



Executive summary

“ Much more has to be achieved before we can say that the capable state is the norm in Africa.”

This report is a synopsis of the first major continent-wide study to measure and monitor “Progress towards Good Governance in Africa,” undertaken by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The study conducted surveys and desk research in 28 project countries. The full results and analysis of the study are to be published in the first *African Governance Report* in 2005.

ECA initiated this work to gauge citizens’ feelings about the state of governance in Africa, to gather information on best practices and to identify the main requirements for capacity development in the region. The project identified four positive trends on the road to creating capable states in Africa: democratic transitions, political inclusiveness, voice and accountability and economic management.

In the area of democratic transitions, many African countries have made significant strides, evolving from authoritarian or military regimes to more democratic arrangements. We see a new social pact emerging, where state institutions and processes are gradually being reconstructed to promote the values of good governance. Indeed, elections have become the only acceptable basis for choosing and changing leadership.

Africa has also entered an era of greater political inclusiveness. Many African countries are seeking to ensure that the executive and legislative arms of government reflect the profile of their people in regional, ethnic, racial and religious terms.

The third positive governance trend emerging from our survey findings is toward expanded voice and accountability. New avenues are being created across Africa to allow citizens to participate in the political process and express their demands, without fear of retribution. This, in turn, is making governments more responsive to their constituents. Our study found that most governments in Africa are expanding the political space for nonstate actors to participate in various aspects of public decisionmaking.

Fourth, in the area of public financial management and accountability, our study shows that more countries are running smaller deficits, meeting their targets for revenue mobilisation, managing their tax systems more effectively, improving

fiscal transparency and creating institutions and arrangements for better auditing of public funds.

Although our study shows considerable progress to report on many fronts, it also highlights many deficits. It is evident that much more has to be achieved before we can say that the capable state is the norm in Africa. According to our research, the quality of public sector management in most countries remains very weak. That is where investments in better governance will yield big growth payoffs in the future. And in the area of corporate governance, African countries have definitely recognised the need to promote the development of the private sector, but they need to do much more to create a truly enabling environment for the private sector to flourish.

On the basis of our research findings, the report identifies 10 priority areas for action in building capable and accountable states. Together, these priorities encompass a series of interventions that will help to develop a critical mass of capacity in Africa at three levels: individual, institutional and societal. The 10 priorities:

Strengthening the capacity of parliaments to perform their core functions. There is a critical need to strengthen the human and institutional capacity of African legislatures to improve their operational effectiveness. The special training requirements for parliamentarians and their support staff have to be addressed and funding needs to be provided to establish supportive institutional resources, such as parliamentary databases and libraries.

Deepening legal and judicial reforms. Steps must be taken to protect and enforce the autonomy of the judiciary from outside pressure or interference and to modernise the functioning of the judicial process. The judicial system must operate independent of, but with the full support of, all institutions responsible for upholding the rule of law. That makes it important to ensure that the judiciary receives independent funding and that any judicial reform is done at the same time as reforms in other key sectors, such as the police force and office of the public prosecutor.

Improving public sector management. When it comes to strengthening the capacity of public service institutions and improving public sector

performance, only a long-term, carefully thought-out and sustained effort, tailored to each country, can succeed. Action must focus on reevaluating the role, optimal size and organisational structure of the public sector—and on drastically reducing red tape to minimise the burden of administration and reduce opportunities for corruption. There is also a great need to increase performance through an accelerated programme of improving pay and other incentives. Human resource shortages should be addressed by tapping skills in the Diaspora and making more effective use of in-country and regional knowledge hubs.

Improving the delivery of public services. It is essential to develop an effective channel of accountability between public service providers and their clients. Options for implementing this include the decentralisation of the provision of public services as well as encouraging greater choice and competition, through various means of incorporating the private sector and nongovernmental organisations into the field of public service provision. Good regulatory oversight is essential to ensure adequate levels of quality and service provision.

Removing bottlenecks to private enterprise. There is an urgent need for actions that will lead to lasting improvements in national and regional investment climates. A sound macroeconomy naturally is important, with low inflation and stable exchange rates. Also needed are consistent policies and regulations governing the establishment and operation of businesses. Perhaps most important are the protection of property rights and the enforcing of contracts. Programmes to enhance business development and technical support services can also help, as can the provision of good information on markets and investment opportunities.

Tapping the potential of information and communication technologies. Information and communication technologies are useful for promoting transparency, openness and knowledge exchanges in the many areas of society—and managing the affairs of government is no exception. But given the relative high cost of developing and implementing the relevant e-governance tools in Africa, governments need a highly strategic approach to their adoption and use. It helps for key institutions (such as the

legislature and the public service) to lead the way. But it is also important for governments to encourage private investment and initiative.

Fostering credible and responsible media.

Several challenges need to be addressed if the African media are to promote the good governance agenda. Above all, they must develop the capacity to consistently report accurate and credible information. And journalists must be allowed to operate in an environment of freedom, without any threat or fear that prevents them from reporting facts to the public and stimulating debate on the issues. In addition, support should be provided to address key training needs that will support the drive for professionalism and effective self-regulation.

Maximising the contribution of traditional modes of governance. Given the enduring vital role of traditional modes of authority in many areas of the continent, particularly in communities, it is important to constantly find ways to increase their efficacy in the modern setting. Traditional systems can complement the resources of government in providing such services as health, education and infrastructure.

Confronting the governance dimension of HIV/AIDS. There can be no development progress in the region if the HIV/AIDS pandemic is not dealt with head on. African governments must treat HIV/AIDS as the most serious challenge to development and governance in the continent today, strengthening national leadership in the battle against the disease. Strong leadership is especially required to help states deal with the impact of HIV/AIDS on institutional structures, to scale up the resources dedicated to the fight against it and to create mechanisms for society-wide responses.

Getting partners to live up to their commitments.

Everything in this report points to the greater accountability of African governments. What, then, about their external partners? First, donors must live up to commitments to provide more aid to Africa—as part of the Monterrey pledges. Second, they must do more to provide better aid—through harmonised procedures, general budget support and predictable disbursements. Third, they have to do more to ensure that their policies for aid, trade and debt relief are consistent with African efforts to come closer to reaching the MDGs.

 **The report identifies 10 priority areas for action in building capable and accountable states.**

Fourth, they need to work with African governments in systematically tracking actions to enhance development outcomes—through mechanisms for mutual review.

Two other areas also command attention: attacking the supply side of corruption by improving corporate governance in donor countries; developing systems for the recovery of assets lost by corrupt officials and parked in OECD countries.

Essential in all 10 areas is tapping the potential of Africa's young people. They are the future of governance in Africa. Indeed, they are the future of Africa, and they must be part of all that we are trying to accomplish.

We now need to make a concerted push to address these priority areas for a broadbased and multifaceted programme of capacity development

in Africa. This call is not new. Several years ago, the World Bank proposed a comprehensive programme for capacity building in Africa, to be backed with substantial funding from our international development partners. It may be useful now to revisit that idea.

More recently, the UNDP has proposed the creation of an African Governance Institute to provide, among other things, resources for training and capacity building of academics, policymakers, parliamentarians and civil society leaders.

These and other options for advancing the agenda must be pursued with haste. For in our bid to build stable, capable states in Africa, it is time to move from small capacity-building interventions to a bold, cross-cutting and comprehensive programme that will transform the effectiveness of individuals, institutions and societies.

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