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*CHALLENGES IN THE BUILDING OF PUBLIC
SERVICE CAPACITY IN AFRICA*

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CHALLENGES IN THE BUILDING OF PUBLIC SERVICE CAPACITY IN AFRICA

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I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of “capacity building” has become one of the popular phrases in the development discourse. According to InfoCotonou (Sept., 2003), a newsletter of the European Centre for Development Policy Management, “governments, non-state actors, and (foreign) donors all tend to invoke capacity problems to explain why policies fail to deliver, or why aid is not generating sustainable impacts. Reports of conferences on every possible subject generally include a host of capacity building recommendations in their conclusions. Capacity issues are omnipresent in national development plans, poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSP), and in all sorts of donor policy documents”. Economic and social conditions in Africa are such that the continent has continued to manifest glaring features of economic and social difficulties, underdevelopment, and marginalisation in the global economy. The specific features that the continent has continued to exhibit include low growth rates and declining per capita incomes, high incidence of poverty, rapid population growth, environmental degradation, external debt burden, large fiscal and external imbalances, undiversified production structures and heavy reliance on traditional and low-productivity primary product exports, and official development assistance.

One major factor that has been acknowledged to have accounted for this unpleasant state of affairs is lack of or inadequate capacity. Indeed, the African Capacity Building Initiative which gave birth to the African Capacity Building Foundation in Harare is based on the proposition that one of the root causes of the economic crisis facing Africa has been the lack of capacity in governments and institutions to respond quickly and decisively to a rapidly changing global environment (ACBF, 1995: 1). Consensus seems to have been reached by various stakeholders that adequate capacity or capacity building is the missing link in Africa’s development that needs to be bridged. Severe capacity deficiencies have been found to constrain progress in the spheres of policy and programme formulation, articulation and implementation, management and monitoring of the economy, mobilization of resources for development, and effective participation of the various countries in the globalisation process, among others. Public policy issues are inadequately analyzed in many African countries because (i) there are not enough people with the appropriate qualifications and skills to do policy analysis and management; (ii) there are very limited well-equipped institutions that offer the necessary tools and facilities for the few public policy analysts and managers; and (iii) African governments have tended to

rely more on expatriate technical assistance instead of utilizing local expertise and as a result have not invested sufficiently in the education and training of indigenous experts and in local policy analysis institutions. It is thus hardly surprising that the collapse of educational systems and training capacity as well as other institutions has considerably diminished the capacity of African countries to effectively redress their capacity constraints. Thus, the widespread interest in capacity building is not in any way misplaced in view of the critical need to significantly enhance the ability of African countries, institutions and people to manage development on their own in a smooth, efficient and sustainable way and in the process achieve the cherished goal of development.

In the rest of the paper, we, in Section 2, put the discussion in context by first clarifying the concept and significance of capacity and capacity building. This is followed in Section 3 with a discussion of the status of public sector capacity and capacity building in Africa. This is done in order to put the capacity building challenges in perspective. Then, against the background of the development challenges of the continent, the focus and direction of capacity building is examined in Section 4. Following this is a brief discussion of the specific case of capacity building in Nigeria's public sector. The final section contains concluding remarks.

2. CONCEPTS OF CAPACITY AND CAPACITY BUILDING

2.1 Capacity

The concept of capacity has been defined as the power of something to perform or to produce. From the perspective of the United Nations Development Programme, it is the ability of individuals and organizations or units to perform functions effectively, efficiently or sustainably. And from the development literature, is the reference to capacity as the range of human, institutional and organizational resources and practices that enable a country to achieve the goals of development. Capacity thus has both human and institutional dimensions with the following components:

- skilled human resources
- leadership and vision
- viable institutions
- financial and material resources
- effective work practices, including systems, processes, procedures and appropriate incentives.

Human capacity refers to the stock of trained, skilled and productive individuals capable of performing the essential tasks necessary for a country to achieve its development goals. On the other hand, institutional capacity refers to the available organizational structures and processes which facilitate the achievement of developmental goals. Human capacity is, however, central to development. Nevertheless, institutional capacity complements the human factor and both are mutually reinforcing. They are not ends in themselves as they are only of value when they are placed at the service of the wider society.

The significance of adequate capacity in the realization of development objectives cannot be over-emphasized. Adequate capacity:

- (i) engenders self-reliance, which is the product of the ability of the people and institutions to make choices, take decisions and actions to realize their chosen goals;
- (ii) provides a country and its people the ability to design, appropriately sequence, implement and monitor sound macroeconomic and sectoral policies for proper economic management;
- (iii) enables a country and its people to identify and analyze problems, evolve solutions and implement them effectively; and
- (iv) enhances a country's ability for policy analysis and development management generally.

2.2 Capacity Building

In view of the significance of adequate national capacity, capacity building for economic and social development is crucial. It entails deliberate and/or incidental endeavours, through investment in people, institutions and practices, to enhance human abilities and institutional capabilities in the pursuit of development. It is a process of incremental acquisition of capacities through establishing and/or strengthening organizations to perform key functions, improving the vision of leadership with respect to these functions, strengthening the commitment of leaders to the achievement of these functions, increasing the resources available to these organizations and functions by strengthening fund mobilization and improving the resource allocation process, strengthening education and training to produce necessary skills, strengthening practices which enhance productivity and eliminating those which impede good governance. The human dimension of capacity building is the process by which a nation develops and increases its human resource capabilities through the inculcation of relevant general and technical knowledge, skills and competencies to efficiently realize set goals. On the other hand, institutional capacity building involves the development of the capabilities of organizations and institutions with a view to enabling them accomplish their set objectives.

In a developing economy context, the processes of capacity building thus involve the following:

- (i) human development, especially developing new skills through education and training, strengthening of existing skills and structures; provision of basic health, nutrition and technical skills;
- (ii) developing new structures and reorganization of existing institutional structures and processes to create a context for more efficient performance and in which skilled workers can function effectively;
- (iii) reordering of incentive systems for more intensive and efficient utilization of existing skills and institutions;
- (iv) evolving a political leadership that understands the need for effective institutions; and
- (v) capacity utilization. This is a very crucial part of capacity building. Capacity created and developed would imply a huge waste of resources if it is not effectively utilized. Brain drain is often the by-product of

non-capacity utilization. Therefore, capacity building and utilization must proceed simultaneously not only at an accelerated pace, but also in an incremental and coordinated fashion.

At this juncture, the specific roles of training and research institutes in capacity building need to be underscored. Training and research institutes are veritable instruments for achieving the goals of capacity building. Educational institutions contribute to capacity building by providing all kinds of training leading to the acquisition of knowledge and technical and management skills. And according to the World Bank (1998), "local training and research institutions transmit the skills required for managing development, by offering specialized training in niche fields, keeping in touch with the best international practice and knowledge providers, developing need-specific policy research, and providing the intellectual input for reform".

The significance of research in capacity building hinges on its role in the advancement of knowledge and creation of improved ways of doing things. Specifically, research institutions contribute to capacity building through their research outputs in various ways (Obadan and Uga, 1997):

- (i) policy research outputs, by serving as inputs in the policy-making process, enhance the capabilities of policymakers to formulate and manage public policies. Policy research not only identifies the need for policy, but also provides analysis of expected benefits and costs of the policy, as well as states options and makes practical, as opposed to general, recommendations for easy decisions and actions;
- (ii) autonomous policy research institutions and research units within tertiary institutions can enhance their own relevance by providing technical assistance and making their research findings available to policy analysis units and individual policymakers in the public service;
- (iii) research outputs, particularly in the form of published works, enhance the capacity of training institutions to produce high-level manpower; and
- (iv) most importantly, outputs of scientific and technological research assist manufacturers and other producers to produce goods and services that improve the welfare of the people.

The implication of the foregoing is that national development takes place through institutions, with the active contribution of human capital. Human capital development and institution-building are crucial for development. Therefore, institutions, once created, should not be allowed to decay. The government must nurture institution-building.

3. CAPACITY SITUATION IN AFRICA

3.1 Steady Deterioration in Capacity

Many decades after African countries attained political independence, the issue of adequate capacity, in terms of building and utilization, has continued to be regarded as the missing link or factor in the development of the continent. It is true that at independence, African countries inherited from the colonial governments neither educated and skilled populace nor strong institutions. Indeed, during the colonial era, capacity building for economic development was relegated in favour of maintenance of law and order. But the situation changed significantly after independence with emphasis shifting to formal education and training, for building skills, as the means of human capacity building particularly for administrative purposes. But the new challenges occasioned by the realities of independence were not just administrative, but also economic, social and political. There was the felt need to address capacity problems in these spheres. In particular, the need to address the capacity problem in the areas of policy formulation and implementation and development management, led to the establishment and expansion of educational institutions including those for higher education, and the welcoming of donor interventions through technical assistance. It was against this background that several excellent universities flourished in the 1960s and 1970s. Among these are the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), Makerere University (Uganda), University of Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), University of Nairobi (Kenya), etc. But then, since the 1980s, higher education in particular and other levels of education, in general, have suffered severe decline and heavy damage with adverse effects on the continent's analytical and management capacity. The factors that have caused the sharp declines in higher education include declining public sector budgets, high growth in the number of tertiary institutions and rapidly expanding student enrolment. The impact of these factors has been devastating on quality of output such that in most countries too many poorly trained graduates enter the labour market each year. Also, many first-grade institutions of higher learning have suffered from so much neglect and underfunding such that infrastructure, library or staff have not been adequately maintained. National management development institutions in some countries have suffered the same fate. It must be noted that some of the post-independence policies pursued by African countries exacerbated the capacity weakness. For instance, many countries, in the context of public sector-led development and the quest to control the commanding heights of the economies, got involved directly in commercial and productive activities. And with the resultant expansion of the public sectors, the limited indigenous technical and managerial capacities were stretched to breaking points.

Although multilateral and bilateral donors, as well as private foundations, have provided and continue to provide human resource and institutional support to Africa, the results have generally not been very encouraging. Indeed, according to a 1987 World Bank Report, "World Bank Technical Assistance Activities and Issues" (FY 82-86) (Sept. 1987), "From an operational point of view, the record of technical assistance, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, is perceived by the World Bank, the UNDP, donors and recipients as unsatisfactory". Thus, even though technical assistance has been

used by many African countries as a vehicle for capacity building, with billions of US dollars spent every year on this form of assistance, the benefits to African countries have on balance been mixed (Mseka, 1997: 2). Not only have Africa's development partners often aggravated the capacity problem through their operational practices, technical assistance has often tended to be supply-driven, or imposed as a price for financial assistance rather than as a response to local demands. Besides, projects have been over-designed, reflecting an imperfect understanding of the local institutional and cultural environment. And very frequently, lack of technical assistance coordination among the donors has overburdened African institutions and available skilled manpower, and too often aid agencies have undermined the capacity of core ministries by setting up their own project management units (World Bank, 1991: 12). Thus, contrary to the expectations of Africa's development partners and of African countries themselves, technical assistance has not resulted in building up the required indigenous capacities in terms of skills, knowledge and institutions. Indeed, it has become increasingly evident that not enough local skills and institutions have been systematically built, technologies have not been transferred effectively, and indigenous capacities have not been adequately developed. Instead, according to the ACBF (2001: 1), after decades of development assistance, nearly all African countries manifested weak capacity at both the institutional and human levels. In addition, most countries tended to rely too heavily on foreign technical assistance in their development programmes. This was the situation that the African Capacity Building Initiative and the follow-up initiatives were geared towards redressing. In this regard, the basic purpose of the African Capacity Building Initiative was to build, over the long-term, a critical mass of professional African policy analysts and economic managers who would be able to better manage the development process, and to enhance the more effective utilization of already trained African analysts and managers.

It must be stressed that the nature and dimensions of Africa's capacity problems have been borne out of empirical studies and investigations. For example, the World Bank's study of long-term development prospects for Sub-Saharan Africa (From Crisis to Sustainable Growth, 1989) found that the capacity for sound policy design and policy sustainability is in critical short supply in almost every sector of most African countries, and then called for substantially increased investment in indigenous human capital and institutions. Also, as a prelude to the establishment of the Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa (PACT) in the late 1990s, at the initiative of the African Governors of the World Bank, who are mostly Ministers of Finance and Economic Planning and Development, capacity assessments were undertaken in a sample of twelve countries representing the various regions - (the Burkina Faso, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia). Besides, a Consultative Seminar was held in Mauritius to exchange views with experts and government officials from the Far East (Indonesia, Korea Malaysia and Singapore) on how those countries had successfully built and utilized their capacity and what lessons African countries could draw from their experience. The findings from the various efforts revealed many things, four of which are particularly notable as follows:

- capacity building is the missing link in Africa's development;
- the capacity issue is complex and cuts across all sectors of African economies;
- the capacity problem diminishes performance in the entire range of sectors that apply to national development from policy analysis to implementation of basic social services; and
- African ownership and leadership in capacity building is a key to future success.

From the various capacity assessments, it has become clear that despite years of intervention by both African governments and development partners one vital capacity gap that is not being adequately filled is capacity for economic policy analysis and development management. Most countries still do not have a critical mass of top-grade analysts and managers who can pilot their economies through the series of shocks and crises that confront them from time to time. And so, according to the African Capacity Building Initiative, critical public policy issues are inadequately analyzed, little relevant and timely research is done by African universities and other centres of policy research; African data sources are generally inadequate or unreliable; and high level African officials in key economic ministries are sometimes poorly trained and equipped. It is hardly surprising that expatriate advisers have been increasingly called upon to substitute for the lack of or weak indigenous capacity. But it is an inappropriate strategy to use expatriates as a first choice rather than a last resort. Therefore, it is imperative to design technical assistance to build domestic capacity and institutions which African countries must be prepared to make full use of.

3.2 Explaining the Capacity Weaknesses

In explaining the serious capacity deficiencies which constitute a scourge to Africa's development efforts, it is important to underscore the role of the un conducive environment. An enabling environment is important for capacity building and utilization. Not only does an enabling environment facilitate capacity building by providing stability and long-term demand which help to safeguard sustainable development programmes, it also ensures the nurturing and ultimate utilization of available capacity. But what has been found is that even where some capacity has been built, available skills and talents are often underutilized, misallocated, or even prevented from being put to work as a result of a negative economic, institutional, and political environment. In addition, management is poor, remuneration low, recruitment and promotion is based on personal connections and loyalties rather than on merit, and there is lack of professional standards of performance (Report of African Governors of the World Bank, 1996: 16). Under the circumstances of non-effective utilization of built capacity, such capacity becomes a monumental waste.

In general, the environment for capacity building in Africa has not been enabling, being characterized by the following:

- (i) Political instability. This has tended to deter the development of institutions and investment in long-term capacity building projects. Very importantly,

the political situation in many African countries has not been accommodating to the growth or sustenance of independent human or institutional capacity. Negative political attitudes have been carried by some governments to the point of intolerance of objective policy research and analysis – to the extent of ignoring or even suppressing objective policy analysis. The unfavourable political climate has diminished the expressed demand for policy analysis and advice, has lowered morale in government ministries, and has led to the neglect of education, research and statistical institutions (World Bank, 1991: 10).

- (ii) Poor Governance. This has been widely fingered as the root of Africa's capacity problems. According to the Report of the African Governors of the World Bank on the Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa (1996: vi):
- “in most countries, narrow political considerations have taken precedence over the public interest and broader issues of development, power is personalized rather than imbedded in rules and institutions, patronage and corruption pervade administrative and political culture, and there is no accountability and transparency in the public sector. Amidst all these, the state has been extended well beyond its technical and managerial capacities. The failure of governance has created an environment that is antithetical to the development of capacity in both the public and private sectors, and in civil society, and has contributed to the collapse of the educational system”.

Therefore, it is imperative to institute good governance, manifested by the five pillars of accountability, transparency, openness, predictability, and the rule of law. These remain central to successful capacity building efforts.

- (iii) Financial Constraints. Financial resources for intervention in capacity building activities have been and continue to be grossly inadequate. The economic crisis which has afflicted Africa for quite some time has affected capacity building efforts adversely. Severe terms of trade shocks, reflecting steep declines in export earnings, falling per capita incomes, fiscal crisis and burdensome external debts have led to budget cuts throughout the public sector resulting in serious shortages of funds for training, research, institution building and education in general. In ministries and agencies in most countries, budget cuts have been made in all areas: maintenance, equipment, supplies, training, and staff development. In-house facilities for training of staff are practically non-existent. A disproportionate part of national recurrent budgets (over 80 percent) goes to cover wages and personnel costs, leaving insufficient funds to meet routine operating expenses. Resources available from the donor community have been dwindling and their flow has been occurring with increasing constraints. Indeed, the weaknesses of donor funding and technical assistance have already been highlighted.

- (iv) Problem of skills retention and utilization in the Public Services. Reference has already been made to this. It is one reason why the task of capacity building will remain a long-term challenge. As the African Capacity Building Foundation (1996: 1) has observed: "The retention and intensive utilization of skills has not benefited from the implementation of civil service reforms in a large number of countries. This is irrespective of government's efforts in this direction. Seemingly, reform of the civil services has focused more on downsizing of personnel, the merger/restructuring of ministries and changes in the nomenclature of public officials. Performance-related reforms such as enhanced salaries and benefits, continuous retraining programmes, professionalization of tasks, institutionalization of performance measurement and monitoring systems, provision and maintenance of infrastructure, etc, have received only scant attention"; and
- (v) Unstable economic policy environment. This has tended to be prominent in a number of countries with detrimental effects to capacity building efforts. Erratic and discretionary socio-economic development policies do not provide the proper enabling environment for long-term capacity building activities. Under conditions of economic uncertainty, there is a tendency to favour short-term gains over long-term risks. Therefore, stability in economic policies is a prerequisite for an environment which is conducive to private investment and sustainable growth.

4. DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND CAPACITY BUILDING FOCUS

4.1 The Development Challenges

For African countries, capacity building must not be seen as an end in itself, but a means to an end, namely, the attainment of respectable socio-economic development or in the context of current imperatives, the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Therefore, public service capacity building needs to be considered against the background of the development challenges and the associated capacity building requirements. Indeed, a workable capability strategy must be based on a larger vision of economic and social development, and on capacity needs implied by such a vision. This means that capacity building must become an integral part of the development agenda.

What then are the subsisting development challenges, reflecting the unacceptable economic and social situation in Africa? These can be summarised as follows:

- (i) how to reverse the phenomenon of low economic growth rates and poor performance/decline in almost all sectors. As the World Bank's World Development Indicators, 2002 has reported "Sub-Saharan Africa has been nearly stagnant, with less than 0.2 per cent annual growth over the same period (past 40 years). Fourteen major African countries had negative growth. Even such resource-rich economies as Ghana, Nigeria and Zambia, classified

as lower-middle-income economies in the 1960s, have become considerably poorer, in some cases, because of political instability". Other factors, however, include poor economic policies and lack of capacity to reap from the benefits of globalization.

- (ii) significant reduction of poverty and backwardness which stand in stark contrast to the prosperity of the developed world; Africa remains the poorest continent despite being one of the most richly endowed regions of the world; Approximately 50 per cent of Africans are income-poor;
- (iii) reversing the poor social and economic conditions under which 340 million people, or half of the population, live on less than US\$1.0 a day. The mortality rate of children under five years of age is 140 per 1000, and life expectancy at birth is only 54 years. Only 58 per cent of the population has access to safe water. The rate of literacy for people over 15 is 41 per cent, etc;
- (iv) elimination of the heavy external debt burden. Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries are among the most indebted of developing countries, considering standard debt indicators and income levels. In the year 2000, for example, SSA's external debt stock stood at US\$215.8 billion and out of 34 countries classified by the World Bank as severely indebted low-income countries, 28 are in Africa. African countries are thus not only among the poorest, they also suffer the biggest debt burden;
- (v) halting the malaise of marginalisation and exclusion in a rapidly globalising world. While, for example, the exports of industrialized countries grew at over 7 per cent per annum in the last four decades, those of Africa, suffered a decline of about 1 per cent per annum within the same period. Besides, while the share of Asia in world manufactured exports grew from 16 to about 27 per cent, African countries' share declined from 4 to less than 2 per cent (World Bank, 1997 and 2000). Africa's inability to participate effectively and profitably in the globalisation process derives from its lack of capacity, coupled with the structure of its production, trade and finance, as well as a number of structural impediments to growth and development in the form of debt burden, unfavourable terms of trade, rapid population growth, and failure of political leadership. Not to be underrated is the role of slavery, corruption and economic mismanagement in stalling the development of the continent;
- (vi) Other development challenges that Africa needs to address with adequate capacity include the HIV/AIDS pandemic; conflict prevention; resolution and management, including post-conflict reconstruction; private sector development; revitalization of African universities and research institutions, and promotion of regional cooperation and integration as a major response to the forces of globalisation.

In the light of the above challenges and the general social and economic crisis confronting Sub-Saharan Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) correctly focuses on the need to achieve high rates of growth (7 per cent per annum up to the year 2015), achievement of the MDGs, halting of the marginalisation of Africa in the globalisation process, and development of capacity to sustain growth at levels required to achieve poverty reduction and sustainable development which in turn depends on other factors such as infrastructure, capital accumulation, human capital, institutions, structural diversification, competitiveness, health, and good stewardship of the environment.

4.2 The Public Service and Capacity Building Focus

The public service in every country plays a major role in the policy process and development management. Indeed, whatever may be the prevailing paradigm or development philosophy, the government under the framework of the public sector plays a critical leadership role in the society's socio-economic development efforts. And the ability of the state to propel economic growth and productivity, as well as organize its people depends on the degree to which it is able to establish political legitimacy, mobilize popular participation as well as direct and assist its citizens in the pursuit of common national goals (Oshionebo, 2003: 40). The civil service and the public service at large assist the government in fulfilling these obligations through public policy articulation and implementation. In specific terms, the public service is expected to be:

- (a) development-conscious and performance-oriented;
- (b) able to formulate policies and programmes and implement government decisions and measures with minimum delay and least cost;
- (c) heavily dependent on scientific approach in the management of public affairs and operation;
- (d) staffed with high-calibre and well-trained personnel with emphasis on professionalism and specialization;
- (e) responsive and sensitive to the wishes and aspirations of the people and to changing circumstances in the domestic and global environment;
- (f) constantly up-to-date on the political, economic, social, scientific and strategic developments within and outside the country; and
- (g) capable of continuously improving its own dynamics.

And in aiming to promote societal well-being, good governance and development, public policies deal with a wide range of societal issues – economic, social, cultural, scientific and technological, and environmental, for example, in various sectors and spheres such as agriculture, industry, defence, health, population, social welfare, education, transport, utilities, housing, environment, political structures and organisations, law and order, and regulation of economic and social activities (Obadan, 2002: 15).

In the light of the foregoing, and the need for provision of some services to the general public coupled with efficient administration of governmental activities, capacity building in the public service should necessarily focus on producing an efficient and effective public sector so that the economic, political, and social environment and policies necessary for sustained growth and development can be effectively maintained. In other words, the public service requires a critical mass of expertise to articulate, analyse and implement development policies, programmes and projects in various sectors. This critical mass needs to be supported by a high-quality education and training system, for the development/strengthening of skills, so that the countries can gain a firm grip on their economic destinies.

The various national assessment teams that preceded the establishment of PACT confirmed that in the public sector, the capacity to design and implement policies, manage and monitor the economy, design and implement budgets, mobilize resources, and manage external resources are weak and non-existent. Furthermore, little attention has been paid to staff or skills development in the civil service, and the culture of accountability and meritocracy has practically been forsaken in favour of short-term gains and opportunities. With education

and training having deteriorated badly across the whole of Africa, the quality and relevance of education have declined due to many factors (lack of qualified and motivated teachers, poor instructional materials, unsuitable curricula, and poor facilities). While post-secondary and vocational training institutions lack the capacity to provide adequate training, the universities are barely functioning. Besides, judicial, legal, and regulatory capacity has been sorely lacking, a factor at the root of the poor governance that has undermined the development of capacity and the efficient use of existing capacity.

Thus, it is clear that capacity constraints have been pervasive. But in view of the competing demand on resources, it is desirable to focus public service capacity building on the most critical areas, which include the following:

- economic policy analysis and management including monitoring and evaluation;
- economic and financial management including auditing, accounting and accountability;
- professional education that is relevant to needs, especially, in the spheres of science and technology;
- public administration and management including public sector reform;
- public policy analysis of national parliaments;
- legal and regulatory system;
- rebuilding/rehabilitation of institutions, and
- information technology.

Even among these areas the most attention needs to be paid to policy analysis and development management. In the past, limited policy analysis and management capacity in Sub-Saharan Africa had weakened the sub-region's ability to respond and adjust to widespread economic dislocations and shocks such as changing commodity prices in terms of boom and bust patterns, changing oil prices, burdensome external debt, etc. Indeed, as was observed earlier, one of the root causes of the economic crisis that African countries have had to grapple with is the lack of capacity in governments and institutions to respond quickly and decisively to a rapidly changing global economic environment. Very importantly, a focus on capacity building for policy analysis and development management is important for other reasons. First, development depends on the capacity of a society to analyze, adapt, initiate and manage change. Effective policy analysis and economic management are necessary for successful development in all sectors – agriculture, mining, industry, the social services, environment, etc. Each of these and other sectors require the capacity to analyse as well as formulate responsive policies and to implement them. Strengthening these core skills will not only help create an environment that will benefit Africa's socio-economic development, but will add professionalism and quality to the management of individual sectors (World Bank, 1991: 6). Secondly, African countries are in dire need of policies that are sustainable. Policy sustainability requires a strong sense of African ownership. This can be achieved if the policies are produced through indigenous research and public policy design capacity. Thirdly, and very importantly, African countries need to have continual access to policy analysis and development management skills and institutions as they

address major policy questions. The paucity of these indigenous capacities and the weaknesses of local institutions in SSA have resulted, in numerous cases, in a flawed policy process which, in turn, has led to severely negative effects on development. Finally, the growing number of reform programmes that have been initiated by African governments in recent years, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDs) in Nigeria, for example, since 2003, has tended to increase the demand for policy analysis capacity and management skills. Over the long-term this demand for analytic and management skills can only be sustained through strengthening of local capacity to identify and discuss problems, devise appropriate solutions and effectively implement them. This means that a rewarding strategy for African countries will be to establish or strengthen national economic management institutions.

5. CAPACITY BUILDING AND UTILIZATION IN NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR

5.1 Status of Capacity Building

Capacity building in Nigeria's public sector is geared towards the effective management of development through sound policy design and management, good governance and effective administration of government activities, effective project and programmes implementation/execution, and efficient provision of some services to the general public. All these are with a view to improving the living conditions of the populace which is the ultimate goal of the public service.

Like all other African countries, Nigeria, at independence, inherited from the colonial masters capacity gaps arising from weak structures and institutions. But since independence, several capacity building initiatives have resulted not only in investments in education but also in the reform of public administration and even in capacity enhancement in the private sector. Emphasis, in the sphere of human capacity building, has been on formal education and training for building skills to meet development needs. Apart from the establishment of tertiary institutions to provide academic training leading to the award of degrees, diplomas and certificates, there are also a number of post-experience and management development institutions to cater for the in-service and on-the-job capacity building needs of public and private sector employees. Some of these institutions are the National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA) which was merged with the Centre for Management Development in March 2005, Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Agricultural and Rural Management Institute (ARMTI), Centre for Management Development (CMD) and Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM). The latter two offer general management training to private sector officials. There is also the national Directorate of Employment which was set up to provide trade skills to school leavers to become self employed. Besides, as at today there are nearly 60 universities in Nigeria among which are those providing traditional education as well as the specialized ones in the areas of science and technology, agriculture, etc. Polytechnics and Colleges of Education are also in very large numbers.

In spite of the existence of the institutions, past capacity building initiatives have not succeeded in effectively addressing the capacity needs of the country particularly in the face of declines in built capacity, non-maintenance of institutions and collapse of infrastructure. The environment for capacity building has, over the years, deteriorated significantly. The massive public sector intervention during the oil boom era of the 1970s led to the expansion of the economy and the creation of infrastructure and facilities. But with the collapse of the international crude oil market in the early 1980s and the attendant recession, public sector capacity suffered serious reversals in terms of critical shortages and inefficiencies. The situation was further accentuated by the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the second half of the 1980s. Consequently, public capital spending on education in relation to the GDP has been on the decline. All the levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) have experienced serious neglect and decay. The poor standard of lower level of education has permeated the higher levels with adverse effects on the quality of human resources going into the public sector. Yet, in-service training for public sector staff has been grossly inadequate because of under-funding. The same underfunding also affects very profoundly the operations of government-owned capacity building institutions which have witnessed excruciating neglect and decay, such that most of their infrastructural facilities are in very bad shapes and in need of replacement/refurnishing while staff morale is low. What has been observed is that annually, the public service makes budget provisions for capacity building. But once resources become scarce, the vote for training and staff development becomes one of the first casualties in terms of reduction. And very often, the little money that is allocated is either not released at all or is released late and piece-meal. In some establishments, money allocated for capacity building efforts is vired to other purposes not relevant to staff development (Williams, 1997: 8). And so, in the public sector, serious capacity gaps exist in most ministries and agencies. The quality of technical knowledge and skills as well as the quantity of the available manpower has been adjudged to be inadequate.

- According to sources attributed to the Federal Character Commission, the consolidated number of employees in the Federal Public Service, including government parastatals and state-owned companies, decreased from 501,794 in 1996 to 238,372 in 1999 against an established position of 259,753 (Nigeria/World Bank, 2000: 42-43).
- Indeed, the National Capacity Assessment Report (Nigeria/World Bank, 2000) reveals inadequacies in capacity building and utilization. And these have negatively affected the way public resources are managed and coordinated in the country.
- Some of the specific revelations are as follows:
 - lopsided staff structure with staff concentration in semi-skilled and unskilled labour category, while qualified staff was lacking in critical areas such as economics, finance, policy analysis, general management and information technology. While the civil service is overstaffed at the lower levels, it is overworked at the higher levels;
 - more than 70 per cent of the institutions sampled could not meet their training needs;

- the ratio of trained employees to total staff strength was very low and in some cases, very insignificant and the reasons adduced for this included lack of funds;
- Even at the state government level, capacity gaps are also quite serious. An interim report of a survey of Osun State Civil Service by NCEMA and ASCON in 1999 showed that capacity gaps ranged between 10 and 84.2 per cent for ministries, with the highest gap being experienced by the Ministry of Education. Such gaps were attributed to embargo on employment, voluntary retirement, budget constraints and non-availability of infrastructure, among others. In this same State, about 40 per cent of the staff surveyed felt that knowledge and skills acquired through education and training were not being fully utilized because of reasons ranging from lack of facilities to work with to unconducive working environment, office politics, discrimination, lack of cooperation and administrative bottlenecks.

As was observed before, capacity does not only have to be built. The capacity built has to be effectively utilized. In other words, producing skilled people, for example, is only half of the battle; the other half is to recruit, retain and use them, not so much by high pay but by ensuring that they have productive jobs, decent and satisfying work, and secure conditions. Effective utilization of capacity is better appreciated in successful development management, specifically, formulation and implementation of sound policies and programmes, effective management of financial and human resources in relation to the attainment of development goals, etc. But then, there has been the problem of inadequate utilization of indigenous expertise or built capacity in Nigeria, e.g. in the areas of medical personnel, engineers and scientists. This has manifested in the high turnover of skilled and technical staff and the phenomenon of heightened brain drain, occasioned by poor remuneration, poor work environment/inadequate working facilities and some government policies, e.g. SAP policies.

The National Capacity Assessment Report (2000) revealed the following, among others:

- adequate attention was not given to assigning staff to related jobs after training, and this was not unconnected to lack of facilities;
- the majority of respondents confirmed that their skill potentials were not effectively utilized. Only 50 percent of officers on salary grade levels 1-7 and 15 and above, and 40 percent of those on grade levels 8-14 confirmed full utilization of their potentials;
- resulting from lack of satisfaction, more than 60 per cent of the respondents indicated their willingness to quit the public service for better job opportunities elsewhere;
- the status of institutional facilities was found not to have helped capacity building and utilization. Vital facilities such as computers, data bank facilities, telephone/fax and photocopiers, were available only in few institutions. Even in these cases, they were not functional most of the time, due to factors such as inadequate funds, poor maintenance culture, lack of spare parts and lack of skilled manpower, general apathy to government property, etc.

5.2 Constraints to Capacity Building and Utilization in Nigeria's Public Sector

From the foregoing, it is clear that the task of building and strengthening as well as effective utilization of capacity in Nigeria faces challenges which are very likely to be enduring. First, is the challenge of coping with lean budgets for capacity building with the institutions already grappling with deterioration in facilities, shortage of teaching/training materials and poorly motivated staff. Financial resources for intervention in capacity building activities are grossly inadequate and the outlook of the overall revenue profiles of all the three tiers of government continues to be precarious. The serious underfunding of capacity building programmes and institutions becomes more pronounced when the government experiences fiscal crisis. Then, as was noted before, training becomes a first casualty during budget cuts. Thus, there is the challenge of giving adequate priority to the development and utilization of capacity. Secondly, is the challenge of skills retention particularly in the public sector. Poor conditions of service, brain drain and compulsory early retirement have heightened the turnover of skilled and technical personnel in the public sector.

Thirdly, is the challenge of adequately addressing the constraints on capacity utilization, especially poor remuneration; unconducive work environment; inadequate working facilities; some government policies, e.g. on staff rationalization/down-sizing, problem of measuring the real value of training; and budget constraints/under-funding.

Fourthly, are a host of other constraints that need to be addressed. They relate to the following:

- lack of adequate support for and investment in key institutions and processes in the public sector that are responsible for building and utilizing available capacity;
- the gradual dismantling of the enabling environment for maintaining existing capacity;
- waning enthusiasm for training such that even the 10 per cent of personnel budget expected to be spent on training in the public sector is most often not realized;
- lack of training needs assessment;
- proliferation of tertiary education institutions in relation to resource availability;
- declining quality of output of capacity building institutions;
- massive brain drain of the best professionals from the universities to greener pastures abroad;
- inadequate physical facilities as well as institutional constraints, reflected in poor policy performance, weak rules, procedures and processes, and corruption, among others; and
- inappropriate aid modalities (for example, the project approach), substitution of technical assistance, and poor governance conditions, leading to inefficient use of available capacities. The continued adoption of donor-driven approach to aid programme implementation as against

the national execution strategy has led to the use of a substantial proportion of donor funds on foreign experts and consultants with limited impact on local capacity building and utilization (Honourable Minister of National Planning, 1997: 14).

6. TOWARDS MEETING THE CAPACITY BUILDING CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

On the part of African governments, a number of specific actions and measures are indispensable, if adequate human and institutional capacity is to be available to the various countries to successfully implement economic and public sector reform programmes, design and implement policies, programmes and projects geared towards achieving respectable economic growth and diversification, sustainable development, poverty reduction, and effectively participate in the globalisation process. Indeed, the machinery for policy and programme planning and implementation needs to be well sharpened and focused for it to be responsive to contemporary situations. It is true that it is the political authorities that take policy decisions and give a sense of direction. But it is the public officers, particularly civil servants, that help the political masters to articulate and implement the policies. Therefore, the governments of African countries need to accord high priority to capacity building through adequate investment in human capital development and utilization, institutions and practices. The specific areas of crucial need include the following:

- (i) Provision of and/or improving the Enabling Socio-political and Economic environment. This entails the pursuit of high rate of economic growth as a basis for full utilization of built capacity. More importantly, it also involves ensuring political stability, economic policies stability, professionalism in the public service, improved government efficiency (good governance), widespread confidence in capacity building, and demand for local capacity. The latter is important because where there is a trade-off of indigenous capacity for technical assistance, short-term benefits may be obtained but at considerable long-term costs to national development. Specifically, where the demand for local capacity is weak as a result of foreign technical assistance, it will be difficult to sustain the momentum on local capacity building projects. Also, as part of the enabling environment, institutions of governance and development, whether public or private, need to be adequately nurtured in order to meet the goals of development.
- (ii) Recognition of human capacity building as a priority. Although training is not synonymous with capacity building, it should be seen as a key vehicle to make the public service professional, operationally effective and more result-oriented. Such training should therefore be systematic, progressional and aimed primarily at developing practical skills, knowledge and attitudes, as well as innovative and technological capabilities. The career development of public officers through systematic training should be regarded as a right.
- (iii) Increased Budgetary Allocation to Education and Staff Development. There is no doubt that, as at today, in most countries, there is a dire need to

rehabilitate and reform educational institutions and improve standards, as well as make educational curricular relevant to development needs on the continent. The governments should demonstrate commitment to capacity building in the public service by providing the required financial support to educational and management development institutions.

- (iv) Institutional Building and Strengthening. The exact measures here would depend on the situation in each country. But they could include the following:
- adequate funding of training and research activities;
 - rehabilitation of decaying institutions, supporting the establishment of new institutions and promoting a culture of maintenance and investment in such institutions;
 - adequate operations and maintenance budgets to enhance the utilization of capacity. This should facilitate the provision of complementarities, that is, necessary facilities for skills acquired to be used;
 - adequate remuneration packages that are performance and quality-based rather than just on paper qualifications; this will enhance retention of capacity;
 - merit-based recruitment of new qualified staff in relevant areas and appropriate redeployment policy and restructuring of departments.
- (v) Public Sector Reform – to raise substantially the quality of skills, infrastructure as well as efficiency and effectiveness of the public service. Reform effort is required in the spheres of:
- improving the pay and other incentives in the public service;
 - effectively re-skilling the service through transparent and competitive employment practices as well as professionalisation of tasks;
 - adequate and commensurate assignment of duties, such that officers trained would be deployed to posts to which the training applies. This will ensure maximum use of the knowledge and skills acquired; and
 - making training needs assessment of the individual and organization to provide the basis for courses selected for officers.
- (vi) Reversal of Brain Drain. African experts have emigrated out of the continent in droves for various reasons that are too well known, two of which are poor remuneration and unconducive environment including the element of political instability. Redressing the brain drain requires redressing the conditions which force people to leave their home countries, and encouraging those at home to stay. Specifically, strengthening of institutions, institution of appropriate mechanisms and incentives, as well as successful economic and political governance reforms are important for the reversal of the brain drain phenomenon.
- (vii) Reform of the Use of Technical Assistance. Although technical assistance has contributed to growth in Africa, it has equally caused a great deal of damage to capacity building efforts. Therefore, it needs to be reformed to redirect it to contribute effectively to the building of indigenous capacity in Africa and meeting development goals. First, donor agencies should embrace

the strategy of national execution in the administration of their assistance and pay particular attention to the building of local capacity for aid management. This means that donors should utilize the services of local nationals as consultants, experts and programme managers in preference to foreign experts. Secondly, existing local institutions should be the primary vehicles for, or key partners in the implementation of technical assistance programmes. Indeed, as the ACBF has advised (ACBF, 2002: 9), "Technical Assistance should be geared, where applicable, to strengthen local institutions to provide capacity-building programs rather than locating such programs in institutions abroad and financing participation by Africans"; and finally

- (viii) Political and Financial Support for African capacity building initiatives – ACBF and PACT. As at today, the two continent-wide capacity building initiatives are the African Capacity Building Initiative which gave birth to the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), and the Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa (PACT). Both have very strong external/donor involvement even though the latter was established at the instance of African Governors and Executive Directors of the World Bank. The ACBF was established in 1991 to develop and/or strengthen capacity for macroeconomic policy analysis and development management considering that skills in these areas were judged to be critically deficient. The Foundation accordingly started out with two-aspirations, namely:
- (a) the long-term development of a critical mass of indigenous top-flight policy analysts and development managers; and
 - (b) building, strengthening and eventual multiplication of reputable and sustainable centers of excellence and institutions at the national and regional levels upon which African countries would chart their paths to progress and prosperity.

By 1996 the persistent problem of inadequate capacity, characterized by lack of indigenous capacities at the levels of skills, knowledge and institutions, and which had permeated all sectors of the economies, led African Heads of State, the World Bank and its African Governors and Executive Directors to set up, in that year, PACT. PACT is seen as a broader integrated approach geared towards fostering capacity not only in the public sector but also in the private sector and civil society. Two of its specific objectives are: (i) to provide an integrated framework for a holistic approach to capacity building for good governance and sustainable development and (ii) build a partnership among African governments, the private sector, civil society and Africa's development partners which allows for effective coordination of interventions in capacity building.

The PACT has, since January 2000, been integrated into the ACBF's operations and this is expected to translate into a significant increase of ACBF's available resources for capacity building in Africa. But then, if the ACBF and PACT are to make significant impact on the capacity and development challenges of the continent, African governments must demonstrate greater political commitment and provide much more financial support, than

hitherto, to the initiatives. This will enhance ownership. For too long, African governments have tended to abandon capacity building initiatives to donors, and the limitations of technical assistance have been generally acknowledged.

7. CONCLUSION

Capacity is fundamental to a country's development. It is a vital resource which enables a country to identify and analyze problems, formulate solutions, and implement them. It is reflected in the combination of people, institutions and practices that permits countries to achieve their development goals. Yet, for too long, African countries have not given the required priority to long-term investments for good governance and capacity, thus leaving the continent deprived of the human and institutional capacity needed to withstand global economic storms that occur from time to time as well as respond appropriately to the challenges of globalization and national development. Therefore, African countries must make capacity building – investment in human capital, institutions and practices – a priority and central element in their development processes, particularly as many countries have embarked on economic reforms and liberalization. Adequate capacity is required to implement these programmes successfully and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The three components of capacity need to be addressed simultaneously considering their inter-relationship. Special attention needs to be paid to institutions whose existence or non-existence may significantly influence the ability of countries to develop.

For quite some time now, not much attention has been paid by most countries to the survival of institutions. Agencies/institutions are created but somehow neglected or allowed to decay such that not much attention is paid to the interrelationships and respective roles of the different institutions. It is therefore, necessary for each country to have an explicit strategy for institution building. It must be acknowledged that although all Sub-Saharan African countries need capacity building, the approach of each country in redressing the situation would need to be consistent with its own economic, political and social circumstances. It will be desirable therefore for each country to assess its own capacity needs and devise an appropriate strategy for building capacity. Whatever the strategy may be, however, the government's commitment to capacity building is crucial. This will be demonstrated when African governments recognize the need for capacity building themselves, accept the responsibility for leading efforts to achieve it, mobilize domestic resources in support of it and manage donor support in ways consistent with their own capacity development plans. By so doing, the chances of failure of capacity building efforts on the African continent will be minimal.

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ACBF WORKING PAPER SERIES

Overview: The ACBF Working Paper Series (AWPS) was launched in October 2004 as one of the instruments for disseminating findings of ongoing research and policy analysis works designed to stimulate discussion and elicit comments on issues relating to capacity building and development management in Africa. A product of the Knowledge Management and Program Support Department of the African Capacity Building Foundation, a Working Paper very often ends up as an Occasional Paper, a book or some other form of publication produced by the Foundation after a thorough review of its contents. It offers a means by which the Foundation seeks to highlight lessons of experience, best practices, pitfalls and new thinking in strategies, policies and programs in the field of capacity building based on its operations and those of other institutions with capacity building mandates. AWPS also addresses substantive development issues that fall within the remit of the Foundation's six core competence areas as well as the role and contribution of knowledge management in the development process.

Objectives: AWPS is published with a view to achieving a couple of objectives. Fundamental among these are the following:

- To bridge knowledge gaps in the field of capacity building and development management within the African context.
- To provide analytical rigor and experiential content to issues in capacity building and the management of development in Africa.
- To highlight best practices and document pitfalls in capacity building, the design, implementation and management of development policies and programs in Africa.
- To systematically review, critique and add value to strategies, policies and programs for national and regional economic development, bringing to the fore pressing development issues and exploring means for resolving them.

Focus: AWPS focuses on capacity building and development management issues. These are in the following areas:

- Capacity building issues in the following six core competence areas and their relevance to development management in Africa:
 - **Economic Policy Analysis and Development Management.**
 - **Financial Management and Accountability.**
 - **Enhancement and Monitoring of National Statistics.**
 - **Public Administration and Management.**
 - **Strengthening of Policy Analysis Capacity of National Parliaments.**
 - **Professionalization of the Voices of the Private Sector and Civil Society.**
- Engendering of development
- Development challenges, which include issues in poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS, governance, conflict prevention and management, human capital flight, private sector development, trade, regional corporation and integration, external debt management, and globalization, among others.

Orientation: Papers published by the Series are expected to be analytical and policy-oriented with concrete guide to strategies, policies, programs and instruments for strengthening the capacity building process and enhancing growth and development. In line with the objectives of the Series, such papers are expected to share experiences, information, and knowledge, disseminate best practices and highlight pitfalls in capacity building processes and/or the management of development policies and programs.

Contributions: AWPS welcomes contributions from policy analysts, development practitioners, policymakers, capacity building specialists, academics and researchers all over the world, but with a focus on the African context.