to prepare a budget, decentralization, devolution, and bureaucracy, the public policy process, personnel/human resources functions, distinctions between public administration and business administration, principles of public management, and efficiency, effectiveness, and economy in the public sector. Students also select specialties or concentrations in such areas as: local government management; public budgeting and finance; human resources planning/management; health administration; non-profit management; international development; public affairs; and environmental management. There is no specialty area with a set of courses covering diversity or representative bureaucracy. Traditional course work in public administration saw the influence of cultural differences in organizations as something that was
invisible, illegitimate, and negative (Adler, 1991) and inconsistent with the values of efficiency, effectiveness, economy and good management.

However, in recent years, a number of university public administration programmes in the United States now include the topic of “Diversity” as a subtopic within an existing course or as a complete course. Why? These programmes are conforming to the standards of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) (an umbrella organization of university public administration and public affairs programmes in the United States) and/or are recognizing the need for their graduates to be able to deal with diverse constituencies and groups in the management and delivery of public services. Further, NASPAA standards of review also take into account the extent of faculty diversity and student diversity in university public administration programmes.

As an African American Professor in a nationally recognized graduate programme of Public Administration, I teach two courses covering the topic of diversity and representativeness: “Diversity in the Public Sector” and “Race, Ethnicity and Public Policy” The primary objectives of these courses are: (1) to prepare students, who have career aspirations to be employed in the public sector, to meet the diversity and representativeness challenges in society they will face as future public administrators, public managers, and public service delivery personnel; (2) to enhance students’ appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity and to provide cultural competencies needed to interact successfully in a rapidly demographically changing society in the United States and globally; and (3) to provide students with an in-depth and broader understanding of how race and ethnicity issues play out in several important issue areas in the public policy arena. These courses emphasize that public administration/public management is a dynamic process involving the provision, allocation, management and distribution of public services to diverse constituencies representing different races, ethnicities, backgrounds, and gender.

In particular, the former course gives considerable attention to distinguishing between affirmative action, multiculturalism and managing diversity and emphasizes readings, discussions and experiential activities on “managing diversity and valuing diversity” paradigms, monoculturalism and “organizational culture.” Among the important learning outcomes conveyed in this graduate course are: (1) hiring diverse personnel is simply not an end in itself, nor is a diversity edict from top leadership; and (2) affirmative action, multiculturalism and managing diversity are different concepts with different definitions; and, as a result, operationalizing them leads to different quantitative, qualitative and behavioral outcomes. The different outcomes result from different implementation strategies and approaches. Table 1 provides the definitions of the concepts. Table 2 provides a comparison of outcomes in the organizational implementation of each concept. An important distinction is the model utilized in the implementation of each. Affirmative action utilizes the assimilation model; multiculturalism employs the diversity model; and managing diversity utilizes the synergy model. Synergistic organizations, according to Adler (1991), seek to maximize the advantages of diversity while minimizing its disadvantages. Another learning outcome conveyed in this graduate course is that implementing diversity management practices and valuing diversity initiatives require a committed process involving comprehensive strategies that raise management and employee
awareness, create and maintain management and employee training programmes, promote effective communications, strong leadership, changes in organizational culture, etc.

TABLE 1. DEFINITIONS

**Diversity** – refers to a broad range of differences among employees, including race, gender, age, ethnicity, physical abilities, sexual orientation, education, and so on.

**Multiculturalism/Valuing Diversity** – refers to “the process of recognizing, understanding and appreciating cultures other than one’s own,” and to a change in perspective in regard to the diversity of individual workers in an organization; the change is from regarding differences as a disadvantage to seeing them as an important asset in an organization.

**Managing Diversity** – refers to the effective utilization of the diversity of the work force to accomplish organizational goals.

**Source:** Based on Auman and Myers (1996)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Affirmative Action</strong></th>
<th><strong>Multiculturalism (Valuing Differences)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Managing Diversity</strong></th>
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<td><strong>Quantitative.</strong> Emphasis is on achieving equality of opportunity in the work environment through the changing of organizational demographics. Progress is monitored by statistical reports and analysis.</td>
<td><strong>Qualitative.</strong> Emphasis is on the appreciation of differences and creation of an environment in which everyone feels valued and accepted. Progress is monitored by organizational surveys focused on attitudes and perceptions.</td>
<td><strong>Behavioral.</strong> Emphasis is on building specific skills and creating policies that get the best from every employee. Efforts are monitored by progress toward achieving goals and objectives.</td>
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<td><strong>Legally driven.</strong> Written plans and statistical goals for specific groups are utilized. Reports are mandated by EEO laws and consent decrees.</td>
<td><strong>Ethically driven.</strong> Moral and ethical imperatives drive this culture change.</td>
<td><strong>Strategically driven.</strong> Behaviors and policies are seen as contributing to organizational goals and objectives, such as profit and productivity, and are tied to rewards and results.</td>
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<td><strong>Remedial.</strong> Specific target groups benefit as past wrongs are remedied. Previously excluded groups have an advantage.</td>
<td><strong>Idealistic.</strong> Everyone benefits. Everyone feels valued and accepted in an inclusive environment.</td>
<td><strong>Pragmatic.</strong> The organization benefits; morale, profits, and productivity increase.</td>
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<td><strong>Assimilation model.</strong> Model assumes that groups brought into system will adapt to existing organizational norms.</td>
<td><strong>Diversity model.</strong> Model assumes that groups will retain their own characteristics and shape the organization as well as be shaped by it.</td>
<td><strong>Synergy model.</strong> Model assumes that diverse groups will create new ways of working together effectively in a pluralistic environment.</td>
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<td><strong>Opens doors.</strong> Efforts affect hiring and promotion decisions in the organization.</td>
<td><strong>Opens attitudes, minds, and the culture.</strong> Efforts affect attitudes of employees.</td>
<td><strong>Opens the system.</strong> Efforts affect managerial practices and policies.</td>
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<td><strong>Resistance.</strong> Resistance is due to perceived limits to autonomy in decision-making and perceived fears of reverse discrimination.</td>
<td><strong>Resistance.</strong> Resistance is due to a fear of change, discomfort with differences, and a desire to return to the “good old days.”</td>
<td><strong>Resistance.</strong> Resistance is due to denial of demographic realities, of the need for alternative approaches, and of the benefits of change. It also arises from the difficulty of learning new skills, altering existing systems, and finding the time to work toward synergetic solutions.</td>
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Teaching diversity and representativeness in university public administration and public service training programmes and civil service reform in SSA

Studies and research have identified a number of problems that negatively impact the practice of public management and public administration in SSA. Some of the factors that have been identified are (see Mutahaba et al., 1993; Mengistu, 2000):

1) lack of capacity to meet the growing public needs;
2) overstretched and underdeveloped bureaucracies;
3) public administrative systems that are quite vulnerable to political influences; and
4) increasingly politicized public administrative systems; and
5) public administrative systems that lack diversity/representativeness appointments and staff from various and different ethnic groups (italics added).

What about the teaching of diversity and representativeness in university public administration and public service training programmes in developing nations of SSA? Would this facilitate Civil Service Reform initiatives in SSA? Since the purpose of Civil Service Reform in SSA is to improve the effectiveness and performance of civil service and raise the quality of public service delivery to the population (Wescott, 1999), it would seem that the teaching and practice of diversity and representativeness should be considered an important programmatic thrust. The Civil Service Reform movement in SSA has stressed, for the most part, a focus on core functions such as financial management, personnel/human resources management, and revenue management and meritocracy (Wescott, 1999; Adamolekun, 1993). While personnel/human resources management has also been stressed as a reform area, the emphasis has been primarily on basic personnel functions such as recruitment and selection, staff development, performance, socialization and utilization, monetary reward system, communications, and manpower planning with an eye on fiscal discipline (Hildebrand and Grindle, 1997)–not personnel diversity and representativeness in the civil service.

Therefore, it would seem that teaching diversity and representativeness in university public administration and professional public service training programmes in SSA would facilitate Civil Service Reform strategies and efforts. This would perhaps create an environment where the social dimensions of reform would be built into human resources programmes at the outset, not as an afterthought (Agere and Mandara, 1999). For example, if gender and equal opportunity issues are considered at the outset of Civil Service Reform, they are more likely to be considered and adopted as formal programmatic areas of adjustment and intervention. These observations are extremely important for SSA because “ethnic differences within racial groups are an aspect of diversity [and representativeness] that has been almost completely overlooked in an attempt to create a more representative bureaucracy” (Rice, 1996). All Africans, as well as other groups of the same race, are frequently (and incorrectly) considered homogenous groups. It is now much clearer that in SSA people of the same race but from different ethnic groups have very different cultural, religious, and language practices that are sources of continual ethno-regional conflict.
Further, a representative public bureaucracy in SSA countries must emphasize gender balance, the hiring and placement of women in public management decision-making positions and as public service delivery personnel (Wescott, 1999).

Since Donald Kingsley (1944) introduced the term “representative bureaucracy” nearly sixty years ago, subsequent scholars have persuasively argued that having a representative civil service bodes well for a country’s governance. It assures that diverse communities have access to the policy making process (Naff and Crum, 2000). Paul Van Riper (1958: 552) observes that a representative civil service is “a body...which is broadly representative of the society in which it functions, and in which social ideals are as close as possible to the grassroots of the nation.” Krislov (1974) asserts that representativeness within the public service produces minority acceptance of officials, improved decision making, positive symbolism, and perhaps even democratic accountability. Krislov and Rosenbloom (1991:65) see a representative bureaucracy as a functional operation. They maintain that it:

- expands membership to stress diversity in policymaking as well as the desirability of the bureaucracy being able to sell its programmes to diverse groups in society.
- By increasing the range of those who function within the bureaucracy, we increase the infusion of ideas into bureaucracy and the dissemination of decisions to the outside world.

Dresang (1984:84-85) is much more dramatic in his view of the importance of representativeness. He says representativeness “is an index of openness and access to government and educational and career opportunities in general....As long as the public work force is imbalanced, there are mistakes and imbalances.” Frederick Mosher (1976) notes that administrative decisions are affected by an administrator’s values and orientations, which in turn are affected by the bureaucrat’s background. Table 3 illustrates the tenets of a representative bureaucracy and the relationship between the roles of values and backgrounds (cultures).

The first step in pursuing representativeness is to perform a workforce utilization analysis by ethnicity and job categories. This kind of analysis was completed recently in South Africa (Public Service Commission, 2000). The second step requires that diversity within applicant pools be achieved. The latter step may be a daunting task in SSA because of issues concerning training, competence, and recruiting, which in turn may be impacted by political and socialization factors (Wescott, 1999). Yet, organizations that are committed to representativeness as articulated above can accomplish responsive diversity by increasing both skill equity and family equity in society. Christopher Daniels (1996: 102) argues that “skills equity empowers historically deprived groups through education and training while family equity helps individuals reconcile work and family commitments.” Family equity takes into account that the employment of more female workers is fostered when jurisdictions consider the family responsibilities of female workers.

Further, teaching diversity and representativeness in university public administration and professional public service training programmes in SSA must take into account several important questions raised by Mengistu (2000:63):
Table 3. Tenets of Representative Bureaucracy

Bureaucrats have values formed by social environment.

Bureaucrats propose and make policy.

Bureaucrats are not controlled internally and externally.

Social, racial and ethnic groups have different values.

Bureaucrats from different groups best represent public’s values.

Values of bureaucrats lead to policies favoring societal groups.

Bureaucrats bring values with them from different groups providing value representation.

Source: Based on Moore (1985)
1) What is the organizing pedagogical philosophy in the construction of knowledge?

2) What is the conceptual foundation of the educational programme?

3) What should be the content of the courses [and the course work], i.e., what is to be taught?

4) Who is to teach (the academic /practitioner dichotomy)?

5) How should that which students are learning to be evaluated?

6) What type of feedback mechanism should be in place in order to insure that what is being taught is relevant to the individual learner and the society that provides the funding for the education enterprise?

Perhaps a more complex issue that these questions delve into is the notion of values (of which diversity and representativeness are values) in public administration. That is, should public administration be constructed and taught to convey control, standardization, neutrality, remoteness, impersonality, and red tape or transformational leadership, openness, diversity and representativeness, user friendly and change (Human, 1988)? Or put another way, can SSA public administrators shift from listening to local residents with distinguishing cultural and religious differences in an impoverished village in the morning and to having a business lunch in a lavish hotel a few hours later before returning to the office to begin addressing a practical problem with colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds. Values are important to how public servants carry out their jobs (see Table 3). Posner and Schmidt (1994) contend that values influence the choices that public servants make, the appeals they respond to, and on what issues they invest time and energy. This is why it is necessary that the value perspectives of diversity and representativeness be stressed in public management education in SSA. This observation is strongly supported by Human (1991) and Mahomet (1990) who believe that values (which include diversity and representativeness) must be considered if meaningful change is to occur in society, particularly in developing nations.

Appointments and staffing for diversity and representativeness is not enough. Students studying public administration and public administrators in professional public service training programmes in SSA must receive training in diversity issues and diversity management as they relate to ethnicities, cultures, religions, and languages. This can be a very important role of university public administration and professional public service training programmes in SSA. Further, university public administration programmes can assist by performing studies that can address public service delivery standards and the level of involvement in public services by underrepresented social groups, women and the poorest of the poor. The issue here is whether public bureaucracies in SSA can be representative bureaucracies and reflect the different ethnicities and cultures in society. Or, will SSA public bureaucracies reflect only a monocultural organization—an organization that reflects the values and culture of only one group. A monocultural organization maintains domination of one group over another, seeks to establish and maintain superiority, and promotes exclusionary hiring practices. The monocultural public
bureaucracy in SSA is one that is based on social group pressures, elitism and clientelism (Davidson, 1992) and the bureaucracy is accustomed to pursuing the individual of the same social or cultural group (Price, 1975). This kind of situation neatly fits that of a distinct organizational culture that Chapman (1988: 175) defines as “the aggregation of attitudes and standards, values, beliefs and assumptions of individuals [where] the end result of this culture is apparent in a set of patterns and guidelines of behavior.”

**Final observations and conclusion**

University public administration and professional public service training programmes in SSA must develop an updated and relevant curricula that prepares students and civil service management and staff for dealing with individuals and groups of different cultures, religions, and languages. It is these differences that lead to conflict and disagreements between groups and slow the development and advancement of a country. Education and “training contribute to behavioral and attitudinal change as well as breaking down of barriers, resistance and rigidities” (Agere and Mandara, 1999:50).

Further, university public administration programmes in SSA must research and identify *proven local* initiatives of diversity that have worked. This observation suggests that not all contemporary public management practices transferred from developed countries have been appropriate and fit all situations in SSA (Leonard, 1987; Agere and Mandara, 1999; Wescott, 1999). After all, the public bureaucratic systems in place in SSA were instituted during the colonial era (from England and France) to support a colonial-type economy (Subramaniam, 1990), maintain law and order and perpetuate social equalities. In the post-colonial era this kind of bureaucratic system lacks the capacity to deal with the social demands of contemporary SSA societies. The prevailing assumption has been that the transfer of contemporary management practices from the developed countries has been seen as the only viable option (Olowu, 1999). This transference process, which can be viewed as inputs (in a systems context) from external donors, has consisted of vast amounts of resources that have been the focus of much scholarly inquiry and analysis (Wescott, 1999). Much more focus must be placed on outputs achieved from this transference process in terms of quality and client satisfaction in public service delivery (Jones, 1990). Considering this observation, a question that must be raised at this point is: Has the transfer of contemporary management practices from developed nations included both the teachings and practices highlighting the importance of diversity and representativeness?

The Civil Service Reform Movement in SSA must view diversity and representativeness of the public workforce as a major priority. Effectuating diversity and representativeness as a necessary structural adjustment in SSA’s civil service systems can lead to a proactive public service that takes into account the needs, demands, and aspirations of a *wider* public particularly in the provision, allocation and delivery of public services that fall under the areas of social policy—education, health, housing, labor, gender, and justice. Social policy areas “are close, central and visible to the majority of the people” regardless of cultural, religious and language backgrounds. Moreover, it has become quite clear that “a strong [diverse and representative] and achieving public service is a necessary condition for a competitively successful nation” (Agere and Mandara, 1999: v). If SSA is to advance and develop economically and socially and become a participating partner in the world order at least two fundamental changes must occur: a
transformation in the mind set on the part of both government officials and the professional public service to valuing and integrating differences in the public workforce and the mastery of new competencies and skills to effectively manage a diverse and representative civil service. In other words, civil service in SSA should reconsider its “raison d’etre” and reorient itself and underscore diversity and representativeness as major goals (United Nations, 2000).

Finally, valuing, integrating and managing diversity in SSA public workforces presents a number of challenges. These challenges, although not simple, can be simply stated:

1. Ethnic blindness versus ethnic consciousness.
2. Strengthen the integrity of each ethnic group.
3. Keep the standards high while finding new ways to assess potential employees.
4. Focus on training that will enhance diversity skills.
5. Raise the level of awareness of the importance of diversity.
6. Break down walls and build bridges by working together to solve problems.
7. Right the wrongs when possible.
8. Create a unity, which permits diversity.

These challenges can best be met if the “ownership of reform programmes [in SSA]...are more broadly based and...derive support both from the political and administrative leadership and the rank and file of the civil service” (Wescott, 1999: 148). Policy statements on diversity and representativeness must be issued and strongly supported at the highest levels of political and administrative leadership. This must be followed by implementation design schemes including a specific focus on university and professional public service training programmes that promote the values of diversity and representativeness in the civil service.


