Discussion Paper

THE TRAJECTORY AND CHALLENGES OF INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN AFRICA:

REVISITING THE FUNDAMENTALS FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

Beginning in the 1980s, a number of African countries undertook public sector institutional reform programmes that were intended to be the panacea for identified inefficiencies in the public sector. While noticeable gains were recorded in areas such as commercialization and privatization of some state-owned enterprises, overall, outcomes of the public sector reforms did not always necessarily produce the expected outcomes, thereby proving that such reforms are not the *de facto* ready-made solutions for resolving poor public sector performance. This paper is the result of a desk-based literature review focusing on case studies of public sector institutional reform efforts in different African countries to extract lessons from the successes and failures of these reforms. Opportunities for, and constraints to, youth participation in these institutional reform processes are also identified and articulated. The paper finds that reform efforts across the continent have produced mixed results. However, cases of failure seem to outnumber those of success. There is an obvious and often articulated need to re-think public sector institutional reform in Africa in such a way that it effectively counters the weaknesses evident in earlier reform efforts. A citizen-centred reform model seems to present a good starting point for such a re-thinking as it would enable collective engagement and co-generation of knowledge that is critical for the success of the reforms. Inevitably, this requires creation of the right institutional environment for results-oriented reforms as well as systematic creation of platforms for broader civic participation. This may also entail the development of participatory, localized dialogue platforms that embrace the views of the youth and other social groupings in society.

Acronyms

AU	-	African Union
BBC	-	British Broadcasting Corporation
DFID	-	Department for International Development
ECA	-	Economic Commission for Africa
ESAP	-	Economic Structural Adjustment Program
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
IDEA	-	Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IMF	-	International Monetary Fund
MINDS	-	Mandela Institute for Development Studies
MMD	-	Movement for Multiparty Democracy (Zambia)
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
NPM	-	New Public Management
POSDCORB	-	Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting, Budgeting
RBM	-	Results-Based Management
SSA	-	Sub-Saharan African
SOE	-	State-Owned Enterprise
UN	-	United Nations
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme

1. Introduction and background to the study

A phenomenal wave of public sector institutional reform programmes characterized national planning in many developing countries as from the 1980s, thereby creating the impression that changing policies and institutions and restructuring organizational structures would be the panacea for identified inefficiencies and ineffectiveness of the public sector. Informed by neo-liberal narratives, the reform programmes were presented as the shortcut to economic growth and development. While noticeable gains were recorded in areas such as commercialization and privatization of some state-owned enterprises, overall, outcomes of the public sector reforms did not always necessarily produce the expected outcomes, thereby proving that such reforms are not the *de facto* ready-made solutions for resolving poor public sector performance. In spite of this, public sector '*institutional reform'* has continued to gain widespread currency in many countries in Africa and beyond and thus, remains quite topical in national and international development discourses.

This paper is the result of a study commissioned by the Mandela Institute for Development Studies (MINDS) with the intention to identify ways in which the youth in Africa can more actively participate in national governance processes. The paper presents and analyzes case studies of public sector institutional reform efforts in different African countries to extract lessons from the successes and failures of these reforms. The paper also discusses the processes of embedding and adopting societal change, highlighting the experiences of African champions of reform and leaders. It explores the main opportunities, challenges, tensions and contradictions inherent in public sector institutional reforms and articulates the key lessons emanating therefrom. The major aim is to provide an empirically based narrative of the key factors that may explain the success or failure of public sector institutional reforms in an African context. Opportunities for, and constraints to, youth participation in these institutional reform processes are also identified and articulated. The paper is intended to inform decision-making around the question of how best to ensure the effectiveness of national institutional reform processes.

Thus, main goal of the study was to articulate the challenges and opportunities evident in national institutional reforms in Africa and identify ways in which African youth can meaningfully participate in such reform processes as part of the nation-building agenda. More specifically, the study sought to review the current state-of-the-art literature on public sector institutional reforms in African countries and beyond and draw relevant lessons; critically assess the processes and outcomes of public sector institutional reforms in Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Ghana and Nigeria, identify their strengths and weaknesses and draw relevant lessons. The study also sought to identify opportunities for youth participation in public sector institutional reform processes. Based on results from the critical assessment, the paper recommends appropriate policy options, strategies and institutional steps that may enable African countries to move towards best-practice in public sector management while enabling greater youth participation.

2. Methodology and key research questions

This paper is the output from a qualitative desk-based study which explores the institutional reform trajectories of the public sector in several African countries. Using a historical descriptive approach, an extensive review of the published literature and government documents is used to examine and document public sector institutional reforms in 6 case study countries with a view to identifying key lessons for best-practice in public sector restructuring. Relevant policies and institutions influencing the reforms were examined in detail in order to establish their strengths and weaknesses. The analysis of the case studies includes systematically looking out for variations in national developmental outcomes that are attributable to policy actions and institutional reconfigurations implemented in different political and structural contexts.

While global information on public sector reform is used, the paper specifically focuses on public sector institutional reforms in selected case study countries that help in illustrating the key drivers for and constraints to the reforms in Africa, key success factors, barriers and opportunities for youth participation in the reform processes. Most of the literature used was obtained from general databases such as the ISI Web of Knowledge, Scopus, JSTOR and EBSCO that contain peer-reviewed journal articles. Extensive use of the Google Scholar search engine was made to access other relevant publications. This included government documents that directly address the case study countries' socio-economic development and institutional reform trajectory.

Due to time constraints, articles that addressed specific themes reflecting the various dimensions of institutional reform in the sub-Saharan Africa context were selected and reviewed. These themes are: primary functions of the public sector; theories of public sector reform; main motivations for institutional reform; models of public sector institutional reform in Africa and beyond; institutional reform patterns in Africa; and fundamentals of youth participation in national development processes. All in all, 60 articles were downloaded that had direct relevance to the themes of interest. Most of the articles presented qualitative narratives of institutional reform in Africa to support their arguments. As a result, there was no room to systematically sample data for meta-analyses. Instead, the Researcher concentrated on extracting and synthesizing information and data that directly addressed the key questions and thematic areas of focus. From the analysis and synthesis, tentative recommendations for addressing the imperatives for youth participation in national institutional reform processes begin to emerge.

To obtain specific data that would support the narrative, the study used a number of enduring but important research questions that seem crucial to understanding and addressing the African national institutional reform agenda. This includes asking questions about what constitutes the primary functions of the public sector in Africa; the main motivations for public sector institutional reform in Africa; the nature of reform models that have prevailed in most African countries where public sector institutional reforms have been tried out; the main challenges and opportunities faced during the institutional reform process and how may these challenges and opportunities be better addressed; and what specific barriers should be overcome to enable greater youth participation in national institutional reform processes.

3. Theoretical framework and definition of key concepts

The United Nations report on the post-2015 development agenda points to *responsive and legitimate institutions that encourage open political space, access to justice and accountable government and public institutions* as being central to the achievement of the sustainable development goals (UN, 2013). While this reflects a general agreement on the broad set of institutional characteristics correlated with high levels of economic development, much less is known among theorists and practitioners about what constitutes the appropriate type and design of effective institutions (Bardhan, 2005). As a result, the debate about the nature of institutions that improve national socio-economic performance has been ongoing for several decades.

This paper is guided by a political economy analytical framework that views policies, institutions and comprehensive stakeholder involvement as key to national development processes. As Bunse & Fritz (2012) point out, the common denominator in a political economy approach is a concern with the interaction of political and economic factors – and in particular with individual and group interests, incentives, and actions, structural factors, and institutions. Therefore, it is a framework one may use to understand the context and dynamics in which development efforts and interventions take place, and especially the incentives of various stakeholders that come to bear on reform initiatives, such as improving public sectors (ibid). Deployment of such a theoretical framework requires a good understanding of how institutions and stakeholder participation influence or affect outcomes arising from interactions among human actors in various social settings and why some institutions are ultimately more effective than others in exerting influence over the course of human interactions and development (Schroeder, 2005).

For the purposes of this paper, both formal and informal institutions and organizations are considered essential to sustainable allocation and administration of national public resources. *Institutions* are viewed as the rule configurations that specify who decides what in relation to who. They are also the regularized patterns of behavior between individuals and groups in society or '*the rules of the game*' (see North, 1990; Oakerson and Walker, 1997). In essence, the physical world determines what is technically feasible while institutions determine the obligations that individuals and organizations adhere to in making certain choices. As these choices are made, discernible patterns of interaction emerge which in turn produce specific outcomes. Ultimately, the prevailing institutional structures, social, political and economic conditions and policies underlie the extent to which public sector resources are used wisely.

In this analytical framework, considerable emphasis is placed on relationships between stakeholders and decision-makers, as well as the multiple inter-relationships and power-sharing arrangements among various actors in the public policy terrain. The contribution of multiple stakeholders to the decision-making process is seen as essential to the appropriateness of the decisions and development programs emanating therefrom. Thus, when analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of public sector institutional reforms, the need to ensure participation of the youths and other key stakeholders becomes a non-negotiable necessity.

3.1 Primary functions of the public sector in Africa

Public administration is a feature of all nations in Africa and elsewhere, whatever their system of government. Since several centuries ago, there have been hundreds of individual and collective efforts to study and crystalize key concepts and principles relating to effective public administration. Most of the efforts often end up taking specific positions about what, why, how, and when 'good public administration' may be expected to function in an optimal manner. Basically, public administration is the instrument through which government provides services to its citizens as reflected in the policies, programs, plans, and projects that government departments conceptualize and implement (Lascoumes & Le gales, 2007). Gullick (1936) popularized the acronym POSDCORB that today reflects the classic view of administrative management, whether public or private. It stands for Planning, Organizing, Staffing, Directing, Coordinating, Reporting and Budgeting, as the core functions of public administration.

Today, as it has been for centuries, public administration is often regarded as including some responsibility for determining the policies and programs of governments and controlling government operations (see Fayol, 1918; Gullick & Urwick, 1933; Stillman, 2009). It is often practiced at the national, provincial, and local levels and indeed, the relationships between these different levels of government within a single nation constitute a growing area of concern in public administration. While elected officials are often the most visible part of any government, it is the daily government workers, or '*bureaucrats*', who execute most of the tasks and functions that government must implement (see Henry, 1975; Peters & Van Nispen, 1998). They are also required to advise elected officials regarding the strengths and weaknesses of specific public development programs and policies.

Usually the broad basket of functions of public administration in most countries include the provision of services such as public health care, social security, housing, education, transport, agriculture, issuing licences and permits, identify documents, certificates, and providing information. In essence, public administration (also read government) determines the availability of almost all the basic needs and services that a society or household normally has. It is also important to note that since the publication of Woodrow Wilson's classic work entitled, "*The Study of Administration*" in 1887, the discipline of public administration has undergone several phases that have determined the evolution of the key concepts and functions of the profession. Wilson's article sought to establish public administration as an important field in its own right, separate from politics or political science (see Kettl, 2000; Stillman, 2009). Indeed, his emphasis on the dichotomy between *administration* and *politics* has framed some of the academic field's toughest theoretical battles and preoccupied public administration theory and practice for a long time (for example, see Fayol, 1918; and Henry, 1975). From these theoretical battles, the main functions of public administration as we see them today have emerged. Ultimately, the main goal of the state is to serve society without wasting resources (Fayol, 1918; Gullick & Urwick, 1933). However, there have been many cases in which there is widespread local and international dissatisfaction with the performance of the public administration machinery of various African countries.

4. Main motivations for institutional reform in Africa

The advent of political independence provided the majority of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries with the opportunity to determine the appropriate mix of public policies and institutions that would enable them to achieve rapid socio-economic development. As a result, the first and second decades in post-colonial Africa witnessed a situation in which it was assumed that by directly participating or intervening in national socio-economic development processes, the African state would deliver macro-economic stability, stimulate national growth, redistribute incomes, provide social welfare, and develop required physical infrastructure and infant industries (see Bangura, 1999; Nellis, 2006). The creation and subsequent phenomenal expansion of the state-owned enterprise (SOE) sector in various countries on the continent reflects this orthodoxy (Zhou, 2001; Bangura, 2000; Owusu, 2012).

By the late 1980s, however, the consensus was that the public sector's contribution to economic development was far below expectations and needed to be reformed (World Bank, 1994; Killick, 1995; Rammanadham, 1989; Cook and Kirkpatrick, 1988). SOEs that were expected to provide investible surplus to the government often required massive subsidies, thereby imposing a heavy fiscal burden on the national coffers (Nellis & Kikeri, 1989). In addition, the civil service was generally characterized by poor service delivery, rampant corruption and patronage. Over the years, and up to the present day, vestiges of these negative characteristics remain quite visible in the public sectors of most African countries. As a result, there is often overwhelming pressure from international policy makers (usually led by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank), for African countries to reduce the role of the state in the economy by restructuring their public sector agencies and re-orienting them towards efficiency and effectiveness (see Keyter, 2007).

While a number of international case studies already provide evidence demonstrating that successful public sector institutional reform is possible, there is an equally large number of case studies demonstrating the existence of deep-seated barriers to the reforms. For instance, the successful transformation of Singapore and other '*Asian Tigers*' from poor and supposedly '*backward*' nations, through implementation of unique institutional reforms, into astonishingly successful and modern nation-states, demonstrates beyond doubt that '*getting the basics right*' in context is crucial (see Kuan-Yew, 2000). Table 1 summarises some of the major negative characteristics of the public sector in post-independent Africa.

A ground-breaking study by Acemoglu et al. (2001) provides interesting historical insights on the evolution and nature of the post-colonial state and its administrative machinery in Africa that may also be useful in efforts to better understand some of the main motivations for reform. The study assessed developments in many former European colonies on the African continent, categorizing their colonial-era institutions as either extractive or constructive. The main conclusion from the study (which has since been accepted and in some cases severely contested by several other theorists from various stand-points) was that where the disease environment was favourable to the colonialists, they settled in larger numbers and built societies with strong and '*constructive*' democratic institutions that were relatively similar to those found in Europe at that time. They contained elements of proper checks and balances on use of state power and promoted innovation and private sector development.

Table 1: Summary of common public sector weaknesses in Africa

Weakness	**Symptoms/ impacts**
Low capacity to deliver public services	▪ Low personnel capacity; ▪ Low technical capacity and competencies in the administrative systems.
Organizational centralization and top-down governance	▪ Emphasis on process (bureaucracy) instead of output orientation; ▪ Permanent jobs without room for any innovation among the employees.
Service monopolies	▪ Uncompetitive and unaccountable public production processes; ▪ Weak incentives for production efficiency; ▪ Huge and inefficient monolithic organizational structures typified by state-owned companies (public enterprises) providing services in key sectors without any competition from private companies.
'Social insulation', low transparency and poor participation	▪ Social exclusion based on process and 'normal professionalism'; ▪ Internally biased, non-responsive incentive structures.
Poor organizational evaluation and accountability mechanisms	▪ Weak internal evaluation mechanisms; ▪ Few external (social) evaluation mechanisms.

Source: Adapted from Andrews & Shah (2003)

On the other hand, places where the disease environment was harsh to the colonialists as reflected in high settler mortality rates, the colonialists established largely '*extractive* *institutions*' that endowed the state with unfettered powers and very few restraints. In essence, these institutions were crafted to facilitate the extraction and subsequent transfer of natural resources to the colonialists while stifling private entrepreneurship (ibid). These two categories of institutional set-up have continued to prevail with direct implications for the performance of the administrative machinery in many post-colonial African states. Acemoglu & Robinson (2012) also studied a number of countries in developing countries and convincingly demonstrated that countries can only escape poverty when they have put in place appropriate economic institutions, especially well-established private property rights systems and healthy competition. In addition, they argued that countries are more likely to develop the right institutions when they have an open pluralistic political system with competition for political office, a widespread electorate, and openness to new political leaders.

At a more general level of analysis, the response to declining national socio-economic and political conditions as well as to the pressure for institutional reform exerted by international policy makers has traditionally been that African countries should embark on national structural reform programmes with the specific intention of addressing public sector performance inadequacies (Owusu, 2012). However, the core elements of the reforms have sometimes been contradictory as different social forces drive them in different directions. For instance, there are often tensions between, on the one hand, concerns for market efficiency and deregulation, and issues of accountability and equity, on the other (see Gibbon, et al., 1992; Larbi, 2001). In practice, it has generally been difficult to satisfy social equity and efficiency objectives simultaneously.

An exploration of the relevant literature also reveals that implementation of public sector institutional reforms in SSA is often strongly influenced by a variety of international and local agendas and circumstances that may lead to significant differences in outcomes across different countries (see Mamdani, 1991; Gibbon et al., 1992; Stein, 1992; Mosley & Weeks, 1993; Polidano & Hulme,1997). It also reveals that over time, many scholars have become more and more pessimistic about the post-independent SSA development condition. Indeed, a sense of deep pessimism about the development prospects for SSA pervades much of the literature, given their weak institutions, unimpressive economic reforms, and resource-curse challenges (Bluedorn et al., 2014). For instance, Edigheji (2005) confidently concludes that the history of the post-independent African state is that of monumental democratic and developmental failures and relatively weak economic performance.

It is now apparent that after more than five decades of independence, most countries on the continent are still characterised by underdeveloped and the evidence for this state of underdevelopment can be found in any social and economic indicators one cares to examine (see World Bank, 2008). In turn, SSA countries' failure to sustain their economic growth take-offs has shifted the attention of policy-makers and theorists from general questions about post-colonial socio-economic development priorities to the missing ingredients for more robust macro-economic policy and public administration institutions. Even though good policies have been identified in various SSA countries, in too many instances, they have neither been adopted nor implemented with the level of seriousness that they deserve (Owusu, 2012). Hence, the continued relevance of discourses on national institutional reform processes across the continent.

4.1 Models of institutional reform in Africa

It is now commonly agreed that public sector institutional reform in Africa has mainly focused on issues of fiscal stability, managerial efficiency, capacity building, public accountability, promotion of plurality in the central institutions of government, and dispersal of power to lower level authorities (see Bangura, 2000). In this landscape, '*reform*' is used to describe many changes from minor adjustments to management arrangements to big and fundamental changes in ownership and governance of state institutions (European Commission, 2009). Essentially, public sector institutional reform is the art and science of making the public sector machinery work. It is about deliberately changing the inter-locking structures and processes within the public sector that define how financial and physical resources and people are deployed and accounted for (see World Bank, 2012).

An exploration of the relevant literature also reveals that three main 'generations' of reforms have characterized attempts to transform public sector institutions in Africa. Reforming the sector mainly meant reducing the role and size of government departments, which was considered necessary for achieving macroeconomic stability. These ideas were underpinned by the "*quantitative*" first-generation and the "*qualitative*" second-generation reforms that were implemented across Africa with the support of the World Bank (Owusu, 2012). The first generation is the one that came to be commonly associated with economic structural adjustment programs (ESAP). It was mainly concerned with the overall national fiscal balance and macro-economic and trade policies. It was also often a pre-condition of aid and loans from the World Bank and the IMF (ibid).

The main consequences of the pursuit of balanced national budgets and shrinking public sector workforces were policies of retrenchment and re-definitions of the roles of the state. It also meant implementing relatively simple managerial and bureaucratic structures and processes of order, discipline and control (European Commission, 2009). The second generation of reforms was a follow-up intervention aimed at deepening governance and the quality of public services. It inevitably included a sharper focus on the integrity of the public service machinery, transparency, accountability and anti-corruption reforms. It also included trying to correct some of the civil service problems, such as low pay and motivation of civil servants (Ibid). It is also important to acknowledge that both the first and third generation of reforms were concerned with economy (spending less) and efficiency (improved productivity).

The third generation of reforms is the one that came to be commonly associated with the '*new public management*' (NPM) paradigm. It seeks to make use of market and quasi-market mechanisms to govern government departments as well as adoption and application of '*management methods'* that are ordinarily used in the private sector, especially in recruitment, promotion, performance management, service design and delivery inside public sector organisations (see Larbi, 2001; Andrews & Shah, 2003; McCourt, 2013). Governments that adopted NPM early have tended to pursue further reforms to correct the problems of fragmentation, poor policy coherence, and lack of central direction that often resulted from reform efforts. Therefore, 'third generation' reforms are designed to restore coordination and coherence as well as improve overall public sector performance (see Larbi, 2001; European Commission, 2009). Table 2 summarizes the key components one may find in all these reform phases as well as the specific problems they were intended to address. It is in the second and sixth dimensions indicated in Table 2 that issues of active youth involvement and broader stakeholder participation gain more visibility.

Table 2: Main public service reform problems and approaches

Problem	**Main approach**	**Main action period**
1. How can we put government on an orderly and efficient footing?	- 'Weberian' public administration and capacity-building emphasizing meritocracy	Post-independence period
2. How can we get government closer to the grassroots?	- Decentralization	1970s to present
3. How can we make government more affordable?	- Pay and employment reform - Commercialization &/ privatization of SOEs -	1980s and 1990s
4. How can we make government perform better and deliver on our key objectives?	- New public management - Commercialization &/ privatization of SOEs	1990s to present
5. How can we make government more honest?	Integrity, transparency, accountability and anti-corruption reforms	1990s to present
6. How can we make government more responsive to citizens?	'Bottom-up' reforms	Late 1990s to present

Source: Adapted from McCourt (2013)

In some cases, national institutional reform efforts were implemented according to a grand design, in which every aspect of financial, human resource and service management are changed at the same time (the so-called *big-bang approach* to development planning). In other cases, reforms were carried out in step-by-step fashion, fixing basic problems first before moving on to more complicated solutions (see European Commission, 2009). Commercialization and privatization of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) also cuts across all generations of the public sector institutional reforms.

5. Case studies of institutional reform in Africa

In earlier sections of this paper, it has already been indicated that many African countries have attempted to design and implement national institutional reforms and the results have been mixed. This section is devoted to the presentation of selected case studies from East, Southern, and West Africa. The case studies show-case and are symptomatic of the national institutional reform experiences that one may encounter in various parts of the continent.

Box 1: Tanzania

Tanzania has a history of national institutional reforms stretching over two decades with mixed success (see Morgan & Baser, 2007). Since the Arusha Declaration of 1967 up to the late 1980s, Tanzania saw a dramatic expansion in the role of the state in all areas of the economy. State enterprises, whether newly created or expropriated from the private sector, were heralded as the driving force of economic growth (Lufunyo, 2013). During this period, political interference increased, and the civil service became a source of patronage, nepotism, corruption and influence. As the socialist economy failed to deliver the expected dividends, public finances were squeezed and real pay levels in the civil service worsened year by year while service delivery in the sector declined significantly, hence the need for institutional reform (Graham & Richard, 1999).

Other critical factors for reform included the desire for market determination; public dissatisfaction with service delivery; growing demand for citizen participation in decision making; and disillusionment with the standard of public sector resource management (Therkildsen, 2000; Njunwa, 2005; World Bank, 2013). Thus, Tanzania formally adopted an economic recovery program in 1986 (Muganda, 2004). According to Caulfield (2004) the intended objectives were to attain a smaller, affordable, well-compensated, efficient and effective performing civil service. Tanzania has since pursued reforms and made significant achievements: macroeconomic stability has been achieved and a wide range of structural reforms completed (Stevens & Teggeman, 2004).

The country's adjustment and reform process has been gradual and at best cautious but steady, deep, and sustainable (Muganda, 2004). Supported by the World Bank and others, significant improvements in public management and accountability were achieved under President Mkapa's administration stretching from 1995-2005 (Morgan & Baser, 2007). Mkapa proved to be one of the most progressive reformers and made promising progress in tackling a comprehensive set of reforms (Stevens & Teggeman, 2004). Key successes included an improved computerized integrated financial management system connecting all ministries and regional sub-treasuries to a central system at the Ministry of Finance; a Medium-Term Expenditure Framework monitored by parliamentary committees; the adoption of international accounting standards; greater independence of the National Audit Office; and increased compliance in the area of procurement (Lufunyo, 2013). A detailed assessments for citizen participation in planning and decision making by Stevens & Teggeman (2004) indicated that there was significant improvement.

There are other authors and scholars, however, who argue that the performance of the civil service has remained questionable and has been found wanting on several grounds. For example, Issa (2010) argues that high centralization of the reform implementation actually weakened the ownership of the reforms in the implementing institutions and stressed the need for more demand-driven reform instead. Patronage has remained pervasive in the sector and President John Magufuli has been working hard to address this challenge. Similarly, the country's pay and incentive policies failed since political leaders have not hesitated to increase public sector salaries before elections (ibid). Efficient use of public resources still lags behind and government procurement has remained susceptible to political influence and corruption. In addition, accountability remains weak and audits are rarely acted upon (Njunwa, 2010).

From the available literature, a number of factors stand out prominently as contributing to the limited progress and sustainability of the reforms. These include:

- Inconsistent/absence of leadership from the top, particularly after 2005, and lack of government commitment to reduce bureaucratic discretion and corruption (see Therkildsen, 2000);
- Poor communication of the reform objective and weak demand for good governance by civil society;
- Political rivalries: for example, despite being from the same party, Kikwete wanted to distinguish himself clearly from his predecessors and set new priorities;
- The government‘s perception that the political capital needed for effective reform implementation is larger than benefits of the reforms;
- The donor-driven nature of the reform process;
- Due to the combined effect of a lack of focus on quick wins in service delivery, and the lack of selectivity in providing financial and technical support to ministries, departments and agencies, the reforms failed to build a strong constituency in favor of reform and individual citizens did not see tangible results, as new systems were almost invisible to them while most executive agencies failed to improve services (see Lukumai, 2006);
- It was also clear that the vision for reform came from the top. The political and technical leadership perceived a need for change. In that sense the programme was directed and imposed. It was not participatory. Indeed, it had to be, public servants were so demoralised that they had neither the desire nor the ability to bring about change themselves (see Stevens & Teggeman, 2004).

Tanzania was initially hailed as a best-practice example enabled by a more established sense of nationhood compared to many other SSA countries, but since 2005, reforms have stagnated and some elements reversed (see Morgan et al., 2010). Nevertheless, a window of opportunity for more limited sectoral reform may now open with increasing public demand for greater democratic governance, growing oversight, and a stronger media (Charlie et al., 2014). Indeed, in more recent years the ongoing reforms in Tanzania, and particularly economic liberalization policies, have reshaped the country’s corporate environment, with private players taking over production and distribution while the government assumes the role of facilitator and regulator (Booth et al., 2014). Thus, Tanzania has now made significant progress in reforming the economy, and creating a favorable environment for the private sector to function.

Box 2: Ethiopia

There is a general paucity of literature on Ethiopian institutional reforms. Nevertheless, a detailed account by Nigussa (2013) reveals that in the early 1990s, the government launched a structural adjustment program that embraced civil service reform as one of the key components. The first phase of the reform (1991-1996) focused on restructuring government institutions and retrenching civil servants to reduce the size of the sector. The second phase was launched in 1996. It was mainly constituted by five sub-programs that included reforming the top management system; expenditure management and control; human resource management; service delivery; and ethics in the service. The sub-programs were further split into a number of projects (Emnet & Habtamu, 2011). However, assessments of progress in implementation of these sub-programs in 2001 by the government revealed that it was below expectations. This was attributed to a number of factors including the reform program being too focused on technical aspects rather than changing attitudes of the workforce; impulsive start of implementation; and lack of committed political leadership (see Mesfin, 2009).

A public sector capacity building support program was subsequently launched as part of the civil service reforms (ibid). With the support of a consortium of donors, the main objectives of the programme were articulated as to improve the scale, efficiency and responsiveness of public service delivery at the Federal, regional and local level; empower citizens to participate more effectively in shaping their own development; promote good governance and accountability; and promote business process reengineering as a key management initiative, particularly in those Ministries that interface directly with the private sector (see Mengesha & Common, 2007; Nigussa, 2013). Since then, a number of successes have been realized that may be attributable to the institutional reform effort. There have been notable efficiency improvements in the Ministry of Trade and Industry, particularly in terms of issuing licences for new businesses. For instance, the time for issuing a business licence has been reduced from an average of 8 days to 39 minutes, resulting in very high levels of customer satisfaction among clients of the Ministry. Business name registration time was reduced from 2 days to 34 minutes (see Mesfin, 2009).

The service delivery reforms in the country are still an ongoing process. Business process re-engineering has been introduced in various ministries and at all levels of government organizations. There has been the introduction of Citizens' Charter by the Ministry of Civil Service and change communication strategy in some regions (MoFED, 2012). Despite the contribution of the reform efforts in reshaping and restructuring the public sector for the better socio-economic development of Ethiopia, there have been a syndrome of on-and-off to sustain the reform (Tilaye, 2007). The available literature indicates that implementation of the civil service reforms in Ethiopia face challenges related to lack of proper integration and sequential approach (Mesfin, 2009). There is also a lot of inconsistencies in performance evaluation system (Teka, Fiseha and Solomon, 2007).

Some civil servants have been resisting change and there is lack of accountability in the performance management system (see Eshete, 2007; Tesfaye, 2007). Due to poorly communicated reform objectives, there is a general poor sense of ownership among the civil servants and the citizens (Solomon, 2007). Other challenges include the prevalence of inefficient technological readiness, weak team work culture among the civil servants, absence of well designed and implemented remuneration system (Tilaye, 2007; Emnet & Habtamu, 2011). There is also lack of awareness on the service seekers side regarding their rights and the duties and responsibilities of the civil servant (Mesfin & Taye, 2011).

Box 3: Zambia

As in other African countries, the phenomenal growth of the public sector in Zambia after independence was paralleled by a proliferation of SOEs whose main function was to implement the government's economic policies whilst paying due regard to social justice and equity. This situation not only led to a steep rise in the number of employees hired by the public sector and SOEs but made the task of efficiently managing this expanding sector increasingly unwieldy (Mulikita, 1996; Tangier, 2002). It was also noted that there was no rational link between the performance of the bureaucracy and the escalating volume of resources that was expended in running the civil service on an annual basis. Government subsidies on essential commodities such as fuel, bread, wheat, sugar and the country's principle staple, maize meal constituted the most serious drain on the fiscal resources of the national treasury that were in any case mainly financed from proceeds from copper (Mulikita, 2000; Mulimbika et al. 2015). But when prices of copper nose-dived in the late 1980s on the international markets, Zambia faced a deep economic crisis that led to calls for national institutional reform.

In 1991, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) won the country's first free elections based on a commitment to the implementation of comprehensive structural adjustment and the promise of more transparent and accountable governance (Bratton & Liatto-Katundu, 1994). The MMD government wholesomely embraced the orthodoxy of economic structural adjustment, which the previous socialist regime under Kenneth Kaunda had fiercely resisted. Upon assuming office, the new government set up the Zambia Privatization Agency and mandated it to privatize the huge SOE sector which had experienced a prolific growth in the single party era (Rakner, 2003).

In a parallel policy move, the government announced its determination to drastically downsize the civil service in order to make it more client driven as well as enhance basic needs delivery to the general population (Tangier, 2002). Thus, Zambia's much lauded public service reform program was officially launched in 1993. The program, was mainly constituted by a focus on macro-economic stabilization; public sector downsizing; economic liberalization; the privatization of state assets; and agricultural reforms (see Mulimbika et al. 2015). Initially there was considerable opposition, which stalled the privatization process throughout the early 1990s. However, increased donor pressure forced the government to accelerate the process such that by 1997, over three-quarters of state enterprises had been sold or discontinued (Bigsten & Kiwizzi-Mugerwa, 2000).

The impact of privatization on the structure of employment was quite significant. For example, by 1998 the size of the parastatal sector had declined rapidly from 16% to 4% of total employment. Furthermore, after 1998 a majority of the remaining SOEs were in the mining and transport sectors, both of which have subsequently moved closer to being privatized (see Republic of Zambia, 2002; Thurlow & Wobst, 2006). However, the unstable macro-economic climate and the uncertainty surrounding the government's commitment to reforms made the newly liberalized markets unattractive for private sector investment (Rakner *et al.*, 1999). Several industries either collapsed or retrenched many workers in an effort to reduce excess capacity and re-establish efficiency (Mulikita, 2002). Formal manufacturing employment declined at an average annual rate of 5.9% during 1991-1998.

It is apparent that institutional reforms in Zambia led to massive unemployment and migration, and changed the required skills-intensity of many sectors (see Rakner *et al*., 1999). Although necessary for achieving long-run economic growth, the short-run impact of the structural reforms was very negative for most urban and lower-skilled households who were more severely disrupted by the rise in unemployment and changing patterns of employment (ibid). It is however, important to note that the economic reform process advanced considerably in the initial years, and significant changes in the economic policy regime were implemented between 1991 and 1994. Within the first two years, the government had completed the liberalisation of the external and domestic trade regime by eliminating tariffs, freeing the exchange rate and interest rates. However, this initial momentum was not subsequently maintained.

Overall, Zambia's record of institutional reforms to-date presents a mixed picture (Stevens & Teggeman, 2004). A detailed study by Rakner (2003) also categorized Zambia's economic reform record in the 1990s as '*exceedingly complex and mixed'*. For instance, despite the significant changes attained, many important aspects of economic reform were subsequently either not implemented or were implemented in a haphazard manner during MMD's first two administrations. Thus, Zambia joined the vast majority of African reform governments who have entered a '*transitional grey zone*' stuck in a '*partial reform syndrome*' characterised by permanent economic crisis (see Van de Walle, 2001; Carothers, 2002). A key factor emphasized by other scholars is that political liberalisation re-introduced multiparty elections and civil liberties in Zambia without necessarily resulting in increased civic participation (Stevens & Teggeman, 2004). Thus, the influence of interest associations declined as a result of the economic and political liberalisation processes. This suggests that interest coalitions located within the government and bureaucracy were more influential than independent interest associations in terms of opposing and postponing reforms (ibid).

The programme of SOE privatisation pursued by the Zambian government since 1992 has also been subject to a number of contentious assessments. For some scholars and practitioners, it is considered a model programme, and perhaps one of the most successful in Africa (see Campbell-White & Bhatia, 1998). For others, it is a deeply flawed experience which allowed for the corrupt acquisition of assets by those linked to the ruling party. Thurlow & Wobst (2006) point out that although these reforms hoped to stimulate growth and diversify the economy, GDP growth remained stagnant at 0.2% throughout the 1990s. However, there is evidence of renewed growth in Zambia later on even though it is difficult to determine whether or not that growth is directly attributable to the institutional reforms (ibid).

During the reforms, the government developed a strong record of consulting civil society during program preparations. According to Stevens & Teggeman (2004), numerous workshops with many segments of society were held in all provinces in the preparation of the government's public service reform programs. However, this effort resulted in massive wish-lists and a failure to make tough choices. Even less successful was the public information campaign, which was supposed to keep the public informed on reform program objectives, activities, and expected and actual results through news releases and press conferences as well as a program website (ibid). Indeed, the first phase of the reforms did not go beyond studies and focus group discussions to ascertain citizens' views on the quality of service delivery and the potential benefits of decentralization. The recently conceived second phase now envisions citizens' charters and service delivery surveys, tapping into an increasingly vocal civil society (see Yezi Consulting & Associates, 2013).

Box 4: Zimbabwe

As a result of socialist policies adopted soon after independence, the public sector in Zimbabwe expanded rapidly - from 45,000 employees at independence in 1980 to 192,000 by 1990 (Chimhowu A., 2010). This resulted in a bloated bureaucracy characterized by red-tape, corruption, inefficiency and other administrative malpractices typical of the newly-independent era (see Gordon-Somers & Khosa, 2006; Berejena, 2011). The number of SOEs rose from 20 in 1980 to more than 40 by the 1990s operating in almost all sectors of the economy (Godana & Hlatshwayo, 1998; Zhou, 2001). Subsidies and grants from government provided to the SOEs led to unacceptably high budget deficits which, by 1990, averaged 10% of gross domestic product (GOZ, 1991). All these internal pressures led to the realization that national policy and institutional reform was necessary. In addition to these internal pressures, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were pressing for public sector reform across the entire developing world and made adoption of 'economic liberalisation' a pre-condition for balance of payments support.

Since then, Zimbabwe has undertaken 3 different phases of institutional reform that have not necessarily produced the expected results. The first phase of the reform, guided by the IMF-directed ESAP framework, ran from 1991-1996. Its core objectives included reforming the functions of government departments to make them more efficient and effective while eliminating duplications. Among other things, it also sought to reduce the size of the civil service by at least 25% through retrenchments (Berejena, 2011). Some 23,000 workers (12%) came off the civil service payroll almost immediately and the number of ministries fell from 27 to 16 by 1995 (Moyo, 1998; Bangura, 2000). Existing Public Service Commission regulations and procedures were also reviewed and re-designed to support performance management (Berejena, 2011). Retrenchments caused increasing resentment among civil servants, severance package costs were high, and implementation was corrupt. Thus, the programme was abandoned in 1995 (Makumbe, 1997).

The programme was manifestly unsustainable politically, because it required the government to dismantle its social sector achievements of the 1980s, particularly in health and education (UNDP, 1998; Masunungure and Chimanikire, 2007). A considerable number of skilled staff left the service as real wages in the public sector rapidly declined (Moyo, 1998). The second phase of the reforms was implemented from 1998 – 2003. The main objective included re-focusing the government on its core-business by sub-contracting, commercializing and privatizing non-core business functions (ibid). It also concentrated on enhancing performance and service delivery, putting citizens first and promoting good governance. Berejena (2011) describes the second phase as essentially a continuation of unfinished business from the first phase. A new public financial management system was introduced in 1999, reducing financial indiscipline among line ministries and achieving significant reductions in unauthorized expenditures and fraud (Madambi, 2011). In both the first and second phases of the reforms, the quality of and access to public services declined significantly in the health, education and other social sectors (Botchwey *et al*., 1998; UNDP, 1998).

The reform programmes themselves remained very slow and, in some ministries, were not implemented at all (Makumbe, 1997). Batley (2004) states that the first and second generation of reforms in Zimbabwe were slow and became conflated. Key factors included weak policy commitment to reforms imposed by donors, fear of disturbing existing patron-client relationships, and concern over losing important sources of public revenue (Makumbe, 1997). Ultimately, 'business-as-usual' prevailed even after introduction of the reforms. For the most part, the government did not encourage the participation of important constituencies such as private businesses, NGOs, the youth and citizens, choosing instead a top-down approach (Kherallah *et al*, 2000). At the same time, the government itself did not feel the sense of ownership necessary to sustain the reform effort (Stein, 1992; Masunungure and Chimanikire, 2007).

Chimhou (2010), who carried out an extensive review of progress made during all the phases, points out that effective and efficient public services did not materialize; indeed, there was general decline in service provision and staff morale, and hence poor staff performance. A customer satisfaction survey in 1996 depicted public servants as arrogant, impolite and self-serving, behaving as if the people had no right to demand or enjoy a better service (Public Service Commission of Zimbabwe, 1998). The third phase of the reform started from 2004 onwards. It gave the greatest emphasis to wide-spread implementation of Results-Based Management (RBM) in both the civil service and SOE sectors (see Makochekanwa & Kwaramba, 2009). Key components include systems for results-based budgeting; personnel performance; results-based monitoring and evaluation; management information; and results-based government (Madambi, 2011). It is however, difficult to assess or attribute the impact of the third phase on service delivery, since problems related to the overall national economy worsened during the same period in ways that affected all sectors and governmental operations (Zwizwai, 2007). Nevertheless, implementation of RBM is on-going and impacts are not yet manifest. Gordon-Somers and Khosa (2006) argue that introducing a new initiative in a hyper-inflationary environment in which budgets rapidly evaporate, sometimes within a month, threatens RBM credibility, even before it is fully installed.

Several diagnostic studies aimed at effectively restructuring and commercializing all the major SOEs throughout all three main phases of reform did not sufficiently address the fundamental causes of their inefficiency and ineffectiveness (GOZ, 1998; Sadza, 2002). The government continued to exercise direct controls on pricing, investment, and hiring and firing of top management (Zhou, 2000). The state has remained the majority shareholder in most SOEs, either having 100% ownership in the case of a commercialized entity such as the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority, or 51% in the case of a joint venture such as the Zimbabwe Passenger Company which provides bus services in urban areas (Zhou, 2000). Creating sound financial systems also proved difficult and the SOE sector's privileged access to government subsidies was not significantly curtailed (Zhou, 2001; Keyter, 2007). Most SOEs continued to operate under their traditional pre-reform enabling Acts, and parent ministries continued to view SOEs as government departments to whom they could give directives (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1994; Zhou, 2001).

Box 5: Ghana

In the international development literature, Ghana has been categorized as one of the economic success stories on the African continent. Indeed, the last two decades have seen steady and significant economic growth in the country in spite of considerable instability in macroeconomic performance and a growing dependence on aid and other foreign inflows (Killick, 2005). For more than two decades, Ghana has put a lot of effort in reforming its public sector since 1995. The main goal was to develop the capacity of the Ghana civil service to deliver effective, efficient and customer-oriented services (Antwi et al., 2008). These efforts have included first generation reforms aimed at reducing the cost of the public sector, as well as second generation reforms that have sought to improve the quality of the public service, and to strengthen its capacity and performance (Aryeetey & Fosu, 2005). The most significant reform drivers have been economic and fiscal crisis; a concern about bureaucratic and institutional weaknesses; and donor pressure (Antwi et al., 2008, Hutchful, 2002, Stevens & Teggemann, 2004). While governance issues are still considered to be problematic, there is increasing openness in the discussion of economic policy as part of the reforms. This is reflected by the institutionalization of the annual national economic dialogue and the growing participation of civil society in policy discussions (Aryeetey & Fosu, 2005).

The civil service performance improvement programme was consultative and participatory, aimed at encouraging ownership and sustainability of the reforms right from the design stage to implementation (Antwi et al., 2008). A series of consultative workshops with key stakeholders such as civil servants, parliament, industry, civil society organisations and politicians were organised to solicit views on what kind of civil service they desired (see Aryeetey & Kanbur, 2006). A multi-sectoral technical group was constituted to formulate the ideas together with technical and financial assistance from the Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank (ibid).

However, Aryeetey & Kanbur (2006) further argue that while people were happy to attend the workshops and enjoy the ‘‘freebies’’ associated with it, actual commitment to implementation was very limited. For instance the crucial system-wide issues of remuneration, decentralisation and financial management reforms were not properly dealt with, and this appears to have generally undermined the reform process in the long-run. In essence, while the results on the mechanical routine aspects of the reforms were impressive, the actual level of ‘transformation’ that endures and should be reflected in management and staff’s attitudes and behaviour, and in the organisational culture is, to say the least, unacceptable (see Government of Ghana, 2002). According to Booth et al. (2004), previous attempts at civil service reform are judged to have been largely unsuccessful due to lack of political support. Economic and political reforms are now redefining the role of the state, but the process often remains *ad hoc* in Ghana.

In trying to offer explanations for why two decades of reform have not dealt adequately with the problems of macro-economic stability, Aryeetey & Fosu (2005) argue that the problems could be attributed to the continuing presence of institutional constraints in the mobilization of resources and their allocation. The state and its institutions had been weakened by many years of neglect, and the reforms did not deal adequately with those problems. While political instability may have been contained, this was achieved at some economic cost. Corruption and other institutional inadequacies increase the transaction cost for all economic endeavours, and this is seen clearly in Ghana. The end result was that policy reform slowed down in the 1990s and growth stagnated, although at a higher level than in most countries (ibid). In terms of the visible impacts of the reforms themselves, by the end of the year 2000, 85% of all ministries, departments, and agencies had completed plans for reform (Antwi et al., 2010). However, while some studies report marginal capacity improvement, the reforms did not change the prevailing organizational culture which was characterized by inertia, low motivation, and perceived corruption, nor did it improve service delivery or accountability (see Kiragu, 2002; Adei & Boachie-Danquah, 2003). Resistance by senior civil servants and ineffective implementation since the body in charge of coordinating reforms lacked political authority emerge as some of the key barriers (see Hutchful, 2002). The perception that the reforms were driven from outside and their association with redundancies and retrenchments worsened attitudes towards implementation. In addition, lack of continuous stakeholder engagement after initial wide consultation reduced momentum for reform (ibid).

All changes of government since the early 2000s have also meant that new approaches are tried out and thus delaying progress. Stevens & Teggemann (2004) argue that Ghana did not sustain its promise of successful economic and administrative reforms demonstrated during the 1980s. For instance, the reforms approved in April 1999 barely went beyond the analytic phase and had little administrative change to show. Before that, Ghana had witnessed substantial economic and administrative reforms under the authoritarian populist rule of Jerry Rawlings in the 1980s. Against a backdrop of economic crisis, he had managed to harness support for technically sound yet difficult reforms through “incorporation, co-option, or outright suppression” (Kiragu & Mukandala, 2004, p.132). Rawlings was able to win internal support for reform with the state house, cabinet, technocrats, and government-supported populist revolutionary organizations. With the introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, however, this coalition no longer held together, prompting the reform process to stall and reverse (ibid). Ghana stands out from the other case studies on the continent where top-down formulations tend to dominate. It widely engaged the public in the early stages of reform even though it lost momentum thereafter.

Box 6: Nigeria

Nigeria has been identified as one of the fastest growing countries in the world by various international development agencies, with an average GDP growth rate of 7% per annum. Yet poverty and inequality remains very high. For instance, the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics reported that 60.9% of Nigerians in 2010 were living in "absolute poverty" and this figure had risen from 54.7% in 2004. The Bureau predicted that this rising trend was likely to continue (BBC Africa News, 2012). At the root of this disconnect between growth and development are governance challenges in the form of corruption, state capture by corrupt elites and misdirected policies (Oloruntoba, 2015). A detailed study by Monye-Emina (2012) concluded that the military governance system and the oil windfall constitute the main factors that have greatly influenced the public sector and its contribution to the actualisation of national goals in Nigeria since the 1970s. Both of these led to the alteration and rapid expansion of public sector activities in the country's socio-economic and political life. Politicians, military and civil servants, who claimed to be motivated to serve public interest, ended up serving themselves through a lot of shady deals. Thus, even before the introduction of reforms in the sector under the Obasanjo regime, the public sector was already inefficient, wasteful and underperforming with widespread evidence of political and bureaucratic abuses, thus necessitating the reforms.

From the inception of the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in May 1999 till its exit in May 2007, many reforms were initiated to ameliorate the socio-political, economic and institutional decay that the nation has witnessed over the years. The core thrust of the government‘s reforms was to 'reposition and re-professionalize the public service for greater efficiency, effectiveness in service delivery, accountability, accelerated privatisation and liberalisation, transparency, better fiscal management, and overall national productivity' (see Maikudi, 2012). Reforms were mainly implemented through the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy. However, the available evidence suggests that public sector institutional reforms in Nigeria have mainly entailed commercialisation, privatisation and liquidation of SOEs as government and public sector organs are considered to be unable to provide services effectively and efficiently (Adeyemo, 2005). Nwokoma (2015) argues that in its desperate bid to down-size the public sector of the economy and minimise the economic role of government, the administration has continued to place emphasis on the private sector as the engine of growth of the Nigerian economy. Yet the reality is that the private sector is very weak in Nigeria and depends on the public sector for its survival and continued growth. The down-sizing of the public sector consequentially led to the down-sizing of the private sector (ibid).

The reform's major focus on privatization led to the total collapse or disposal of SOEs to foreigners, while the public service, which was once vibrant, productive and incorruptible, became a haven of corruption, inefficiency and stupor (Aluko, 2007: 31). Adeyemo (2005) states that public utility provider institutions, including producers of public goods such as electricity, portable water and even transport, postal and communications services were privatized and liberalised or are still in the process of being privatized. The reforms also entailed large-scale worker retrenchment under the euphemisms of 'down-sizing', 'right-sizing', 'reorganisation' and 'restructuring'. It witnessed the sale of government properties such as houses and motor vehicles on an unprecedented scale, in questionable circumstances, and usually to cronies of the political and bureaucratic elite, a clear sign of poor/ bad leadership (see Nkwede, 2013).

As Aluko (2007) argues, 'much of the claimed successes recorded by the private sector in Nigeria are not due to efficient operation and increased productivity. They are more due to 'profit' made from inflated contracts, patronage and corruption, among other factors' (also see Adeyemo, 2005). According to Okorie & Stella (2014), most of the strategic SOEs were sold and bought over by elites and shares of government in most of the privatized companies were bought over by the same class of people who were entrusted with the mandate to manage those companies for the interest of the masses. This amounts to empowering the rich at the detriment of the poor in society. Thus, the benefits arising from privatization and liberalisation were reaped only by local elites. This also further worsened income and wealth inequalities, subjugated social objectives, and worsened the nation's institutional capacity to produce and deliver essential public goods, especially in sectors with human capital development implications (see Economic Commission for Africa, 2005). Due to the one-size-fits-all nature of institutional reforms in Africa, there does not seem to be any evidence of a proper diagnosis having been done in Nigeria with a view to determining the right type of reform and where it is required in light of the country's past experiences. That is why scholars such as Omar (2012) have argued strongly that the reform effort was undertaken without considering the realities of the Nigerian society (see Adewumi, 2012). As a result, and contrary to the projections of the reform program, many Nigerians ended up going through hard times when the supply of basic amenities such as water, electricity, and health care became inadequate (Obiora, 2014).

The reforms also failed to carry along and reflect the sentiments of the civil society in understanding the propriety of the adjustment programme and the public reforms in general (Idowu, 2012). Rather than accepting the fundamental flaws inherent in the system, the reforms ended up making sacrificial lambs out of the more vulnerable categories of public servants whose views do not seem to matter in the grand scheme of things and who also cannot be objectively accused of being the source of the problem (Adewumi, 2012). While the reforms were made possible by the initial strong support and political commitment of President Obasanjo and his team, the gross mismanagement of the economy by successive administrations contributed in worsening the economic crisis which the country has had to contend with for a long time (Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo-Kwaako, 2007). The reforms also met with enormous resistance, mainly from a selfish political elite whose opportunities for rent-seeking were threatened by the implementation of the reforms, particularly in instances where greater transparency was to be introduced in government business (ibid).

6. Fundamentals of youth participation

Despite the existence of evidence from concluded studies demonstrating that active political participation of all citizens, and especially of the youth, is the basis for a well-functioning society, citizens in several African countries still face serious challenges and difficulties when wanting to participate in different political platforms and processes. The youth are often side-lined from formal national decision-making and institutional reform processes. The UN (2014) contends that young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world's population. However, even though they are often involved in informal, politically relevant processes, such as activism or civic engagement, they are not formally represented in national political institutions such as parliaments and many of them do not participate in elections. This can impact on the quality of democratic governance. In 2003, James D. Wolfensohn (the former President of the World Bank) pointed out that "by the year 2015, there will be 3 billion people under the age of 25. They are the future .. they are also the now" (Uzuegbunam & Azikiwe, 2015). This perspective finds common ground with Frank (2006) who argues that the size of the youth population and their feelings of social isolation are two of several compelling reasons for national planners and policy-makers to pay greater attention to the youth's contribution.

This paper adopts the position that if the youth represent a large segment of the world's population, human development for subsequent generations cannot be sustainable if we do not directly address their needs today. Therefore, it is crucial to guarantee that the basic human rights of the youth are recognized and enforced, as well as ensuring that the youth actively and meaningfully participate in institutional reform processes. This perspective also finds common ground with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that defined participation of children as '*the right to be heard*'. This is a philosophy of respect for the dignity of children which implies that adults need to work more closely with children to help them articulate their needs, to develop strategies for change, and to exercise their rights.

When viewed from this perspective, youth participation becomes a fundamental human right which makes it imperative for youth to be enabled to express their views when decisions are made about their future (see Kirby & Kwast, 2009). As the 2011/2012 Arab States popular uprisings and various other movements throughout the world have demonstrated, the inclusion of youth in formal politics and policy-making processes is forever growing in importance (Ibid). While various definitions already exist in the literature, in this paper, the term '*youth*' is defined as it is defined in the African Youth Charter (AU, 2006) which states that "*youth* or *young people* shall refer to every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years". The African Youth Charter also states that Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead (ibid).

It is also important to understand youth participation in the broader context of discourses on stakeholder participation since it is generally recognized in both theory and practice as a key component of local and national development processes. For instance, using empirical evidence drawn from a wide range of contemporary approaches to participation, Hickey & Mohan (2005) managed to demonstrate that participatory approaches are most likely to succeed where they are pursued as part of a wider radical political project; where they are aimed specifically at securing citizenship rights and participation for marginal and subordinate groups (e.g. the youth); and when they seek to engage with development as an underlying process of social change rather than in the form of discrete technocratic interventions. A detailed study by Brinkerhoff & Kulibaba (1994) concluded that the circumstances surrounding participation and the ways it occurs directly influence the national policy reform process, and that changes to enhance participation can lead to improved policy outcomes. The '*fathe*r' of action research and stakeholder participation, Chambers (1997) argues that participation is a conscious effort which encourages people to take the lead in much of the development agenda, to plan, gather, express and analyse information.

The foregoing extracts from theory suggest that there is need to interrogate the governance and accountability dimensions of national development and institutional reform processes. This is important since '*governance*' broadly refers to the mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences (see UNDP, 1997). It is a concept referring to how civil society [read the youth] and government interrelate and how that relationship might change in ways that foster better governance (see Kasfir, 1998; Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Harrold, 2000; Kpessa, 2011). With specific reference to the youth, Checkoway & Gutiérrez (2006) state that youth participation is a process of involving young people in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives. It is also about the *real* influence of young people in national and local institutions and decisions, rather than being present but passive as human subjects or service recipients. In any case, current institutional reform and other national development processes have far-reaching implications for youth because the youth are the generation that will experience the results and impacts of the decisions the longest (Frank, 2006). It therefore, makes sense that the youth become a key part and parcel of the national decision-making landscape.

This paper contends that regardless of the power structures in existence, it is ultimately in the best interest of any nation or government to inform and consult with citizens, and the youth in particular, in order to craft and manage sustainable institutional reforms. Ensuring youth participation in national institutional reform processes is consistent with the view of "*youth as resources*," and contrasts sharply with the image of "*youth as problems*" that often permeates the popular media, social science, and professional practice when referring to young people (ibid). In essence, when the youth are meaningfully included in the national development and institutional reform processes, they are provided with the power and platforms they need to be actively involved in identifying society's and their own needs, analysing these needs, and making decisions that affect the future of the country. The paper further argues that failure to facilitate youth participation in national institutional reform processes is counter-productive and self-defeating. It deprives the whole reform process of fresh ideas that could potentially lead to lasting positive socio-economic impacts.

The 'youth-as-a-resource' perspective resonates very well with the *three-lens approach* to youth participation. Promoted by the World Bank and adopted by various UN agencies, the *three-lens approach* to youth participation has emerged as a meaningful analytical framework for understanding how youth can be better facilitated to contribute to development processes. It encourages working for youth *as beneficiaries*; engaging with youth *as partners* in development planning; and supporting youth *as leaders* in national policy and institutional reform processes. It is important for theorists and practitioners to simultaneously consider all the three lenses as they are not mutually exclusive (see DFID-CSO, 2010). Youth *as partners* means facilitating collaborative interventions, where young people are fully consulted, informed and involved. This implies mutual co-operation and responsibility. Supporting youth *as leaders* means enabling youth-initiated and directed interventions to prosper. It implies opening up space for youth-led decision-making (delegation) within existing national structures, systems and processes (ibid).

6.1 The international agenda for youth participation

The international community has recognized the importance of having youth participating in political systems, including through several international conventions and UN resolutions. For instance, the African Youth Charter (2006) states that "Africa's greatest resource is its youthful population and that through their active and full participation, Africans can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead". It recognises that youth are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development and for the peace and prosperity of Africa, with a unique contribution to make to the present and future development agendas (see AU, 2006). The Charter also notes "*with concern the situation of African youth, many of whom are marginalized from mainstream society through inequalities in income, wealth and power, …….and experiencing various forms of discrimination*". It also acknowledges the increasing calls and the enthusiasm of youth to actively participate at local, national, regional and international levels to determine their own development and the advancement of society at large (ibid). The World Development Report 2007 was devoted specifically to *'development and the next generation*' (World Bank, 2007).

Active youth participation in decision-making is also specifically mentioned as a priority area of focus by the United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond (UNDP, 2014). It is clear that youth participation has gained international policy traction and currency. However, inspite of this increased interest and availability of several innovative ways of participation, voting is still seen as the main instrument of participation in national politics for young people. While voting may be considered a crucial avenue, it cannot be necessarily treated as an end in itself. There is a definite need for the youth and other social groups to actively participate in national democratic processes through various other means, including feeding into the national policy-making process (ibid). This is the equivalent of what Hickey & Mohan (2005) aptly call '*the pursuit of participation as citizenship*' (making claims and holding governments accountable). It is also a view that emphasizes the need to focus on *who* participates and *how* to get the institutions right for effective policy reform (see Brinkerhoff & Kulibaba, 1994).

6.2 Main barriers to youth participation

Youth participation in national development planning processes has been promoted for at least three decades now and yet it remains insufficiently supported when compared to adult participation in Africa. This suggests the existence of significant barriers to the practice. An examination of the available literature shows that various scholars and development agencies have already been engaging with the topic and published their findings. For instance, Knowles-Yánez (2002) states that little room has been provided for incorporating youth concerns in national planning and reform mainly because the processes are legalistic, reactionary, and dominated by economic interests. As a result, national planners and policy-makers have limited knowledge of young people or experience of working with them. Adamolekun (1988) argues that the absence of institutionalized checks and balances in the post-colonial state has allowed the African leader to closely control who has access to resources and decision-making, hence the exclusion of the youth from these processes. This is even worse in authoritarian regimes [and there have been several of these in Africa] where the conduct of independent and critical policy analysis has been discouraged, thus limiting the growth of independent analytic capacity (see McCleary, 1991; Hyden, 1992).

There are also other scholars who argue that the presence of adult-oriented institutions and powerful competing interests and adults' lack of understanding of youth combine with other political, economic, and cultural barriers to restrict the occurrence and impacts of youth participation (see Checkoway et al., 1995; Frank, 2006). Brinkerhoff & Kulibaba (1994) point out that in Africa, the state provides the principal context in which participation occurs, determining the kinds of contributions that civil society can make to policy reform and implementation. In this context, opening up the policy process to the youth and other civic groups is difficult because the African state has traditionally guarded information jealously, yet transparency is vital to policy debate and consensus-building for reform. In some cases, the design and implementation of institutional reform processes is structured in such a way that it is only conducted by a small select technical team of experts and a closed circle of a few key national elites. This excludes not only the youth but also the rest of the other civic groups that could potentially make a meaningful contribution (see Gulhati, 1990; Nelson, 1990).

There are many countries where national level decision-makers see little need to consult elements of civil society beyond symbolic, tightly managed opportunities for popular ratification of policy choices already made (Brinkerhoff & Kulibaba, 1994). This is quite surprising given the mounting evidence that policy designs that build political support for reform measures are more successful than those that do not (see King et al., 1998; Hyden, 1992). In addition to the structural barriers outlined above, attempts to involve youth in national policy processes are also often resisted due to the perception of '*youth as trouble-makers*' who are in a period of early psychosocial growth and thus, lacking the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours, and social connections that adults have. This view casts a lot of doubt among people regarding whether youth participation is beneficial and practical at all (see Frank, 2006).

This view leaves society wondering whether youth possess the capacity to participate in the demanding task of national planning and fosters the belief that adults are more competent to make decisions on behalf of the youth and the community (ibid). Kirby & Kwast (2009) argue that even if the youth are consulted in situations like this, their views are not seriously taken into consideration such that they are essentially absent from processes of reflection, learning and action about decisions that affect their lives. Scholars such as Hart (1997) have labelled such participation as a disingenuous, manipulative, and tokenistic process that leads to the achievement of adult ends rather than it being a serious consensus-building exercise. This suggests that for the youth to be actively included in institutional reform processes in Africa, societal attitudes and the socio-economic and political environments that confronts them have to change and become more conducive.

7. Discussion

Overall, the sample of case studies in this paper demonstrate the limited achievements of institutional reform on the African continent. With the exception of Ghana and to some extent, Tanzania and Zambia, there is outright neglect of civic participation (including the youth) in national debates about the reform process and intended outcomes. Indeed, while there are a few pockets of success here and there, the overall picture is one of monumental failure and reform targets missed. The key question now is, *why have the reforms had limited impacts and indeed, what can we learn from them*? A key starting point for addressing such a question is to re-examine the fundamental theoretical basis on which the reforms are hinged.

It is clear that most of the reform efforts in Africa have served external (rather than domestic) interests. As Owusu (2012) rightly points out, African countries have followed the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank (the so-called Washington consensus) without addressing local interests through broad-based participation. Most of the countries undertaking reform have not been given the opportunity to articulate their own view of the 'public sector problem', nor have they contributed as equal partners in the search for solutions. As a result, despite the pumping of substantial amounts of financial and technical resources into the reforms, most of the public sector institutions in the sample of countries presented in this paper and elsewhere continue to remain ineffective, with no perceptible improvement in service delivery (see Lienert & Modi, 1997; Nunberg, 1999). A related major criticism of the neo-liberal approaches that have guided most of the reforms is that the programmes prescribed are too standardized (*one-size-fits-all)* and tend to ignore preconditions in different countries, particularly social, cultural and institutional contexts. Opportunities to modify the package to suit prevailing domestic needs in a particular country are also largely ignored. Thus, the 'one size-fits-all' top-down approaches promoted by the neo-liberal agenda may partly explain the non-systematic outcomes realized from the reforms (see Mkandawire, 2001).

It is, however, important to note that the third generation of reforms seems to be yielding fruits in countries such as Ghana and Tanzania where democracy has led to the emergence of a new generation of leaders, and greater citizen awareness in forcing internal changes in public organizations (ECA, 2004; Bangura and Larbi, 2006). Nevertheless, the available literature is replete with various reform weaknesses identified pertaining to specific country contexts, whether conceptual or empirical, with all the prominent negative elements of reform. Some observers question national readiness for these reforms, or indeed the appropriateness of the reforms in their development context. Easterly (2000), for example, explains the evidence of a negative stabilization effect on development by saying that the poor are not positioned to take advantage of any gains from these reforms. From the case studies presented in this paper, it is clear that the social costs of retrenchments were a key negative outcome in most of the countries undertaking reforms. While Zambia and Zimbabwe, for example, may appear as extreme cases of extraordinarily high retrenchment costs, other countries in the sample covered, and indeed in the rest of the continent, were not far behind in this respect.

A recurring theme across most analyses is that even in cases where national institutional reforms have been implemented systematically, public institutions have not appeared to change much (see Melkers & Willoughby, 1998). In addition, the reforms are often implemented in a centralized way, thereby limiting the ability of line agencies to develop results-based competencies. Instead, this reinforces process-based organizational incentives and insularity (see Polidano, 1998). Desai & Imrie (1998: 645) describe such reforms as "contradictory and flawed". The Nigerian and Zambian experiences show that privatisation is meaningless without a sufficient assessment of on-the-ground market pre-conditions and the broader implications of privatization on society. This also comes out clearly in the experiences of other countries such as Zimbabwe.

At a more general level of analysis, the reforms are supposed to be participatory, bringing citizens into the governance processes, leading to bottom-up decision making. This is also the entry-point at which the youth could be actively involved. In the majority of cases, this has not happened and indeed, none of the country case studies presented in this paper had programs and policies specifically designed to catalyse youth participation in the reforms. Instead, administrators in central government agencies leading the reform effort have tended to enjoy a lot of influence over the nature of participation, thereby limiting such possibilities and significantly disempowering the citizens.

However, it is important to note that there are some instances in different parts of the African continent where the youth have begun to have significant political influence on the course of national change, particularly through grassroots youth advocacy campaigns that enable the youth to successfully lobby for more involvement in political participation and access to economic opportunities. For instance, regional initiatives, such as the *Y'en a marre* (Enough is Enough) movement in Senegal and the '*Youth Acting For Change*' programme in Mali, Togo, and Burkina Faso, have emerged in recent years and given the youth a political voice in their countries (see IDEA, 2012). The role that social media and communication technology has played during the 'Arab Spring uprisings' in North Africa also reflects the opportunities that the youth and other social groups have used today to increase their political influence. According to Bohler-Muller & Van der Merwe (2011), the 2010/2011 revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were largely organised, supported and driven through the use of social media-based tools. Indeed, the events in North Africa may be a sign of things to come for the rest of the continent as technology continues to reach more Africans (ibid).

During the elections in Kenya, 2013, the youth were organized into various dialogue platforms that enabled them to actively contributed to the success of the elections. For example, Geinger (2013) articulates in detail how Mercy Corps created a programme called '*Yes-You-Can'* which involved more than 500,000 Kenyan youth and established over 17,000 youth parliaments from the national to local level that helped to strengthen youth participation before the elections and subsequently prevent electoral violence. On the other hand, the National Youth Sector Alliance provided forums for the government and private sector to engage with youth leaders and enable young people to emerge as active participants with a greater influence in the development of national policies (ibid). The Tanzania case study in this paper also demonstrates how well-planned comprehensive reforms that simultaneously include reforms in service delivery, financial management, public policy analysis, democratisation, and broad-based public participation can boost overall performance. The youth have also played a critical role in more recent elections in Senegal, Ghana, and Sierra Leone, thereby proving that young Africans are slowly moving the barriers to their participation and ensuring that they have a greater voice in national political discourses.

In the literature on public sector reforms, a number of factors emerge as key constraints to success. First, public sector reforms combine significant short-term costs with only long-term prospects for meaningful gains. This makes it unattractive for many governments to make the initial investment needed to realize returns within the confines of their limited term of office (usually 4-5 years). In any case, significant improvements in the functional capability of the state may take as much as 10 to 20 years to be realized and for most countries, this is clearly beyond the life-cycle of a single government's term of office (see Pritchett & de Weijer, 2010). Secondly, the extent to which corrupt patron-client relationships prevail before reform may also determine the extent to which the public sector serves purposes of rent-seeking and therefore, may engender resistance among the elites in society who prefer to maintain the status quo. The Nigerian and Zambian case studies demonstrate this clearly.

A third dimension relates to the nature of the civil servant in Africa who is often perceived as naturally gravitating towards inertia and therefore, would choose resistance to change or bureaucratic inertia as the first choice in the face of proposed institutional transformation. A fourth factor relates to the lack of local demand for reforms due to limited development of civil society activism. Another dimension relates to the lack of specific institutional incentives for political decision-makers stemming from electoral and party systems as well as political regimes which can make it more or less feasible to initiate public sector reforms.

A common thread running through all the dimensions considered as key to successful reform is the need for a committed political leadership that is willing to sacrifice short-term gains for the long-term good of the nation. This suggests that the presence of committed champions in the hierarchies of power who are prepared to do whatever it takes to attain success, in a context in which the broader majority of civil society makes a meaningful contribution, is an absolutely necessary ingredient. Case studies in this paper make reference to several envisaged reforms that were carefully planned but never fully implemented due to lack of political will. Jerry Rawlings' remarkable achievements in Ghana's economic recovery produced one of the few success stories of a fully committed leadership leading to reasonable returns on institutional reform in Africa (see Chazan et al., 1992; Jeffries, 1993).

Evidence from the three broad phases of institutional reform in Africa articulated in this paper also suggests the need for adhering to a set of values in public sector management that may be generally applicable in various contexts. If '*values*' are conceptualised as essential components of organisational culture and as being instrumental in determining, guiding and informing behaviour, then they assume fundamental utility in enhancing performance of the sector (see Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). A global concern over the pervasiveness of corruption and the need for '*good governance*' has also led to renewed emphases on values across the world. In almost all cases, adherence to high-level public service values can generate substantial public trust and confidence and conversely, weak application of values or promotion of inappropriate values can lead to reductions in essential elements of democratic governance, as well as to ethical and decision-making dilemmas (MacCarthaigh, 2008).

The specific set of core values to be pursued has also changed over time whenever a new framework for public sector management gains prominence. From both official and scientific publications, the values that seem to have withstood the test of time in the case study countries and elsewhere include the need to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in resource use and service delivery (*value-for-money*), impartiality, honesty, loyalty, risk-aversion, ensuring equity, adhering to hierarchy, integrity, accountability and fairness (ibid). With the advent of market-oriented and modernization approaches, new values have gained prominence. These include the need to ensure cost-recovery, to deploy results-based planning, customer-orientation, and more systematic methods of performance measurement in the public sector.

8. Recommendations

A number of key lessons emerging from this study enable one to outline some recommendations for more effective institutional reform and increased youth participation in such reform processes. Paying attention to the need for youth participation as well as the broader imperatives for civic engagement suggests that both *process* and *outcomes* of institutional reform matter. If the process is flawed and excludes key stakeholders such as the youth, the outputs and impacts of the reforms may also be irrelevant and inappropriate. If commitment to top-down and bottom-up approaches in planning cannot be sustained, the reforms can easily be undermined. In this respect, it is encouraging to note that, since the 1990s, policy making in some African countries, such as Ghana, Zambia and Tanzania has witnessed a gradual shift away from bureaucratic approaches towards directly engaging the citizenry through consultation and open public participation (see Kpessa, 2011). Therefore, mechanisms for transparency, democratic accountability and broad-based participation must be built into reform processes in order to maintain the momentum for reform and win allies inside and outside the government departments.

From both the literature and the case studies presented in this paper, it is clear that there is an urgent need to re-think public sector institutional reform in Africa in such a way that it effectively counters the weaknesses evident in earlier reform efforts. A citizen-centred reform model seems to present a good starting point for such a re-thinking as it would enable collective engagement and co-generation of knowledge that is critical for the success of the reforms. Inevitably, this requires creation of the right institutional environment for results-oriented reforms as well as creation of platforms for broader participation. This may also entail the development of participatory, localized dialogue platforms that embrace the views of the youth and other social groupings in society.

In this context, opportunities for youth to participate in the reform processes also depend largely on the political and cultural context. A democratic environment can be more favourable to participation in general. There is also need for the youth to be informed about the purpose, scope and procedures of the institutional reform process that they are expected to participate in. It should be clear right from the beginning what the potential impact of this participatory process is likely to be. Adopting a rights-based approach to youth and broader civic participation could make a significant difference. Therefore, the youth should be approached as active agents who have the right to participate and be heard in national reform processes rather than merely as a problem to contend with. Specific mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure actual implementation of youth decisions. Through targeted training programmes and awareness-raising, the youth could also be systematically capacitated to participate more meaningfully in the reform processes.

9. Conclusion

This paper has interrogated the political economy, challenges and dynamics of institutional reform in Africa. It has also explored and articulated some of the opportunities for youth participation evident in this landscape, including understanding why progress on public sector reforms has been difficult to achieve in many countries, and typical obstacles that may confront different countries. Key lessons from the analysis include the need for targeting the so-called *low-hanging fruits* since early and good results help to build support for more ambitious and large-scale reforms; and the need to ensure that the majority of the citizens (including the youth) get a good understanding of the key reform issues through inclusive debate and participatory approaches that engender broad ownership of the reform process. This includes developing and implementing a comprehensive and coherent national youth policy that articulates how and when the youth will contribute to national development processes and decision making. Another articulated need is for the reform process to be locally-driven and increase the public’s sense of ownership to ensure commitment to implementation and sustainability (home-grown solutions). The need for sustained commitment to reforms by the politicians and national leaders to raise the credibility and sustainability of the process is also now an basic necessity for success. It is also necessary to try and identify major institutional impediments right from the outset in order to establish realistic expectations for reform outcomes.

Overall, the experiences from the selected case studies suggest that for a reform program to succeed, it is essential to establish a favorable political environment that offers incentives for reform (or at least does not actively work against it). At the same time, the reform process itself should be treated as a gradual experiential approach that creates space for the government to adapt policies to its own country circumstances while building the required local support. Resources should be mobilized to educate the public, politicians and the bureaucracy on how the reforms are expected to work and what kind of supportive actions are required from all stakeholders for benefits to be realized. There is also need to recognize that, in practice, institutional reform is not simply a mechanical process of implementing pre-designed programmes. In many cases, people matter and are at the centre of the opportunities for success. That is why it is essential to consider youth as partners and leaders in the reform and national development processes. In cases where institutional reforms are implemented, youth participation becomes precisely about good governance, enabling disadvantaged voices to be heard and ensuring the accountability of those tasked to manage public sector resources.

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