

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN AFRICA: THE CASE OF ALGERIA^(*)

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The features of public administration in Africa differ from one country to another, especially from nations of North Africa to other countries in sub-Saharan area, and for this reason I decided to focus on the experience of Algeria.

The purpose of this study is to examine the issues of public administration, especially the topics related to management and its impact on the public sector. There is no doubt, in my judgment, that the Algerian civil servants face the same problems encountered by the civil servants in sub-Saharan Africa. But I suppose the wealth of oil or 190 billion dollars Reserves in the Algerian treasury makes the difference.

To begin with, we will try to raise in this article issues related to the problematic of the study, and after that we will analyze them. The question which deserve to be raised here are the following:

- 1- What are the social forces which are behind the change from traditional and bureaucratic administration and the efforts of the government to modernize the civil service?
- 2- What is the strategy of the government to meet the social needs and render services to its citizens?
- 3- Does the private sector play a positive role in investment and production?
- 4- Does the government have the necessary mechanisms and tools for the application of laws?

The dilemma of the public sector

It's a fact that the public sector is huge and its services are limited in resources and capacities to meet the needs of citizens. In Algeria, the annual budget of the Algerian government for the fiscal year 2013 exceeds 135 billion dollars. Algeria is one of the rare countries in the world which has 180 billion dollars reserve in its treasury. It is the first largest country in Africa after the collapse of the State of Sudan. The Algerian nation is blessed with natural resources. Hydrocarbons are the primary revenue generator for its 38 million inhabitants. The statistics for the year 2013 show that 60 % of the budget revenues come from hydrocarbons and 95 % of its hard currencies are obtained from selling hydrocarbons.

Such information reveals to us that Algeria is a wealthy country but the performance of its administrative institutions is not up to the level and to the aspiration of the Algerian people. According to the information published in 2013, only 30 % of the 5 year plan 2010-2014, has been achieved and 70% of the 150 billion dollars have not been consumed yet⁽²⁾.

The question now: what is wrong? It is this due to the lack of qualified personnel or to the absence of social forces which are not consulted and did not participation in the process of decision-making?

An analytical study of this phenomena shows that the dilemma of the public sector is that the executive branch of the government is doing its best to allocate financial resources to departments of public services (especially hospitals, universities, highways, schools and housings), but without providing modern machines, technologies and training qualified personnel, to make institutions efficient and capable to deal with complicated problems of 38 million Algerians and their fantastic pressure (as well as demands) and municipal and central public administration.

It seems very clear that the availability of the money for different projects does not solve any problem when the regulations are out of date, because the State's laws have been inherited from the colonial administration which was designed to serve the interest of European settlers and control the indigenous people. Furthermore, the problem of mismanagement comes from the short sight of policy makers who claim or pretend that they know what are the problems and easily give promises and commit themselves to settle complicated issues, without thinking of the consequences and the non-existence of the means to convert the attractive promises into the tangible results.

In fact, there is a third problem which comes from the lack of punishment and absence of accountability. In order to understand the dilemma of giving promises without fulfilling promises, one has to keep in mind the fact that wasting the money in the public sector is considered to be a natural method of work as long as the government does not provoke the people and impose heavy taxes on them. It is a fact that tax payers are indifferent to question of wasting State money or misusing the wealth of the nation.

It can be also said that mismanagement between State affairs is due to the confusion and archaic method of the communication and flow of information between below and above. The flow of information between executive functionaries and their superior does not go through as easily as anybody wants. If a manager on the execution level tries to secure the approval of his superior in the hierarchy, the answer will not come from the second person in the hierarchy until he or she gets a clear answer from his chief in command. When the information reaches the top, there will be the need to call members of central authority to examine the issues and decide whether to approve or disapprove the demand. In any case, it takes months and years to make changes or modify the laws because each civil servant has to respect the laws and hierarchy.

The essential thing one has to keep in mind, is that nobody is above the law! This is the dilemma of administrative centralization. One wonders when theory of empowerment reaches the African continent.

Strategies of Government to render services to its citizens

The sector of public services in Algeria accounts for 1,600,000 employees, and the private sector provides about 3,500,000 jobs in the Algerian economy. In 2013, it is estimated that 35% of the State budget in Algeria is devoted to education and around 1.3 million students are enrolled at 58 universities and colleges of higher education. The abundance of wealth from selling hydrocarbons, made it easy for the State to give 809,015 scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students, thought by 4,280 professors, 5,023 associate professors and more than 13,011 assistant professors at the 58 Algerian universities⁽³⁾

I brought the issue of higher education in order to show the strategy of the Algerian government to provide free education to its young people. Furthermore the State has devoted \$ 150 billion to the 5 years plan 2010-2014 for economic development.

Thus, the strategy of the Algerian policy makers is to create jobs for young people and overcome the problem of unemployment. On the ground, the picture of achievements looks flawed. A quick look at the statistics shows that the managers on the level of execution, are way behind and move very slowly to convert what has been planned to reality. It seems that the officials in local and national administration have failed to focus on the objectives to be achieved and proved to be unable to execute policies of the government and they are far from the achievement of desired objectives.

According to the report published in the Algerian newspapers on September 25 2013, only 26% of 4 billion dinars has been consumed on development projects in the Wilaya (department) of Oum-El-Bouaghi in Algeria. This means that 74% of the 4 billion dinars has not been spent since 2010⁽⁴⁾.

It is clear that the availability of wealth has induced policy-maker to direct their attention, on the issue of shaping policies and allocation of financial resources, paid a little attention to the question of execution and outcome of the programs. This means that there is no co-ordination between policy-makers, on the ministerial level, and public managers on the implementation level. The gap between strategy maker and delivery of programs to be executed is very wide. Furthermore, the delay in delivery of executed programs is tied to other forces which are linked to the next stage of buying equipment.

Competition between public and private sectors and reforms

In The case of Algeria, the State is the leading economic force in the country and the private sector is an auxiliary force. It is well known that managers in the private sector are annoyed or disturbed by the negative actions of public officials. Managers in the private sector claim that the officials have some sort of biasits or prejudice and always issue laws and regulations which are favorable to top officials in the public sector. For this reason, top managers in the private sector always seek to weaken public institutions and make them inefficient and subject to corruption to the extent that the institutions of public services go bankrupt or paralyzed.

In this sense, the target of compradors or mafia of businessmen is to receive financial commissions from imported goods and services and not to produce locally and meet the needs of citizens.

It is obvious in Algeria that the public sector and the private sector compete with each other, and have some sort of animosity or resentment toward each other.

In spite of generosity of the State and its determination to save public enterprises from bankruptcy, public administration is crippled by bureaucratic regulations and strict measures to conform and apply vague and out of date rules. Unlike the case of developed nations where State policies are well defined and transparency is a common method of work, the Algerian bureaucracy is always working with forma laws, mostly established by the colonial administration which is appreciated because the functionaries of the State are familiar with them or got used to applying them and nobody is motivated to change them. Any change is considered to be a threat to office holder and citizens, as well, because change means learning new techniques and new rules and it is possible that it will be difficult for managers to absorb the new methods of work.

In short, the main obstacle for the public sector, as well as to private sector, is the absence of any vision or specific targets to development. If the public sector is overstaffed and its main concern is giving checks to its employees at the end of each month, regardless of profitability, the private sector is faced with the problem of insurance security to its employees and law pay for workers who always feel that they are not receiving the salaries they merit to have. In other words, the main strategy of the private sector is based on the idea of fast financial gains and avoiding the payment of high taxes to the treasury.

It is quite evident that neither managers of the private sector nor the sector of public services, are capable of meeting the needs and services required by the State and citizens. The demands always exceed the offers. The demographic pressure is making it very difficult financially to provide sufficient schools, hospitals and building for municipalities to around 38 million inhabitants in Algeria.

In spite of the efforts of the government to invest a huge amount of money in building houses, high schools, highways, airports and new infrastructures needed for public services, there are always shortages everywhere.

In order to face such challenges in housing, highways, hospitals and universities, the State has decided since year 2000 to modernize the management of public affairs and invite the private sector to participate in the process of modernizing the management of the public affairs and invite the private sector to participate in the process of modernizing managerial system. Private schools, private medical

clinics, mobile phones and private banks were allowed to be established and compete with State's institutions. Up to now, there are no private universities, hospitals or highways. Furthermore, the State of Algeria has allowed Chinese, Japanese and Indian firms to build houses, highways and public schools, because of the shortage of national firms which are capable of building sufficient infrastructures for the Algerian population. However, the determination of the State to overcome the problems of shortages in highways, universities, hospitals and offices for different ministries was not matched by similar efforts to buy modern equipment, computers and introduce modern methods of works. What is needed in the Algerian administrative procedures is the creation of efficiency in the administrative system.

The new approach of the Algerian government to modernize its public administration and meet the needs of the Algerian society is based on the following principles:

- 1- How to render huge services with a minimum of spending and without imposing new taxes. In other words, the Algerian citizens are afraid of paying very high prices in order to receive services of quality.
- 2- Search for new partners from the private sector or even foreign enterprises to share responsibilities and present joint services to the public. This means that the Algerian citizens must accept the idea of better services and be ready to pay high prices for the quality.
- 3- Introduce the principle of total quality management (TQM) by changing the old method of decision making in the top and inducing local councils to examine the social needs and take decisions on that level. This is sort of a new mechanism of the offer and demand.
- 4- Empower municipal councils to study issues of local development and solve local problems without waiting for the approval of central authorities. Local plans of development have to be justified and the government finances them as much as possible
- 5- Reinforcing the new law of accountability and rewarding the functionaries who succeed in accomplishing their missions and punishing the individuals who fail in their tasks.
- 6- Since October 2013, Algeria has created a new ministry of administrative reforms, attached to the prime minister and this means that the ministry of Interior is no longer in charge of the civil service. From now on, the decisions of reforms will be taken quickly by the prime minister and the new minister will have his autonomous institution and his financial means, which is essential for covering the expenses of reforms

The absence of mechanisms

In fact, public administration in Algeria does not suffer from the lack of laws which are issued by different ministries and administrative agencies, but from the absence of mechanisms to make reforms effective and rectify the anomalies. Unfortunately, many officials give promises, make declarations and issue statements that they will do so and so, but very often their rules or instructions turn out to be useless because of the lack of financial means or because of the absence of text of application.

According to the statistics published in March 2008, the head of State in Algeria complained from bureaucrats, because the Council of Ministers (highest authority in the country)

has had decided to devote \$150 billion to economic development, but nothing has been achieved up to now. The President of the republic said: "I did my best to solve the immense problems. I just cannot find qualified individuals to carry out my decision as good as possible"⁵⁾.

The essential question which can be raised here is: why there is a setback in public policies approved by the President of the Republic? The answer to this question is very simple. The dilemma of public policies in Africa is that political officials believe that they may change the society by decrees! The truth is that the real problems of public policies are not in the laws and decrees but in the absence of qualified persons to do the job and follow-up mechanisms. In this sense the failure of African States, like Algeria, stem from the lack of the recruiting qualified persons to carry out and

execute policies as efficient as possible. According to study published by the United Nations in 1992, the success comes essentially from efficient exploitation of human productive wealth.⁽⁶⁾

It is well known in African States that most administrations rely on managers to make policies and execute them as well. In other word consultants, specialists, experts and technical advisers are excluded or neglected and as result of dependence on the executive directors, who are supposed to be in charge of execution and not to elaborate policies, the economic projects of development collapse because attitudes and mental deficiency results in weakening administrative institutions and make them incapable of achieving tangible results.

What is very strange in development administration in Africa is the fact that many people assume that laws inherited from the colonial era, and the laws issued after independence are God's blessing and bureaucrats stick to them even they are no longer useful or suitable to the problems of our era. The obsolete laws and rules are considered by managers to be holly Koran or Bible and cannot be changed.

The problem is that they always forget that the rules are just the means to achieve the fixed targets of development and they were good in the past, they could become useless in the new era. Such wrong approach has prevented managers from doing create jobs and taking initiatives to deal with emerging crisis and issues.

What is needed to do today is change attitudes and understand that the laws are just means of work and what is important is today's administration is achieving the fix objectives. Every manager is supposed to be rewarded if he achieved good results or punished if he fails to reach the fixed goals. What is the use, if the manager respects laws but he achieved nothing? To put it in a simple world, it is: laziness.

Conclusion

Public administration has passed by legal colonial administration to municipal and national administration in Africa. After independence, what is needed to be emphasized here, is that the role of public administration in the colonial era is different from its role in the national era. Before independence, the role of managers was designed to control the indigenous peoples and oblige them to comply with laws which give advantages to European settlers. Now in the era of independence, there is no need to revalidate laws by the national leaders and public managers, but to change the method of work and induce their citizens to participate actively in running their municipalities and national institutions of public services. The pretexts of inefficiency are always the same: lack of funds, costly materials and technologies, in addition to insufficient hard currencies to buy necessary equipments. The study shows that the problems of development administration in Africa are not limited to the vague laws and obsolete methods of work, but they are due to the absence of accountability and the lack of mechanisms to carry out and execute public policies. What needed for efficiency is investment in human beings and training qualified human resources, in addition to limiting political intervention in the wealth of nations.

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(*) This paper has been presented to the IIAS African Forum which was held in Yaoundé, Cameroun, from 28 to 29 November, 2013

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