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Promoting the Capable State

Since the start of the 1990s, Africa has undergone a major economic and political transformation—from closed autocracy to open democracy, from centrally planned economies to decentralized open markets, from single-party dictatorships to multi-party pluralism, and in many cases, from civil strife to peace and reconstruction (although some conflicts have stubbornly persisted). After two decades of almost continuous economic decline, Africa is today showing evidence of economic recovery. Its citizenry is demanding professionalism and efficiency from the state, and asserting that public policies be planned and managed in such a manner as to deliver sustained improvements in the economic and social conditions of the people, with their full participation. Although the degree of commitment and the speed of change have varied across countries, there is increasing focus in the continent on participatory and democratic systems of government.

Overview

There is also widespread recognition within Africa and the international community that peace and development are fundamentally intertwined, and that as long as recurrent conflicts in the continent continue to threaten stability, sustainable development will remain illusory. This latter theme has been lucidly articulated in the UN Secretary-General's report of April 1998 on *The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa*.

The appropriate scope and role of the state have been re-examined in Africa, including the

policy options for stimulating the private sector's contribution to development and the measures needed to foster civil society participation in the development process. For the state to discharge its legitimate functions, for civil society to flourish, and for the private sector to function properly, a system of good governance is required that allows stakeholders in these sectors to play their respective roles to their full potential. Good governance is also required to ensure that the country's social and economic priorities are based on the needs of society as a whole, and that broad-based stakeholders' participation is facilitated in the economic and political affairs of the country.

Good governance calls for the ability of a state to anticipate changes to its well-being, provide core services to its people and then augment these services, act as catalyst of change for the good, and guide the various forces in society towards harmony. The very capable states in the world, especially in contrast to the very incapable states, demonstrate how the promise of good governance is realized when all these tasks are artfully carried out. For this reason, the focus should be on ensuring that the state is endowed with the requisite capacity to cement its capability.

In this connection, the emergence of strong and active organizations of civil society in Africa has been significant to developing norms of good governance and to establishing the necessary mechanisms for holding people in positions of trust accountable. The renewed interest among African governments in developing effective governance institutions—incorporating effective pub-

lic, private, and non-governmental organizations—has also added impetus to the focus on capacity building in these areas. It is increasingly evident that in a rapidly changing global environment, where efficiency and competitiveness are the hallmarks of success, African governments need effective institutions that will enable them to participate in, and benefit from, the increasing global economy. In this light, Africa's systems of governance hold the key to the continent's integration into world markets.

The Challenge

Although remarkable strides have been made towards good governance, wide gaps continue to exist between governance concepts and their implementation as many countries are still grappling with issues of civil strife, political instability, and continued poverty. Weak institutional capac-

Figure 10. Ranking the Obstacles to Good Governance in Africa

OBSTACLES	
1.	Corruption
2.	Tax regulation and/or high taxes
3.	Inadequate supply of infrastructure
4.	Inflation
5.	Financing
6.	Crime and theft
7.	General uncertainty on costs of regulations
8.	Regulations on foreign trade (export, import)
9.	Policy instability
10.	Labour relations
11.	Foreign currency relations
12.	Safety or environmental regulations
13.	Regulations for starting businesses
14.	Price controls
15.	Terrorism

Source: ECA, Economic Report on Africa 1998

ity, fragile economic and political systems, and wavering leadership commitment also pose real risks of reversal both on the political and economic fronts. A well-functioning capable state is essential to safeguard against these risks. However, Africa still faces major challenges that are yet to be tackled to foster the capable state. Key among these are strengthening the components of democracy, facilitating the role of civil society organizations in development, rebuilding the capacities of failed states, and strengthening economic governance through enhanced institutional and human capacity for sound and efficient public management. One related challenge is to ensure the necessary technical and advisory support for sustained civil service reform in the medium term.

“It is Africans who bear the responsibility for taking action, including the tailoring of approaches to improving governance that have been adapted from elsewhere. Africa has its own experiences, its own best cases, and its own storehouse of culture and governance to draw on .” K.Y. Amoako, from “Improving Governance and Citizen Participation in Development—Address to the International Conference on Governance for Sustainable Growth and Equity”, United Nations, New York, USA, 28 July 1997.

The ECA Response

Technical Assistance and Analytical Studies on Public-Sector Reform. In the past, ECA has contributed to efforts at reforming and revitalizing public-sector institutions in Africa at both the national and regional levels. It has also developed and strengthened working relations with Member States and other stakeholders. ECA’s national-level activities are geared towards enhancing the capacity of central and local government institutions to respond to the demands of civil society. In recognition of the impact of governance on economic growth and sustainable development, the ECA Secretariat has collaborated with external partners to organize high-level policy seminars on issues ranging from ethics and accountability, through the rule of law and law enforcement, to public service performance and efficient service delivery.

Technical assistance to Member States on civil service reform and strategies for enhancing public-sector management has been a key part of ECA’s

work in this area (see box 17). Over the next two years, ECA will expand its country-level work through demand-driven, country-focused technical assistance and training. Past activities include a workshop on “Ethics, Accountability, and Improved Service Delivery”, for senior civil servants in Ethiopia; workshops in Eritrea, Ethiopia, Namibia, and Zambia on evaluating and monitoring the performance of public enterprises; and a workshop on “Motivation, Efficiency, and Productivity”, for senior civil servants in Namibia. Planned analytical

papers in this area include analysis of the experiences of selected non-African developing countries that have successfully reformed their civil service; comparative studies of civil-service reform modalities, drawing lessons for Africa; and guidelines on best practices for effective service-delivery systems in the public service in Africa. An expert group meeting on civil-service reforms, with focus on ethics and accountability, is planned for 1999.

Past ECA Activities to Strengthen Civil Society Participation in Governance and Development in Africa. Since 1990, ECA has an established track record in promoting the participation and contribution of civil society organizations (CSOs) in governance and development. At an ECA-organized international conference on “Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development of Africa”, held in Arusha in 1990, African governments, civil society, and Africa’s international partners gave full recognition to the pivotal role of popular participation in Africa’s development, and endorsed the “African Charter for Popular Participation in Development”. The Charter is now adopted by nearly all African states, by the heads of state and government of the Organization of African unity, and by the United Nations General Assembly.

Box 17. ECA Work in Public-Sector Reforms

Between 1997 and 1998, ECA collaborated with Member States (among them, Botswana, Ethiopia, Namibia, Eritrea, and Zambia) to organize workshops that exposed participants to best practices in productivity and performance management, and suggested new directions in the development of service standards and the inculcation of customer-friendly attitudes in service-delivery agents.

ECA has also responded through provision of technical advisory services to requests for assistance in restructuring the Member States' public service agencies and training institutions. In 1997, ECA submitted a comprehensive plan aimed at ensuring the relevance of CAFRAD's training programmes to its Member States' needs, and at turning the Centre's finances around.

Following a critical review of The Gambia's public service capacity to respond to the challenges of Vision 2020—the strategic vision articulated by the Government in 1996—an ECA mission submitted a proposal in October 1998 to strengthen the institutional and human capacity of the civil service and to reposition the Management Development Institute so as to implement the new strategy.

In November 1998, ECA, at the request of the Government of Swaziland, undertook a review of the achievements recorded and the problems encountered in implementing an inward-oriented strategy of civil-service reform, the Public Service Management Programme. Based on the data made available to the ECA mission and a comparative survey of experiences in other parts of the continent, the Secretariat submitted a report outlining measures to consolidate PSMP gains and surmount obstacles to progress. The report further identified areas in which ECA could be of assistance in carrying forward the objectives of the reform programme.

ECA has also provided technical assistance in this area to North African countries. This includes a study on *Public Sector Reforms and Retrenchment Trends and Creation of Alternative Employment Opportunities*, drawing on the

experiences of Egypt and Sudan; a best practices study on *Trends in Management of Public Administration in Africa: Case Studies of Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia*; and a study on *Reconciling Informal and Formal Microfinancing Systems and Practices in Africa: Case Studies of Egypt and Morocco*.

Apart from public service agencies, the other beneficiaries of ECA interventions in public-sector management are the National Training Institutes. ECA has responded to requests for assistance in reviewing the programmes implemented by the Centre for Public Service Training at the University of Namibia, the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria, and as noted earlier, The Gambia's Management Development Institute.

To complement the Commission's advocacy role, a number of technical publications have been produced, focusing on critical issues in governance and public-sector management reform. Some of the publications—particularly those combining new analytic insights with empirical assessment of governance reforms—were subsequently developed into full-length journal articles, thus affording ECA an opportunity to reach a wider audience. A few other studies were undertaken with the intention of contributing to an understanding of a particularly complex governance situation. A case in point is a publication entitled *The Role of Governance and Civil Society in Africa's Development: A Critical Review*, which the UN considered useful in understanding a major governance crisis facing a country where the democratization process had just aborted.

Over the next two years, ECA plans to register impact in a new growth area—that of public service performance management. Based on consultations with its stakeholders, the Secretariat intends to launch a major public-sector productivity and service-delivery initiative in Member States. This will entail, among other things, working with Member States on the development of productivity indicators and the identification of benchmarks for monitoring service-delivery trends in a variety of public-sector organizations.

Following the adoption of the Charter, ECA launched the “Popular Participation in Development Project” to promote civil society contribution to development. In connection with this project, and in collaboration with leading CSOs,

ECA has organized and conducted global, regional, and national seminars and workshops to enhance NGO networks with key African development actors. It has developed a database on NGOs in Africa, carried out several research studies, and

published many technical manuals, newsletters, and other publications—all designed to reinforce the role of CSOs in development and governance. Increasingly, ECA's CSO partners are looking to the Commission as a lead partner in promoting participatory development and facilitating CSO contribution to meeting the development challenge of Africa.

The African Centre for Civil Society. Building on its past work and experience with CSOs and in partnership with African governments, civil society organizations, and donor agencies, ECA has established the African Centre for Civil Society (ACCS) to strengthen civil society participation in Africa's economic and political transformation. Seed capital from the Government of Germany has been acquired for this purpose, and consultations are underway with member states, other donor agencies, and key regional and national NGO actors with a view to making the Centre fully operational. Designed under the framework of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa (SIA), the ACCS is intended to strengthen the contribution of African civil society to development and to facilitate its interface with the UN system in Africa.

In early 1999, a consultative meeting with major African CSO actors will be convened to discuss and define modalities towards the Centre, fostering enhanced CSO participation in African development policy making. Preliminary areas under consideration include investigation of the civil society concept under the wide range of national conditions; enhancement of CSO capacity in accountability and good governance, conflict resolution, and democratic development; and effective participation in national, subregional, and continental development. Instruments for capacity building so far identified include training and networking workshops, technical assistance and advisory support to CSOs, mainstreaming CSO-related work in ECA's work programme, and facilitating the sharing of experience among CSOs in Africa through subregional and regional forums.

Promoting Norms of Good Governance. ECA is preparing a major project on "Setting Goals and Monitoring Progress Towards Good Governance". The project will elaborate monitorable indicators of good governance in the administrative, political, and economic management fields, promote the adoption by countries of good governance targets, and monitor regularly once every two years the status of implementation. Based on this and the work of partner agencies in this field, ECA will publish a report on "The State of Governance in Africa", focusing on specific aspects of governance. ECA will also synthesize, compile, and disseminate "best practices" in a selected aspect of governance. In addition under the SIA umbrellas, ECA together with UNDP has launched the African Governance Forum process—an annual series of consultations on governance issues in Africa (see box 18).

Assistance in Post-Conflict Peace Building. Post-conflict peace building is an important phase in the continuum from humanitarian emergency assistance to long-term development. In the past,



United Nations

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the Commission has provided assistance to a number of countries emerging from conflict in rebuilding their public sector capacity. These include Rwanda, Eritrea, Mozambique, and Burundi. In light of the increasing recognition that peace and

sustainable development are intertwined, however, there is a clear need for a more holistic approach that draws on the expertise and comparative advantages of all partners under a comprehensive framework. ECA's comparative advantage lies in

Box 18. African Governance Forum

The African Governance Forum (AGF) was launched in 1997 by UNDP and ECA under the United Nations System-wide Special Programme for Africa (SIA) umbrella, in which these two agencies have a joint responsibility for the SIA component on governance. The Forum, an annual series of consultations on governance in Africa, has the following four major objectives:

- Provide a platform for African governments, civil society organizations, and the continent's external partners to sustain a dialogue on the state of governance in Africa;
- Promote partnership among participants and encourage the exchange of information, experiences, and good governance practice;
- Assist African governments to develop nationally defined governance programmes and strengthen coordination mechanisms to permit long-term resource mobilization in support of these programmes; and
- Discuss best practices in various areas of good governance through consultations among African governments, international partners, and civil society organizations.

The first African Governance Forum (AGF I), funded by the Government of Norway and the European Union, took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 11–12 July 1998. The Government of Ethiopia hosted the Forum. Fourteen African countries—Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, South Africa, Swaziland, Togo, and Uganda—presented papers on their governance programmes. Based on these presentations, AGF I reviewed the experience of African countries with decentralization, electoral and parliamentary reforms, constitutional and judicial reforms and human rights, and socio-economic management and public administration. AGF I was preceded by an NGO Consultation on

Governance—an approach that has been adopted as a permanent feature of the AGF process to ensure the active participation and contribution of NGOs in the dialogue on governance issues in Africa.

AGF I concluded that enhanced effectiveness in governance was essential to achieving sustainable growth and development. Among the areas identified as crucial to good governance in Africa were incorporation of indigenous traditions into African governance programmes, the need for institutional safeguards of human rights and civil liberties, power-sharing between local and central authorities, independent and transparent electoral mechanisms, gender equity, and the efficacy of the opposition. Participants emphasized that the AGF process could make significant contributions to supporting the positive trends in many countries in promoting good governance and endorsed the idea that the AGF be an annual event.

AGF II, held in June 1998 in Accra, Ghana, focused on the issues of accountability and transparency. Ten African countries presented papers on their governance programmes in these areas—Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Broad consensus was reached on a number of key issues. The Forum concluded that transparency and accountability were crucial elements for promoting development and should not be seen as the sole concern of governments. Civil society at large has an important role to play in this regard. The case studies demonstrated that all the countries were striving to put in place institutions for improving accountability and transparency. The Forum stressed that the challenge ahead was to transform these institutions into effective and sustainable mechanisms. The Forum was hosted by the Government of Ghana and funded by Norway, Switzerland, and the European Union.

Preparatory work is underway for AGF III, scheduled to take place in mid-1999 in Mali. AGF III will focus on post-conflict peace building and development.

its ability to bring to bear the regional and subregional dimension to post-conflict reconstruction.

With this in mind, ECA has prepared a programme to support African countries with selected aspects of their peace-building, reconstruction, and reconciliation efforts. The planned activities are designed to accommodate the participation of other stakeholders. They draw on the lessons learned from past ECA interventions as well as on the operational and research experience of other donors and agencies—including those of the War-Torn Societies Project of the UN Research Institute for Social Development

(UNRISD). The activities focus on rehabilitating and strengthening national economic policy-making capacity, including orientation of new government and public officers in their tasks of development management, through training, technical, and advisory support. The programme will promote the sharing of experiences in post-conflict peace building; develop a database of national and subregional African expertise, which could be drawn upon for post-conflict activities in specific countries; and will also support activities that address subregional dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction and development.