

New Gambian Public Service and Human Capital Formation

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Abstract: The paper emphasized the importance of human capital and its formation to the new Gambian public service institutions. It specifically looked at the salient features of the Gambian public service pre-Barrow regime, and followed by the initial interventionist steps towards a new public service that would be efficient and responsive to the citizenry in terms of service delivery; and the critical position being occupied by human capital in driving the reforms of the public service institutions. It also researched into the efforts made towards capacity development to address capacity/skill gaps and the place of the tertiary and higher education systems in this respect. After highlighting the limitations of the key higher educational institutions, categorical imperatives were made towards enhancing the capacity building efforts of the public service institutions. These include the need to give the conduct of comprehensive capacity needs assessment (CNA) in public institutions the seriousness it requires; support the efforts with adequate budgetary allocation; adequately fund the training and educational institution and processes; establish institutional relationship between the capacity building institutions and the agency responsible for the implementation of public service reform programmes; and develop a national training framework that will ensure a more systematic and sustainable approach that allows some peculiar departments to develop their own capacity and manage this basic framework.

Key Words: New Public Service; Human Capital; Capacity Building

I. INTRODUCTION

Since service is generally an activity that government undertakes to meet societal needs, management and conduct of public affairs have become a big and complex enterprise as citizens are more aware of their rights and in effect leading to increased demands for high quality services. What this implies is that competent public service is required to be able to meet the expectations of the citizens. It is in response to this that the public service has been considered as the very hub of development having emerged, over time as a potent instrument for implementing and actualizing government programs and policies and accelerating change and development and improving quality of life. This poses a serious challenge to the public service and it is in recognition of this unique role that public service is coming under public scrutiny in most African countries. In relative terms, many public services have well trained and experienced technocrats and bureaucrats but unfortunately they have a poor record of service delivery and commitment to meeting the basic needs

and aspirations of the citizens which is today becoming something of concern to all. This has resulted in effecting changes in the machinery of government in most countries which are now at different levels of implementation.

The situation is said to be partly traceable to the so-called global trends which include nations moving from government to governance, businesses moving from an industrial society to a society based on information technology, globalization shifting focus from national economy to world economy, short-term planning yielding to long-term planning, centralization giving way to decentralization, representative democracy embracing participatory democracy, organization abandoning hierarchy for networks, and product emphasis shifting from quantity to quality (Ayeni, 2007). According to him, the role of government has also changed considerably over the decades requiring the transformation of the public service along the pattern of change. He listed government trends as including the following: government is becoming strong without necessarily being big, increasingly strategic without being pervasive, being challenged to be smaller on one hand but more efficient on the other hand, tasked to mobilize scarce resources for accomplishing more with less, directing investments to critical areas offering competitive edge; and lastly relied upon to provide service that is faster, more responsive and caring.

Fagbemi (2006) was emphatic in arguing that increased awareness of the need for good governance and worldwide instant communication through information technology have contributed to more demands from government by the public. This is in line with the opinion of World Bank (2000) (cited by Fagbemi) arguing that public officers are in this millennium confronted with two major forces that shape the environment. These are the forces of globalization (the continuing integration of the countries of the world) and local devolution of power. By this, most governments of the world are described as not having clear control over what happens in their countries as international communities and factors have to be considered in making political, economic and social decision and even public policies. In terms of information, the world is said to have become a global village such that most governments do not have full control over the information made available to their citizens. In essence, information on best practices in different

countries can be accessed and thereby prompted to demand such best practices in their countries. By extension, public officers have now realized that for government to continue to enjoy people's allegiance, they can no longer afford to take their citizenry for granted and in effect doing everything to satisfy them. In other words, public service delivery is now with the recipients in mind. These demands have also resulted in new trends in public sector management. Citing Naschold (1996) and Kaul (1998), Fagbemi (2006) itemized and slightly modified the trends as including the following:

- Focusing on the core responsibilities of the central government, while delegating non-core activities to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local governments.
- Reducing costs for taxpayers by improving efficiency and eliminating non-productive activities.
- Exploiting opportunities to generate revenue so as to provide better services.
- Focusing on achievements of results without neglecting accountability
- Delegating more powers to government organizations, that give room for creativity and flexibility
- Publication of standards for service times and procedures
- Paying more attention to the service needs of program recipients
- Making greater use of commercialization techniques such as contracting out, performance contract, management contract and strategic alliance
- Working more with other levels of government and the private sector rather than working on its own
- Improved remuneration to civil servants and less subjective performance appraisal system
- Citizen and customer participation in quality production
- The introduction of Management by Result (MBR)

All above notwithstanding, the role of the public service in the success of an economy has been seen to be critical based on the lessons from the Highly-Performing Asian Economies (HPAEs) as emphasized in World Bank (1993). World Bank linked the success of East Asian countries partly to the policies they have adopted and partly to the institutional mechanisms they created to implement them, especially having a core of technocratic executives driving the implementation of the reforms. The civil services in this area were said to be highly meritocratic and having an insulated and reputable bureaucracy. The systems were said to have been made reputable first through salaries that were made to be sufficiently high to attract and retain good hands; second high-quality bureaucracies institutionalized by relying on rules and procedures in governing public sector employment and insulating same from political interventions; and third according public employment high status. The World Bank was of the opinion that all these were put in place to improve

the quality of bureaucracy, discourage corruption, and create an *esprit de corps* among civil servants that helped insulate the bureaucracy from political pressures.

It is against this background we intend to conceptualize the subject of public service as service rendered, as a process and as an institution; look at changes in public sector management; dwell on the case of The Gambia by looking at the country's profile, salient features of public service Pre-Barrow-led administration, initial interventionist steps towards a new public service; the critical nature of human capital and its formation; the place of tertiary and higher education in reducing the human capital gap; and the steps required to enhance human capital formation.

II. THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Public service can be described in many senses. From the point of view of what government is meant to deliver, public service means those activities of government institutions aimed at satisfying the needs and ensuring the well-being of society as well as enforcing laws, regulations and directives of government (Fagbemi, 2006). It can also mean the range of services required by citizenry which no other player will provide. The legitimacy and existence of any government depend on its ability to deliver such services that private sector may not deliver at all or to deliver such services to those who cannot afford the market price of the product (Olowu, 2002). The traditional explanations for the public administration system begin with an analysis of what constitutes such services. Such services can be classified into utilities and services. Those services that can be financed by user charges are called utilities while those ones which can only be financed by taxes are referred to as services. There can also be a distinction as either social or economic services and either as basic or community services (Olowu, 2002). Olowu added that goods and services that require exclusion, jointness of use or consumption, and not easily divisible are regarded as "public" goods and services. Tabulating what constitutes public goods, Olowu (2002), citing Ostrom and Ostrom (1991), listed the features as including the following: relative difficult to measure in terms of quantity and quality; consumed jointly and simultaneously by many people; difficult to exclude someone who does not pay; generally no individual choice of kind and quality of goods; payment for goods not closely related to demand or consumption, and lastly allocation decisions made primarily by political process. One of the essential pre-requisites for service delivery is the existence of a clearly defined policy which reflects government intentions and expectations regarding service delivery, quality of service as well as the rights and obligations of service providers and recipients in the process of service delivery (Fagbemi, 2006).

Public Service: a Process, an Institution

Public service as a process is simply what it takes public office holders, in terms of methods (and procedures) to provide sound, accountable, desirable, reasonable, efficient

and effective services to the public or citizenry of any country (Ayeni, 2008). A public officer who shoulders the responsibility is employed and paid by government. From the point of view of institution an attempt is made hereunder to draw a dichotomy between the public service and the civil service drawing from a popular saying – “all civil servants are public servants, but not all public servants are civil servants”. Basically, public service is the agglomeration of all government Ministries, Departments, Agencies, Parastatals and non-executive (or extra-ministerial) institutions set up as part of the machinery of government for the purpose of delivering public services (Ayeni, 2008).

The civil service is narrower which is simply the service of the state in a civil capacity as staff of the office of the President, Vice-President, a ministry or Department of government assigned with the responsibility for any business of the government (Section 318 (1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Adamolekun (1983) described it as a complex organization with a body of permanent officials appointed in a civil capacity to assist the political executive in the formulation, execution and implementation of government policies in ministries, departments and agencies within which specific government works are carried out. To McGregor (1991), there are three main senses in which civil service can be defined. The first sense describes it as a system of employment, focusing on the size of civil services, and rules of civil service employment as these relate to such issues as recruitment, selection, job evaluation, training and development, performance appraisal, and the role and composition of the higher civil service as against the rest of the service. Second, civil service is conceived as instrument of governance, institution that serves as the bridge between the state and specific administrative organs. Finally, civil service is defined in terms of its roles in the policy process: as policy authorizers, implementers, fixers, payers, producers, arrangers, and clients and consumers. It is important to draw attention to the fact that public administration is primarily the responsibility of the civil service as civil service oversees other governmental agencies, statutory corporations, commissions and boards. It is on this note that Ayeni (2007) feels that it is possible to simply conceptualize the civil service as the governmental bureaucratic organization which gives effects to all public policies that are properly and legitimately enacted by government in power.

Adopting the meaning from the point of view of institution in this work, it is however pertinent to mention that the two cannot be clearly separated as there are overlaps and dove-tailing here and there (Maduabum, 2006) especially where those ones classified as belonging to public service but which are overseen or supervised by their respective ministries.

III. CHANGES IN PUBLIC SERVICE MANAGEMENT

The World Bank's World Development Report (WDR) (1997) was emphatic on what should be the basic government tasks and these include “a foundation of law”, a benign policy environment, including macroeconomic stability, investing in people and infrastructure, protection of the vulnerable, and protection of the natural environment. These are the tasks that only governments can perform and which even the weak ones must strive to accomplish. By the early 1990s only a few Sub-Saharan Africa countries had institutional capacity to perform these basic tasks fairly and satisfactorily (Adamolekun & Kiragu, 2002). The sources of the problems of the weak countries that were unable to perform the tasks were traced by these scholars to the problem of huge budget deficits, extensive involvement in the provision of goods and services and complex regulations that stifled private and voluntary initiatives. It was this phenomenon of weak and overextended (bloated) states that the public service reforms of the 1990s sought to address, it was added. Since that 1990s, the public services in Africa have gone through series of changes and reforms in order to make them to become the main vehicle for social and economic development. Before then the situation has always been that the public sector was protected from change with its attendant negative effects. The three main factors driving civil service reform effort in most African countries and Sub-African countries since 1990s have been economic reform efforts, wave of democratization and the search for administrative efficiency with a view to improving the quality of goods and services delivered to the public (Adamolekun & Kiragu, 2002). Olowu (2002) was definite in his assertion that African countries experienced severe economic decline in the 1980s, and there was also a sharp decline in the quality of governance and the delivery of services. According to him, two of the important explanations for poor economic performance are the decline of governance and of the quality of services. He cited cases of increase in the number of people without safe water and in adult literacy rates, high level of maternal mortality rate and increasing percentage of people below the poverty line.

Today the pressure for change is felt length and breadth of Africa which involve, according to Fagbemi (2006), downsizing/rightsizing the public services, adoption of information age government, good governance and democracy, decentralization and reduction of protectionist policy by governments. Such changes have been implemented to varying degrees in different countries and in many cases exploring alternatives to actual provision of the public services. By this, governments tend to make greater use of market-type mechanisms which involve more extensive and competitive contracting and such other deregulated systems and innovations in providing services. Such systems and innovations include the introduction of delivery modes like outsourcing, management contracting, corporatization, commercialization, and sometimes total privatization with all expected to lead to better quality services and desire to

innovate. Other areas of reform measures aimed at achieving improved performance include the modernization of human resource management system and of the financial management system, and lastly capacity development for the workforce.

Beyond the feeling of the pressure for change, the roles of the international (financial) institutions cannot be underemphasized as strict borrowing conditionalities of organizations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have spurred changes in the public sector of countries in Africa. The external influence began in the 1980s in a few countries but became more widespread and continuous in the 1990s all in the context of external funding for economic reform programs (Adamolekun & Kiragu, 2002). Under their structural adjustment and stabilization programs it is often required of borrowing countries to embark on public sector reform measures ranging from public service reform, privatization and commercialization, rationalization, to deregulation. On the whole, the target is the reduction in government's involvement in social and economic activities which may involve doing away with unnecessary organs of government and avoiding overlapping of functions to enhance effective, efficient and faster delivery of services to the public. In addition, it enhances a better fit between the needs of the local community and the services provided due to recipient's involvement and participation.

However, the history of a decentralized public delivery system in Africa has not recorded 100 percent success as it has been plagued with poor design, acute shortage of human resources, financial mismanagement and other dysfunctional elements. There have also been problems traceable to conflict of interest between the dominant groups and the people at the grass-roots level (Rondinelli, Nellis & Cheema, 1983). Generally, public/civil service reform has been described as a daunting task in both design and implementation in developing countries. The World Bank (2008), for instance, confirmed in the support provided for comprehensive evaluation of public sector reform projects in developing countries between 1999 and 2006, that civil service reform is more complex and has fewer chances of satisfactory design and implementation than such other reforms as PFM reform, anti-corruption programs, etc. In the case of Brosamle (2012), he was of the opinion that besides dearth of relevant comparative knowledge and data, the political sensitivity of civil service reform, its close interdependence with the "corruption issue", and its often large-scale fiscal sustainability implications add further difficulty in the choice of civil service reforms and institutional designs.

IV. THE CASE OF THE GAMBIA

a. The Country Profile

The Gambia, known officially as the Republic of The Gambia, is a country located along Gambia River on the west coast of Africa. The river flows through the country into the Atlantic

Ocean. The Gambia lies between latitudes 13⁰ and 14⁰ North and longitudes 13⁰ and 17⁰ West. It is surrounded by Senegal as the former is bounded on the North, East and South by the latter (with which it is joined in the confederation of Senegambia) and on the West by a short bit of Atlantic Ocean. The Gambia is the smallest country on the mainland Africa as it occupies a total land area of 11, 300 square kilometers (4388 square miles) (with approximately 1,300 square kilometers covered by water) which makes it the 164th in the World. It has a total boundary length of 820km (510 miles) of which 80km (50miles) is coastline. The climate of The Gambia is tropical. There is a dry and rainy season. The dry season runs from mid-October to mid-June of the following year with an average temperature of 32⁰ C (89.6⁰ F) while the raining season runs from mid-June to mid-October. The 2013 Gambia population was estimated at 1,857, 181 at the growth rate of 3.2% per year. The Gambian population is currently growing at a rate of 3% per year with a fertility rate of 4 children born to every woman. The Gambian estimated 2018 population is 2,146,119 which ranks 149th in the world based on World Population Review report. This is with a population density of 176 people per square meter which is 74th in the world.

The Gambia's capital city is Banjul. It is located on the Atlantic coast with a city population of 35,000. The Greater Banjul Area has a population estimated at 380,000 with an urban population density of 3,800 people per square kilometer (9900/sq mile). The Gambia's largest city is Serrekunda with a city population estimated to be 350,000 and followed by Brikama with a population estimated to be 77,000 based on World Population Prospects data as of 14th February, 2018 (Retrieved on the 20th March, 2018).

Gambia demographics also reveal that there are many ethnic groups in The Gambia, the largest of which is the Mandinka (42%), followed by Fula (18%), Wolof (16%), Jola (10%), Serers, Sarahule and the Bianunkas. The Krio people are very minute in the Gambia and one of the smallest ethnics in the Country. Out of the total population, about 3,500 non-Africans live in the country, including Europeans and families of Lebanese origin, as revealed by the World Population Review.

The Gambian economy is limited to a small, undiversified market mainly driven by tourism and agriculture. While services accounted for 55% of growth, agriculture, which employs about 70% of the population, accounted for only 28% of GDP (RTG, 2011). The percentage of households living below the poverty line at US\$1.25 per day was estimated at 48.4% in 2010 and 48.65% in 2015, which the average GDP growth stood at 3% in 2015. At the same time, as evidenced from the 2013 census results, poor and inadequate education continues to limit the youth's productivity and acquisition of skills (RTG, 2017; GBoS, 2015).

The Gambia gained its independence from the United Kingdom on 18th February, 1965 and declared Republic 24th April, 1970. The Gambia is a member of the Commonwealth and it is in its third Republic as a result of 2016 historic election. The official language is English and other national languages are Mandinka, Wolof, Fula, Serer, Jola, Sarahule, Manjago and Creole (Krio). The Gambian constitution guarantees freedom of religion giving recognition to three major faiths practiced, i.e Christianity, Islam and Traditional religion. The 2013 census estimated the representation to be as follows: Christianity (3.8 per cent), Islam (96 per cent) and Traditional and others (less than 1 per cent).

b. Salient Features of Public Service Pre-Barrow regime

The public service inherited by the Adam Barrow-led administration has been described to be a problem-ridden one. It was said to be fraught with problems ranging from myriad of political, social and economic problems to systematic breakdown of laws and institutions traceable to the years of mismanagement and neglect the country faced under the immediate past administration. The public service then was said to be characterized by

- i. The multiplicity of ministries, agencies, departments, and functions that led to a bloated civil service characterized by poor coordination, inadequate synergies, and duplication of interventions.
- ii. Lack of a performance management system, inadequate programming capacity and generally low pay and pension scales (which) has led to low productivity, which was further worsened by politicized recruitment and promotion processes and sparse conduct of capacity gaps assessment.
- iii. Apart from a few exceptions, notable among which is the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), most governed transactions are anchored on inefficient manual processes. This is despite the existence of an e-Government platform (since 2003), which remained largely under-utilized due to limited access, weak technical competences, and limited internet connectivity.
- iv. At an individual level, insecurity of tenure and limited recourse to administrative judicial channels during the past 22 years of repressive government had led to high attrition rates and an increasingly junior workforce.
- v. With a change in government, only a handful of high-level political figures have a working knowledge of the country's public administration. While this offers an opportunity to make a decisive break with the policies and values of the previous government, it also complicates reform efforts, as many of the political figures tasked with implementing reforms have limited experience with the public sector and lack strong working relationships with career public servants (RTG, 2018).

The document covers the state of health of the State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) counted to be like 41 public enterprises essentially as extension of public sector agencies. The number made up of SOEs (which are incorporated entities, i.e corporations/companies) and Semi-autonomous Government Agencies (SAGAs), both governed by the 1990 Public Enterprise Act, the Companies Act (2013), Individual Public Enterprises Acts and the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia. It is emphasized that before the advent of this government, Gambia SOEs had become a major fiscal burden on the government because of poor performance of the SOEs resulting from poor corporate governance and gaps and conflicts relating to oversights, inter-PE relationships, mandates, and legal framework (the Public Enterprise Act of 1990). The poor financial performance of the SOEs is also said to have been compounded by their inefficiencies and imposition of non-commercial public service obligations and below-cost pricing formulas without any compensation from government. Also cited was the financial controls and procedures through the SOE sector that have been particularly inadequate and have provided opportunities for the misuse of funds and other assets, with growing evidence of massive embezzlement. The problem of capacity gaps and development needs is yet another area which was described as being pervasive in the Gambia's public sector institutions especially at the institutional, organizational and individual levels (RTG, 2018). These foregoing inadequacies only confirmed the level of decadence of the public service over the years in addition to the changing public perception of the public service as being insensitive and unreliable, lethargic and slow, wasteful, slow to change, unresponsive and discourteous to the public, corrupt, over-bloated, insensitive, parochial and often ethnically-biased processes such as staff recruitment, performance assessment, promotion, contract award, etc. (Ayeni, 2008).

Generally, studies showed that the Gambian public or civil service has poor capacity to implement government policies that can bring about rapid social and economic advancement, weak manpower base in terms of quality and even not prepared for effective and efficient service delivery, and above all highly deficient in ethical practices critical to its success as an institution. In addition, it has been characterized by poor coordination and duplication of services as a result of multiplicity of ministries, departments and agencies, and above all unbridled political interference (RTG, 2018). The RTG (2017) has earlier on emphasized the fact that the civil service has faced problems ranging from red-tapism, lethargy to corruption and other unethical practices in addition to weak manpower capacity, poor remuneration and incentives and growth in numbers and the wage bill that have outpaced fiscal capacity of government. The study carried out by African Development Bank (AfDB) in 2012 also corroborated and confirmed limited capacity as a significant source of constraint in The Gambia civil service which was described as having significant implications for service delivery and citizen satisfaction.

However, it is pertinent to place it on record that the efforts towards improving the Gambia public service has been a continuous thing but the success of such efforts has been partly depleted by years of mismanagement and neglect as highlighted somewhere above. For instance, prior to that of 2018 – 2027 coming up, there have been reform programs for periods 2008 – 2011 (following other less structured reform initiatives) and 2012 – 2015 which have, among other things, targeted the improvement of the operational efficiency and reducing transaction costs through automation of government business processes through installation of e-government platform; building human resource capacities of ministries and staff, and review of the pay and grading system (RTG, 2018) but with little or no success recorded. These reforms, especially that of 2012 – 2015, failed because of some reasons as identified in RTG (2017). These include (i) there was no sense of ownership and commitment on the part of the various constituencies and individuals in the service and therefore generated skepticism and resistance among them; (ii) lack of commitment on the part of national leadership; (iii) inadequate financial support and limited technical capabilities that caused uneven implementation and limited results; (iv) the design and implementation plans were not coordinated with complementary reforms in such areas as Public Financial Management Reform (PFMR) and anti-corruption programs; and (v) serious technical, fiscal and socio-political constraints to implementation. In essence, little or no achievement was made in implementing the 2008 – 2011 and major gaps remain with that of period 2012 – 2015 that followed.

c. Initial Interventionist steps towards a new public service

On assumption of office, the Adama Barrow-led administration embarked on a number of measures required in the immediate. These are as listed in the RTG (2018) to include:

- i. A significant reduction in domestic borrowing, which has brought down the prime interest rate from 23 per cent before the December 2016 elections to 18 per cent as of June 2017.
- ii. Revision of the 2017 budget with a view to bringing down the budget deficit. This exercise led to a reduction of government expenditures of about 1 percent of GDP; and the budget of the Office of the President has also been cut by 75 per cent.
- iii. Launching of nationwide staff/payroll verification and audit by the Personnel Management Office (PMO) and the Auditor-General for the entire civil service and security forces to eliminate ghost workers and improve payroll integrity.
- iv. Adopting a vehicle and travel policy that aims to reduce recurrent expenditures and create fiscal space.
- v. Priority being given to youth issues and the first project signed by the new government focused on youth empowerment through funding from the European Union (EU). The 11million Euro project focuses on youth employment creation aiming to

provide high quality skills training for potential youth entrepreneurs and start-ups.

- vi. Concluding budget support agreements to stabilize government finances through assistance from key development partners such as European Union (GMD 1.25 billion), the World Bank (\$US 56 million), African Development Bank (\$US 7million) and others pledged but yet to be received.

Following all above, the Adama Barrow-led administration also expressed its commitment to serious reforms that could spur growth and assist in stabilizing the country in all areas, including accountability, social cohesion, and national reconciliation and a revitalized and transformed economy for the well-being of all Gambians emphasized in the Gambian National Development Plan (2018 – 2021). To achieve this goal, government set for itself eight (8) strategic priorities (RTG, 2018):

- i. Restoring good governance, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and empowering citizens through decentralization and local governance;
- ii. Stabilizing economy, stimulating growth, and transforming the economy;
- iii. Modernizing agriculture and fisheries for sustained economic growth, food and nutritional security and poverty reduction;
- iv. Investing in people through educational and health services, and building a caring society;
- v. Building infrastructure and restoring energy services to power the economy;
- vi. Promoting inclusive and culture-centered tourism for sustainable growth;
- vii. Reaping the demographic dividend through an empowered youth; and
- viii. Making the private sector the engine of growth, transformation, and job creation.

These strategic priorities were complemented by several critical enablers one of which is instituting a public sector that is efficient and responsive to the citizenry which is our area of concern in this paper. In other words, the government recognized the fact that it needs to have strong public institutions and civil service to be able to succeed in its reform agenda. It targeted mainly how to improve performance through appropriate incentive structure and improving the management systems and processes of the service to make it efficient and responsive to the citizenry in terms of service delivery.

This led to the systematic implementation of civil service reform program (CSRP) using phased approach. The first phase runs from 2018 to 2022 with theme “Institutional Rationalization and Consolidation” to address the identified institutional and structural issues and challenges and strengthen the civil service institutions, systems, structures and personnel. The second phase runs from 2023 to 2027 with theme “Re-engineering and Transformation” to consolidate

and sustain the results of the first phase through engineering and modernization of the public service institutions and processes in terms of innovations and state of the art initiatives that will enable them perform the world class standard (RTG, 2017).

V. HUMAN CAPITAL AND (REFORM OF) PUBLIC SERVICE INSTITUTIONS

The fact remains that public service reforms are undertaken to achieve better and effective service to cope with the desired changes in the socio-political and economic lives of the people (Iyayi, 2004). The structure and responsibilities or functions of the public service are changed or improved upon in the process to ensure efficient, effective and responsive public sector institutions. To achieve all these, it is a function of the government's administrative capacity as underlined by the quality of human capital to successfully drive such reforms and carry out related programs for national development. The human capital deficit in the Gambia public institutions has been identified as one major hurdle that has to be addressed in successfully driving the reforms. This was conspicuously identified as a problem in the National Development Plan (2018-2021) as well as the Civil Service Reform Programme (CSRP) (2018-2027) strategy that placed emphasis on the fact that capacity gaps and development needs, among such others, are pervasive in the Gambia's public sector institutions. The point is that Gambia public service lacks the human resource capacity required to drive government programs to achieve economic growth and sustainable development.

The irony of it all is that generally, human capital is central and significant to the success or otherwise of an organization because its activities are determined by the competence, motivation and general effectiveness of its human organization (Likert, 1967). This is in tune with the argument of Harbison (1973) who placed emphasis on the centrality of human capital in government institutions to national development. According to him

Human resources, not capital, constitute the ultimate basis for the wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations and carry forward national development. Clearly, a country which is unable to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to utilize them effectively in the national economy will be unable to develop anything else.

OECD (2012) expressed it that there are varying drivers of development but notably human capital is a robust determinant as, according to Olowu (1999), it devises strategies for the rest of society and stimulate other social institutions to operate as productive agents. From the foregoing, it is clear that the ability of government and its administrative machinery to satisfy the optimal expectations of the great majority of its citizens (indicating the level of

good government and social contentment) is essentially dependent on its human (and institutional) capacity managing the development process. As expressed by Oshionebo (2004), no matter how well-intentioned and well articulated government programs may be, they cannot be successfully implemented without effective administrative machinery whose technical competent, loyalty and commitment should translate ministerial policies and programs into action. This must have informed the high level of investment in human capital by the East Asian economies and widely acknowledged economic miracles and successes that followed. The critical position of the civil service makes it imperative for government to continuously seek new and better ways of enhancing the capacity of the institution as well as the human element to be able to advance the course of development. Oshionebo (2004) highlighted three reasons why skilled and adequate manpower is imperative and these are to:

- generate self-reliance. This will arise from the ability of the people and institutions to make choices and take decisions as well as actions to actualize their identified objectives;
- avail a country of the ability to identify various development options, select the best option and formulate viable action plans relating to the chosen option; and
- execute the plan faithfully, including monitoring and evaluating it, to ensure success, outcomes and impacts.

This leads us to the issue surrounding human capital and capacity building in the public service.

VI. HUMAN CAPITAL AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Ake (1996) described capacity building as the incremental acquisition of capacities which involves the inculcation of knowledge, skills and effectiveness to pursue and realize set goals efficiently. DCG (2012) corroborated this by defining it simply as the process through which required abilities are obtained, strengthened, adapted and maintained over time. Through this process, individual worker's aptitude, qualifications, experience and competences are said to be enhanced to enable them perform effectively, efficiently and productively.

From the point of view of public sector therefore, human capital capacity building involves investments in human capital to raise the level of performance of the public sector to cope with the rising and ever-changing demands of the system and the population. Government invests in public servants in order to equip them with necessary skills to handle new responsibilities; develop skills for customer oriented civil service; improve the standards of service delivery; and adapt to new technologies and new working techniques, methods and processes (ECA, 2003). It was added that the situations that make capacity building essential include where there are shorter career trajectories and faster turnover; where there is shortage of local expertise in critical areas; the expansion of

government activities; the growth in the size of the public service; the changing role of government; globalization and liberalization; poor service delivery and non-attainment of development objectives. On the whole, capacity building targets raising of the performance levels of the public sector to be able to operate at fairly high professional levels and demonstrate competence, proficiency and commitment to state goals and objectives.

Arising from the argument about the centrality of human capital to development as emphasized above, it is imperative to clarify the complementary nature of human and institutional capacity and by this Oshionebo (2004) described capacity building as entailing investment not only in human capital but also in institutions, processes and practices that are necessary for sustainable growth and development. It is believed, according to him, that human resources are required for catalyzing institutional capacity which, in turn, ensures that human capacity is effective by putting appropriate structures and other institutional arrangements in place. Along this same line, Giwa (1997) has earlier on described capacity building as comprising training of manpower, building of institutions and the acquisition of effective and best practices for the realization of national goals for economic and social development as well as sustainable improvements in the quality of life of the people.

Capacity building is regarded today by The World Bank as the “missing link” in the development process in the whole of Africa, including The Gambia, due to the fact that the required capacity in terms of skills and knowledge to formulate and implement policies to realize the national development aspirations are still weak and inadequate. This has however vitiated the government’s ability to take fundamental decisions and even effectively too.

VII. EFFORTS TOWARDS CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTIONS OF THE GAMBIA

The second intervention in the public service reform is the capacity development in the public sector institutions sequel to the comprehensive capacity needs assessment (CNA) conducted. Given the capacity deficit in public institutions and critical roles of the public institutions to have a new public service, the Barrow-led administration formulated a capacity development strategy to address the gaps identified in the targeted 18 Ministries, departments and agencies (RTG, 2018). According to RTG (2018), the intervention focuses, in the short term, on implementation of the civil service reform program to make the civil service attractive and professional; address the short-term skill gaps by tapping diaspora expertise and prudent management of foreign scholarships to match the capacities required; strengthen leadership and middle management cadre in the civil service to strengthen policy and service delivery capacities within the MDAs and transform the civil service into a more result-driven and citizen oriented one; address

organizational weakness in key MDAs by reviewing and updating the legal framework and conducting functional reviews of key MDAs to ensure that they are appropriately governed and structured; and strengthen cross-cutting policy and research coordination capacities in government by strengthening the newly established Gambian National Think-Tank (GAMNTT), and ensuring enhanced and coherent policy and program coordination within government. For the medium to long term, the intervention focuses on strengthening the capacity providers such as the University of The Gambia and Management Development Institute (MDI) to enable them respond more effectively to the skill gaps identified (RTG, 2018).

7.1 *The Place of Tertiary and Higher education in human capital formation*

There is no gainsaying the fact that the place of tertiary and higher education system is critical in formation of human capital to have quality public institutions as it develops a critical mass of university educated people who will be capable of applying the product of research, science and technology to increase the productive capacity of the country necessary for development. Olaniyan & Okemakinde (2008) was definite in describing the formation of human capital in any developing nation (*like Gambia*) as having a correlating effect with its national development as the competitive nature of economies is dictated by workforce with requisite tertiary and higher education and training. This must have informed the emphasis being placed (in different fora) on the need for the Gambia government to ensure an efficient and effective tertiary and higher education and training if only to build its human capital that will drive the public service at fairly high professional levels, stimulate growth, and address the aforementioned situations necessitating capacity building that can help in achieving the objectives of the 2018-2021 National Development Plan (NDP). This must have been based on the positions of scholars at different times who underscore the use of higher education as a strategy for national development. It is in realization of this that must have led to the earlier reform of The Gambia’s education and training system to respond to the need for more relevance and credible credentials as well as skilled and quality workforce. All these have been clearly underscored in The Gambia Education Policy (2004-2015), The Gambia Tertiary and Higher Education Policy (2015-2022), and the Education Sector Policy (2016-2030). According to Touray (2018), it is the mandate of a country’s education system to maximize quality delivery that aligns national development with relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes. By this, right education in any country ensures the adoption of better education and training strategies that support educators/trainers to deliver content more efficiently and effectively, to strengthen practices that will enhance productivity, address challenges such as equitable access, quality, and human resources in related development spheres and eliminate those practices that impede good governance as a whole.

7.2 A Brief on the Key higher educational institutions

7.2.1 University of The Gambia (UTG)

The struggle for economic and social development in the post-colonial era led to continuous yearnings for degree awarding educational institutions and until 1995 when the country's premier university started as an extension of Saint Mary's University of Halifax, Canada through the Nova-Scotia Gambia Association (NSGA). By 1999, the University of The Gambia became a full-fledged national university and started offering degrees in several undergraduate programs. The University has found itself at the center stage in the production of the requisite human capital for both the public and private sectors to be able to surmount the challenges facing managerial responsibilities. It is now known to be a critical asset in providing skills that will lead to increased capacity, new and relevant knowledge and innovations that will lead to increased capacity and qualified labor force for both the public and private sector institutions. From the point of view of public sector, it is expected to develop expertise with enhanced analytical mind to be able to analyze people's problems and with this indirectly strengthening public institutions that will assist in creating conducive environment for the practice of good governance. UTG is the only public University until recently when University of Science, Engineering and Technology (USET) was gazetted. The University runs most of its programs at bachelor's level until recently when it started running some Masters (both professional and research) and three doctoral programs in Public Administration, Law, and Agronomy and they are at different stages. It has however successfully produced some sets of the Masters graduates and only one set of the doctoral graduates which was in the field of Public Administration. UTG is today known to be the center-piece of human capital formation at degree level. Before 1995, Rural Development Institute, The Hotel School (now the Gambia Tourism and Hospitality Institute (GTTI)) and some others below were the main public tertiary institutions established in 1970s and running programs at certificate and diploma levels.

7.2.2 Gambia College (GC)

GC is one of the oldest and only higher institution inherited at independence. It started as Yundum Teachers' College as established in 1952 and later in 1964 renamed Gambia College for purpose of training teachers in The Gambia and its contribution to teacher education, agricultural extension, nursing and public health is of immense. Although its contribution has been at non-degree level, it has significantly contributed human capital to the Gambia's workforce serving both the public and private sectors.

7.2.3 Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI)

The GTTI is the leading technical vocational education and training (TVET) provider in The Gambia since the early 1970s. It also engages in consultancy services for both public and private sectors in areas like auto-mechanic, architecture,

and some others. Today it runs degree programs in conjunction with the University of Ghana under the new World Bank Project. It has been gazetted to become the University of Science, Engineering and Technology (USET).

7.2.4 Management Development Institute (MDI)

The roles of MDI (Gambia) are also critical in human capital formation in The Gambia. This institute was established in 1982 by an Act of the Parliament to provide management training, consultancy and research services to public and private sectors which are co-terminus with the reasons why MDIs are established in most African countries at independence. The mandates include creation of awareness and promoting management and administrative ethics; enhancing management and administrative development; and serving as a center of excellence in management. Studies revealed that these MDIs in African countries have had an impact in the area of public service reforms by filling in some of the capacity gaps and making a significant contribution towards providing the human resources required by the public service, particularly in those areas and disciplines in which skilled personnel have been historically lacking (ECA, 2003).

The Gambian MDI is not an exception in this case as the strategic goal is to maintain leadership in training of the middle-level workforce of the civil service, consultancy and good governance. For instance, the institute was actively involved in the implementation of the Gambian Government's Administrative Reform Programme (ARP) developed in 1986 and played a key role in providing technical advice and input in all administrative reform policy statements for high standard of efficiency, productivity and good governance (MDI, 2017). It has also been active in equipping government officials with necessary skills to fulfill the objectives of major government development programs such as the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) of the 1980s; the Programme for Sustainable Development (PSD) of the 1990s; the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation (SPA) of the 2000s; and most recently the Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE). All these were documented in clear terms in the MDI's paper on proposed Centre for Career, Business and Entrepreneurship Development (MDI-CCBED).

The supervision and coordination of these higher and tertiary institutions have been under the Department of Higher Education, Science and Technology (DoHEST) and later (in 2007) became a Ministry and named Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST). It has since assumed the responsibility of providing policy direction for post-secondary education, especially to oversee technical teacher and university education in The Gambia with specific objectives of creating a dynamic and flexible system of education (Touray, 2018).

Despite the implementation of various education policies, concerns have been expressed about the downward trend in the performance of the institutions in making significant contribution towards raising the level of management and

enhancing productivity in the public service due to inadequate funding, lean quality human capital resulting from high staff turnover, and low status accorded some of them by government over the years due to little or no patronage, among others. The situational analysis, according to Touray (2020), revealed that the Gambia's higher education landscape is fragile and which has led to lean (quality) staff population in some of the institutions and which has had effect on the quality and relevance of instructional delivery. He further traced the fragility to staff low qualification levels, absence of adequate instructional tools, and a lack of a robust collaboration that will facilitate placements and gainful employment (generally). These concerns are expressed because higher education system is known to be a major driver of workforce productivity and an ideal medium that supports the provision of informed policy making environment that will aid the implementation of government aspirations, programs and policies; accelerate change and development; and improve quality of life.

VIII. ENHANCING THE CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS OF THE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

Towards this end, it is imperative to offer some suggestions towards enhancing human capital formation and capacity building in the Gambian public service. First, it is a brilliant idea to have thought of the need to conduct comprehensive capacity needs assessment (CNA) in the public institutions. However, going by the level of achieving this, it is necessary to suggest that this CNA has to be given the serious attention it deserves in order to achieve the objectives. There is also the need to establish National Capacity Building (NCB) Secretariat to house Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) on Capacity Building. It will be the responsibility of the TAC to carry out national capacity assessment for government to continually know the available manpower in terms of quality of technical knowledge and skills as well as quantity and the desired level to be able to determine the manpower gap to be filled and the direction of the capacity to be built for operational efficiency and effective service delivery. In addition, TAC should be positioned to develop appropriate strategies to effectively implement training policies. This can be done by taking account of the existing status of knowledge and experience of the workers, the scope and type of training actually needed to improve their knowledge and skills as well as their willingness to undergo a specific training.

Following this, it is suggested that the capacity building efforts be supported with adequate budgetary allocation. As a matter of policy, a reasonable percentage of the annual personnel budget must not only be devoted to training and development of the government employees for now but must also be adequately funded in the course of the year. These employees are inputs critical to the realization of the public service reform agenda of the government and which must be complemented by political will and commitments through adequate funding. Government can as well create a

special capacity building fund for critical segments of the public service.

Next to this is adequate funding of the training and educational institutions and processes to enable them meet the purpose for which they were established. This will enable the institutions to acquire necessary facilities and equipment, maintain the existing ones, embark on expansion where necessary, hire and retain quality staff and the like for high level performance in terms of training and developing human resources to stimulate managerial and corporate productivity. Closely related to this is the need for mainstreaming these institutions into the decision making processes especially by encouraging active participation of the experts in these institutions (as think tanks) in the policy making process and reform programs.

Fourth, government must ensure the establishment of institutional relationship between the capacity building institutions and the agency responsible for the implementation of public service reform programs, which in this case is the Personnel Management Office (PMO). PMO was created as part of the Administrative Reform Process (ARP) and empowered by the Public Service Act of 1991 and which mission is mainly to attract, develop and retain highly motivated professional, effective and efficient civil service that is responsive to the national development goals and objectives. According to ECA (2003), such a relationship will be crucial in building the requisite and effective institutional capacity within the public service for formulation and implementation of appropriate strategies for public service reforms. What will be expected here, according to ECA (2003), is that measures for performance improvement of the public service would be factored into the training programs of the institutions and that they would be adequately patronized to improve on the current status as premier training institutions in The Gambia. In addition, the curricula and program structure of these institutions must be reviewed to ensure close alignment between the programs offered and labor market demands and expectations to increase career perspectives, productivity and earnings for individual workers if only to make Gambian economy competitive and foster the achievement of national development objectives and sustain them. This addresses any mismatch in the educational system as it is known the world over that there is the positive correlation between educational investment and development.

Lastly, there may also be need for a national training framework that will ensure a more systematic and sustainable approach that allows some peculiar departments to develop their own capacity and manage this basic framework. This will assist in ensuring effective and efficient system and approach that recognizes the peculiarities of each department in terms of technical, professional and specialized knowledge required to surmount current serious operational problems in each department and agency.

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