GUEST SPEAKER ADDRESS BY GEORGE SCOTT, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT (AAPAM) AT THE 10TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION (SPMA), UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA, 26TH OCTOBER 2017 IN PRETORIA, SOUTH AFRICA

CONFERENCE THEME*:*

A DECADE OF DEBATING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES IN AN ERA OF MULTIPLE CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

- Director of the School of Public Management and Administration, Prof Margaret Chitiga-Mabugu
- Chair of the Public Service Commission; Adv Richard Sizani
- Faculty Members
- Invited Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I take this opportunity to extend greetings to you from the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM). I immensely thank the Director and Faculty of the School of Public Management and Administration and the entire University of Pretoria for the honour of inviting me to join you as a guest speaker. I also appreciate the diverse pool of presenters who have embraced the conference call for papers and invested their efforts and resources into producing interesting research outputs which are important for our continent to reap forward in this information age.

Madam Chair, ladies and gentlemen, the theme and subthemes guiding this conference are timely and thought provoking as we continue to aspire for satisfactory public goods

and services which can only be achievable through an efficient public administration given the scarce resources in face of ever growing public needs and demands.

Madam Chair, Ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that over the years, as public administration practitioners and scholars we continue to seek a working definition which captures what we do. So far, we have achieved only little success given the complexity of our work and our operating environment. Personally, I tend to see public administration as a system of inputs, activities and resources which enable the translation of the government plans/policies into reality by delivering goods and services to the people. In this arrangement, the outcomes of public administration manifest in public goods and services such as health, education, housing, social security roads, airports whose aim is to improve the lives of citizens.

Madam Chair, as recognized by the organizers of this conference, how to identify and apply useful theoretical perspectives to our work to help us take advantage of opportunities and address the challenges is an area we need to continuously keep exploring. In my submission, I will highlight on five theories which I have interacted with, and which I feel are relevant to our discourses in this conference. Allow me to begin by observing that public administration comes out as orphan discipline which relies on theories adopted from other fields. However, theories such as the systems theory which focuses on relations, interactions and interdependence among elements can be a good viewpoint in explaining and understanding how we work. The arguments of systems theory contend that all the identified components of public administration are important in a development context and must be improved in order for governments to implement its development and service delivery objectives.

Madam Chair, the other theoretical perspective which we have interacted with in practice and scholarly undertakings is the New Public Management perspective. This perspective which calls for the adoption of private sector best practices into public sector practices has received both admiration and critique. The proponents have identified how technology for instance is assisting to improve our work, productivity, and thus better service to the citizens. Opponents cite that, such privatization has mixed results as well as massive job losses as a result of cost cutting measures suggested by consultants. There is also doubt on whether most private sector practices can fit into the public sector given its unique characteristics and challenges.

Madam Chair, I also submit that the Transaction Cost Theory can also be a helpful standpoint from which to digest the challenges and opportunities we encounter in public management. This perspective sees our work and its output as a transaction and advises the need for all stakeholders to watch the costs related to their transactions. Related to the transaction cost, is the allocative efficiency approach which calls for public resources to be administered and allocated in the approach which ensures optimal enhancement of the public wellbeing through better health, better education and better roads among others. This perspective is tied to access and distribution equity concerns with the public administration insisting that allocative and technical efficiency is achievable through matching of public services to local preferences. This perspective manifests localized governments as a necessary player in decisions on the allocation of resources to ensure matching of these needs based on preferences of the citizens.

I have also identified the principal-agent theory as a useful approach in understanding the relationships, conflict, trust and opportunism among the public administration stakeholders. For instance, citizens delegate their power to local government units expecting services in return for taxes paid. However, due to information asymmetry, citizens have little control over the officers in local governments except through the elections or protests which disrupt services further.

Madam Chair Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, in an attempt to address the needs of the citizens, different stakeholders have developed frameworks to address, in a sustainable manner, the challenges facing the current world. For instance, UN member states have adopted the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are universal set of goals, targets and indicators that will frame national agendas and political policies over the next 15 years up to 2030. The Africa Union also has its Agenda 2063 which outlines strategic targets which need to be met. Countries are not left behind as they have their respective national development blueprints and strategy papers on various social-economic pillars.

In view of the significance and complexities of public administration, this discipline is regularly engulfed with debates and arguments. Key among the recurrent ongoing public administration debates is the issue of Governance. Functional states can only develop if stakeholders question their oneness - the implication of the governance paradigm for public administration in a pluralized society. In such pluralized societies such as African countries with strong ethnic, religious, and divergent demography across race, colour, tribe and age divisions, there is need for predictable and open

governance structures and mechanisms. Such structures will create a solid foundation of identity and nationhood enabling smooth delivery of public services.

Madam Chair, improving service delivery has dominated the public administration debates in the past decade with the discourse on how to achieve better services taking varied angles. In my 2016 thesis titled "*Influence of Public Financial Management on Service Delivery in the Ghanaian District Assemblies,*" I made an interesting finding with regard to measurement and perception of service delivery where public officials perceive service delivery as 'good' or 'satisfactory' whereas citizens rate the services as 'poor' or dissatisfactory. This conflicting perceptions while highlighting agency problem is an area of concern in the quest for agreeable measure of service delivery.

The role of local authorities in enhancing service delivery has been addressed by several practitioners and authors. The argument has been that localized governments improve equity in resource allocation and service delivery as it enhances public participation and accountability of local leaders. Others however hold that local governments being a key player in grassroots service provision are faced with resources constraints due to weak revenue mobilisation practices and thus are not able to deliver better services.

Madam Chair, I observe that local governments need to be strengthened as key pillars for better services to the public across Africa. We need to learn from the best practices and lessons from countries such as Kenya, where devolution is showing great promise for improving services albeit some challenges. It is notable that, when the localized

governments get substantial resources, they not only improve service delivery, but also offer an opportunity for less competitive and harmful politics at the national level.

Madam Chair, the role of public financial management (PFM) towards service delivery cannot be understated. In my thesis I hold that PFM as a system constituted by six interrelated components of budgeting, revenue generation, public expenditure management, financial reporting, auditing and financial regulations need to be looked at holistically.

When there are no revenues, the public administration grinds to a halt. When the salaries are not paid it affects service delivery directly. When the auditor fails to examine the revenues and expenditure trends, chances of uncovering scandals pilfering money meant to be used to deliver goods and services become a mirage and embolden the corruption cartels. It is thus evident that the various sub-components of public financial management act as a system of inter-related elements which has the tendency to impact or influence each other and consequently, service delivery. In that vein, when there is need to strengthen one of the components, it becomes essential to ensure that, all the other components are reformed and improved.

Madam Chair I also observe that the gender agenda continues to be a conspicuous issue facing public administration. Without adequate attention on the inclusion of women, public administration is not harnessing the full potential of a country's workforce, capacity and creativity, since women mostly represent more than half of the population. Barack Obama in a speech to young people in Kenya noted that the

systemic exclusion of women from public and private engagements given that they make up half of global population, is akin to preventing half of a sport team from playing.

Further, within the field of public administration and the civic sector, it is possible to identify periodic concern for issues of environmental policy and sustainability since it is no longer tenable to separate the concept of sustainability from public administration. Public administration has realized the fact that despite differing views on the concept of sustainability, the current civic sector is expected to meet today's needs without compromising the ability of meeting needs for future generations. Views about the urgency for action on sustainability issues like climate change also differ, but there are growing pressures and evidence compelling concerted public action to advance sustainable objectives nationally and globally.

Additional logic for action to promote sustainability focuses on resultant economic gains from energy efficiency, improved building standards, recycling and reuse. Despite these compelling reasons, sustainability remains only a peripheral argument that is often left to environmentalists in public administration. For both equity and economy reasons, we need to continue to chart the path forward in creating greater sustainability awareness in the field of public administration.

Fighting poverty remains a significant issue in the realization of development. Incidentally, no country has been able to completely eradicate it. These notwithstanding, the levels are greatly reduced in some regions and states. It is believed that only when economic development reaches an advanced level then poverty can be eliminated, however this is yet to be proved even in the developed states like USA, UK, and

France. Despite this assertion, recent literature has emphasized the importance of efficient institutions and governance as a deep determinant for economic growth. This assertion obviously set a homework for public administration to ensure that various institutions build the necessary capacities.

Madam Chair, ladies and gentlemen, there is still debate concerning the appropriate role of leadership in the public sector since the profession of public administration has yet to embrace leadership as a fundamental element of successful practice. There is the need for individual and collective leadership concerns to support and provide leverage for capacity-development efforts. The role of transformative and strategic leadership has been canvassed as a critical tool for the public sector to undertake its role professionally. Such leadership encourages creativity and innovation among employees ensuring a responsive public sector. The public administration leadership must be transformational, strategic, professional and ethical for it to navigate the turbulence and challenges facing public administration in Africa.

Madam Chair, in the African perspective what is (un)ethical is determined by many factors and circumstances. Some scholars, Murove (2009) and Metz (2015) note that the African ethics are founded upon communal/relation Ubuntu philosophy or the humanistic worldview and is distinct from the Eurocentric view of ethics which is more individualistic. I hold that African ethics extend beyond just the living as they are determined by ancestors, and even the unborn spiritual connectedness. Further, ethical practices in the African context differ across age groups noting that what may be unethical to the older generation may be considered ethical by the younger generation.

This perception of ethics has a strong bearing on the nature of what passes as ethical practices in public entities.

Madam chair the adverse effects of the deeply embedded unethical practices among public administrators continues to have adverse effect on the overall state of our society and has become an impediment in efforts to transform our societies from the situation where millions of Africans live in undignified conditions. Linked to low level ethics for instance, is corruption which in many countries has become pervasive, systemic and not easily detected. Corruption is found to run from the top management to the lower level cadres of public service, and tend to increase the cost of service delivery. Many of the anti-corruption institutions in many countries have also lacked firmness; the finances, impartiality and public support to enable them function efficiently. To nurture an ethical public administration there is need to enforce sanctions on unethical practices while we provide rewards for ethical public administrators. There is also need for voters when exercising their voting right to ensure that only the leaders who pass the ethical and integrity test are elected into office, especially at the local and national levels.

The contentions on professionalism continue to occupy an important space in the public administration debates. There has been contention on whether it is even accurate to refer to public administration as a profession given that the public servants are drawn from many distinct professions such as accounting, engineering, medicine and teaching. With such contention on the applicability of professionalism persisting, it is difficult to have binding ethical practices which can improve professionalism across public administration.

It is notable that despite the adoption of codes of conduct and numerous regulations aimed at nurturing and propagating professionalism among public administrators, issues of criminal political establishments, systemic corruption in addition to poor working conditions continue to make professionalism a mileage in the African public administration. The fuzzy understanding of ethics in the African viewpoint makes it hard to instill professionalism into the public sector. For instance, nepotism which is a recurrent challenge in the public sector is deemed quite acceptable based on African ethos which demand support for family members or in line with Ubuntu's rallying call of looking out for each other.

Madam chair allow me to talk briefly on technology in the public administration. In the last decade, technology has been one of the dominant features in the public administration. The adoption of technology is in line with the New Public Management approach which calls for the adoption of what works in the private sector to the public administration. The digitized public administration can become a tool for the sustainable development.

The use of technology has also been suggested as a bullet which needs to be tried to handle the problems of governance and accountability which have persistently dominated the public service. The importance of e-government on improving efficiency and even cutting out corruption by reducing opportunities for opportunism has been adduced from empirical evidence. In the absence of burdensome necessity to travel tens of kilometers to authorize a copy of the document or to sign a paper in the presence of a notary, people can save time, fuel and money, reduce congestions or traffic jams and enable rationalization of the public service. The use of ICT through

tools, such as biometric voting and IFMIs have also shown great promise in improving accountability if well implemented. These tools are enabling 'open governments' where votes and financial resources can be stored and easily tracked for verification and prosecution. Incidentally, there are comments that issues of privacy, and security in ICT would have to be addressed urgently.

Madam Chair, Ladies and gentlemen, in the midst of the increasing and complex debate, public administration is also engulfed in various complicated challenges which also keep evolving. One of the main challenges for public administration is an unwillingness of citizens' involvement in administrative affairs. Though some administrations are quickly moving to E-participation to encourage more citizens to participate, it still faces a myriad of challenges including lack of adequate skills on the use of social media; lack of privacy on the internet; inadequate capacity of all citizens to participate due to education background, socio-economic status and unavailability of e-infrastructure. All these affect the success of e-participation. In addition, where packaging, representation and consideration to representation are not duly addressed, nothing significantly changes.

Madam Chair, the question, of who public servants should be accountable to, remains a highly debated one. The public administrators are expected to satisfy managerial accountability to senior managers, political accountability to the politicians in power, financial accountability to institutions that provide financing and public accountability to the citizens. Incidentally, the lines of these accountabilities are sometimes muddled, multiple and duplicated. The effect is that, often, it is difficult to clearly identify who was responsible for what and who should have supervised what. Where chain of command

lines of accountability is not clearly defined, various authorities run the system without respect for the rule of law. This leads to rampant violation of human rights, poor service delivery and uncertainty.

Many countries, especially in Africa have registered challenging economic growth despite a myriad of efforts at the national, regional and international levels. Scholars have argued that many of the programmes and strategies for Africa's development cannot be implemented effectively because various public-sector institutions are afflicted with inefficiency, poor coordination, poor management, weak institutional capacity, and political interference. Many of the institutions also lack motivation and are most of the time demoralized due to low salaries, poor working conditions and appointments based on criteria other than merit and lack of continuous training for its work force.

The culture within which the public administration and management operates also have many challenges. It should entail employee involvement, rewards, teamwork, recognizes individual effort and incorporate the needs of the clients. It must emphasize ethics such as equity, probity, integrity, moral conduct and political neutrality. Incidentally, the public services of many African counties continue to face the challenges of declining social values. Many of the anti-corruption institutions in many countries have also lacked firmness; the finances, impartiality and public support to enable them function efficiently.

There is also a challenge for the public administration to keep pace with the rapid need to update policies and legal framework. The expertise, knowledge, and budgetary

constraints are also affecting the pace at which regulations keep at par with the requirements of the day. For instance, terrorism and immigration through technology have become new phenomenon, and most countries are rushing to develop structures to handle them. One consequence of such rushed legislation is that it may be outlived too soon owing to the nature of asymmetrical warfare.

In my concluding remarks, I observe that public administration is currently positioned at the center of challenges and opportunities of this new era. Regardless of the debate that may prevail from one time to the next, public administration remains the gel that brings together a government system for success or failure. Since its nature and practice is changing in line with the demands of each coming day, the capacity of public administration to cope with the challenges and opportunities depends on their abilities and willingness to give the best at any given time.

With increased education, technology, liberalization, and globalization, the citizen has become more sophisticated. Citizens are therefore making more demands and are also requesting for efficiency in the delivery of services. Public administration would have to design the appropriate template to cope and satisfactorily manage the emerging situations.

Empowered by the technological developments, and sighted in the light of open government objectives, public administration's new quest in the age of electronic participation should be geared towards engineering the path to a more democratic future.

Madam Chair, allow me to make some recommendations as I finalize my speech. Reinventing public administration both in theory and practice is the positive and necessary way forward for public administration. This paper therefore makes the following recommendations:

For public administration to effectively work with citizens, they need to change the hierarchical process of decision-making. In line with the systems theory, public administration should enter an interactive and interrelationships with the citizen, stakeholders and other agencies, where decision-making requires a collaborative and participative approaches and leads to a performing open government.

Corruption, lack of transparency and integrity continue to be the greatest challenge that undermines the progress of public administration in Africa. There should be concerted and multi-faceted efforts by all players to minimize its extent. Institutional arrangements such as effective negotiation, coordination, realignment and motivation as enshrined in the transaction cost theory should be enforced to ensure effective and efficient operationalization of public administration and management. Such arrangements would also help minimize issues of opportunism and improve trust building between politicians, public servants as well as the citizens as posited by the Principal Agent theory. Such institutional arrangements could also enhance regulatory frameworks and improve control systems.

Practitioners and scholars should pursue, document and empirically test localized Afro public administration theoretical perspectives or borrow from Afro based theories such as *Ubuntu* to help shape the discourse of public administration going forward. Such Afro

based theories would help improve core issues such as ethics which when viewed from Western viewpoint are different from the African viewpoint.

There is need to strengthen, audit, localize and improve appropriate technologies such as IFMIS, and biometric identification for efficient public administration and management. Appropriate technologies should continue to form an integral part in an effort to improve public administration and consequently public goods and service delivery.

There is also the need to encourage key stake holders of public administration; politicians, public servants, and especially the citizens to enhance the use of tools such as Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp for public participation. These tools are gaining importance in getting feedback from the public. The tools can offer audit mechanism for instance, by sharing and discussing photos of ongoing, completed or stalled projects at the grass roots. The use of such tools will help reduce information asymmetry, reduce opportunism and enhance the interface between politicians, public servants and the citizen as prescribed in the agency principles.

As enshrined in the New Public Management theory, and in line with the new trends of globalization, there is a need for structural reengineering of the public sector with the infusion of new values of professionalism, accountability, responsiveness and a focused sense of mission for maximum efficiency. This will facilitate a further departure from the traditional methods of administration and the urgent need for a renewed public administration that propel government in its quest for sustainable socio-economic, political and technological development. In this vein the African Association for Public

Administration and management (AAPAM) is spearheading its partnership with various countries and institutions, undertaking increased number of country level training programs, enhance its E-library and networking with both members and non-members. AAPAM has also introduced an enhanced forum for research and also for innovations platforms.

Our learning institutions such as the School of Public Management and Administration (SPMA) of the University of Pretoria need also to be proactive in building capacity for future leaders, employees and citizens who will be faced with different set of challenges. The education institutions need to embrace changes in curriculums to incorporate the changes sweeping across the world in a bid to address the situation where most of our graduates continue to be said to be half baked or requiring retraining to match industry (including public administration and management) needs. The learning institutions also need to adopt the new communication tools for better/faster communication and feedback interactions among lecturers, practitioners, employees and students. This will enhance the quality of knowledge generated from our institutions of higher learning. If possible, practitioner concepts could be integrated with studies at the institutions

It is advised that research in public administration should be intensified. Development of policies based on adequate research and on emerging trends will help reduce the challenge of lagging policies that are not in tandem with the prevailing environment. It will also cut on budgetary requirements for developing new policies every few years.

Madam Chair, again I thank your team for organizing this event. I believe that this conference would continue to grow and support the ongoing efforts and processes

aimed at ensuring that the public administration of Africa delivers on its mandate to the people, while still being a satisfying undertaking.

Thank you all.

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