



The African City Transformation Blue Print: Public Sector Entrepreneurship and Civil Service Reform as Tools

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Abstract

To develop a practical developmental blueprint which African cities can adapt to transform themselves into prosperous, vibrant and resilient cities. This paper adopts a qualitative research approach by conducting focus group interviews with three experienced civil servants in order to develop a workable blueprint that can guide African city leaders to improve the lives of their citizens. This paper suggests that combining public sector entrepreneurship and civil service reform is a viable strategy to transform African cities. However, two important prerequisites must be in place for success to be attained: Leaders with the political will and moral courage to truly serve their people. African cities must become proactive and rely on the resources, human and otherwise, that they possess to make themselves more liveable, prosperous and resilient; the current popular strategy of relying on foreign assistance exclusively as the way to success is foolhardy and naïve. The road to prosperous, vibrant and resilient African cities is a long and painful one, but one which we must take for Africa to truly achieve its potential. African leaders and its people must be willing to take this hard road of insistence on excellence, meritocracy and vibrant public entrepreneurship and civil service reform for things to get better.

Keywords: *Public sector entrepreneurship, Civil service reform, Political will, Moral courage, African cities*

Introduction

Africa is mostly arable and is blessed with valuable minerals of all kind (Henry & Tubiana, 2018). By all estimation, African cities should be among the most prosperous and vibrant in the world. Unfortunately, the reality is far from this expectation. Many African cities are completely reliant on monthly allocations from the Federal government and have an extremely bloated and inefficient civil service making any real developmental initiatives virtually impossible to achieve due to insufficient resources (Ajah et al., 2020). There is a distinct lack of proactivity, creativity and innovation among the administrators of these cities, as well as an extremely worrying apathy among these administrators at all levels and this does not bode well for the sustainability of these cities (Ofor-Douglas, 2022). As if things weren't already bad enough, incessant civil unrest in different parts of continent have further exacerbated the alarming condition of these cities (Lenshie et al., 2022).

This paper suggests that the wholesale adoption of public sector entrepreneurship and civil service reform as complementary strategies will hopefully transform African cities from their current state of lethargy and conspicuous lack of development to a thriving and prosperous state that will

become the gold standard for cities around the world.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows: first the concepts of public sector entrepreneurship and civil service reform are introduced and conceptualized. Second, the methodology utilized to develop a transformation blueprint is explained. Third, the developed blueprint utilizing these two concepts is presented and explained in detail with the expectation that it will serve as a developmental map which African city leaders can utilize to relieve their long-suffering citizens from the burdens of barely making ends meet to the realization of actually enjoying their lives in peace, comfort and security rather than merely existing. These claims are no doubt grandiose and seemingly unattainable, but there is a famous saying that the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step; this paper hopes to be that first single step.

Public sector entrepreneurship (PSE)

PSE refers to economic development through an innovative approach to public policy initiatives. These initiatives have the potential to convert an economic climate that is now stagnant into one that encourages economic units to engage in

innovative and creative activities in the face of uncertainties (Leyden & Link, 2015). It has also been described as the adoption of innovation and creativity in the public sector in order to enhance service delivery (Gani et al., 2021). Strow and Strow (2018) define it as an attempt to improve the welfare of citizens of an area through the adoption of innovative, value-creating initiatives. In the context of this study, PSE refers to the adoption of business-like principles by an African City through the identification and sustainable exploitation of available resources in order to achieve financial independence so that the quality of life of the citizens can be enhanced exponentially.

Before the advent and popularization of PSE, public sector organizations were labelled as slow, inefficient and highly bureaucratic leading to sub-par service delivery as well as wastage of valuable public resources (Labib, 2022). PSE has introduced more proactive and business-like principles in how public sector organizations are run and this had led to improved effectiveness and efficiency as evidenced by a reduction in 'red-tape' and a vast improvement in the quality of services provided (Reitmann, 2022). Unfortunately, the benefits of PSE have not been significantly experienced in Africa due to the lack of willingness of African city administrators to adopt the changes in the status quo that PSE requires (de Wee & Asmah-Andoh, 2022). This resistance is partly due to a lack of political will from these administrators and partly due to the fact that a small minority of the African elite are prospering from the status quo of gross inefficiency and stark lack of transparency and accountability that plagues many African cities (Nobari, 2022).

Civil service reform

Civil service reform is a proactive and deliberate approach at improving the effectiveness, efficiency and professionalism of a civil service with the ultimate objective of enhancing the quality delivery of products and services to the citizenry amidst a robust culture of transparency and accountability (Guy, 2022). It refers to all efforts made by governments to reform the structures and processes of public sector organizations to improve their performance (Turner et al., 2022). It includes the introduction of exams and merit-based hiring and promotion, as well as other reforms aimed at improving professionalism, competence, and service performance (Aneja & Xu, 2022). In the context of this study, civil service reform refers to conscious and courageous efforts made by African city leaders to sanitize the civil service from corruption and unprofessionalism and to strengthen structures and processes to ensure that the civil services becomes highly efficient and effective in service delivery amidst a new culture of meritocracy, transparency and accountability.

Civil service reform is an acknowledgment by public sector administrators and leadership that things can always be done better; that constant improvement in service

delivery should be the watchword of all public organizations (Turner et al., 2022). It is also an acknowledgement that adaptability is a critical success factor for all public sector organizations (Duong, 2022). The reality though is that designing efficient public service reforms is a difficult endeavour, given that the correct mix of anti-corruption measures and performance enhancements can differ substantially between and within countries (Airey, 2022).

Over the years there have been different approaches to civil service reform with varying degree of success. The Weberian bureaucratic approach to civil service reform is defined by its impersonal and unbiased nature (de Avila Gomide, 2022). Civil servants are bound by a set of regulations and procedures that they must follow (Ohemeng & Akonnor, 2022). Professionalization of the public sector and merit based recruitment through competitive tests help to ensure impartiality (Mikkelsen et al., 2022). Holding public office becomes a 'vocation' for full-time and professionalised government workers (Mikkelsen et al., 2022). According to empirical studies, the meritocratic hiring of public employees is connected with lower levels of corruption (Mocanu, 2022). There are various ways that meritocratic hiring and promotion can help to prevent corruption. To begin, administering entrance exams and highest education requirements allow qualified civil officials to be selected. Indeed, better-educated government officials are associated with lower levels of corruption and greater performance, notably improved public finance administration and tax revenue mobilisation, and stronger economic growth.

A second approach to civil service reform has been a focus on upwardly reviewing the remuneration and welfare packages for civil servants (Ele et al., 2020). This reform strategy is based on the observation that poor civil service salaries could aggravate inefficiency and corruption in the bureaucracy (Folorunso & Simeon, 2021). Salaries that are less than opportunity cost may encourage civil workers to pursue potentially damaging adaptation tactics and seek possibilities for own-account actions (Katsinde, 2021). Public officials may seek pay by unethical or unlawful ways, jeopardising the efficiency and integrity of civil service organisations (Katsinde, 2021). Given these considerations, raising public servants' compensation and other job benefits has been a key component of developing country civil service reform agendas (Quah, 2021). The evidence on public officials' wages and corruption is inconsistent or inconclusive, implying that salary raises are a necessary but inadequate condition for reducing corruption (Sasso & Morelli, 2021).

A third approach to civil service reform is a shift from a centralized civil service to a decentralized civil service (Faizal & Laking, 2019). Decentralization is the movement of authority, resources, and duties from upper to lower levels of government (Faizal & Laking, 2019). Decentralization is thought to improve resource distribution at the local level and bring the government nearer to its constituents (van der Meer et al.,

2019). Decentralization has also been suggested as a way to improve service delivery accountability (Buckley & Leonhardt, 2019). The proximity of local governments makes it easier for residents to monitor and hold public authorities responsible (Buckley & Leonhardt, 2019). Political decentralisation is used to implement accountability procedures (Tunio & Nabi, 2021). Decentralization is a multifaceted process that can take many forms (Benson, 2022). Decentralization is designed and driven differently in each country, making the comparison of a single notion of decentralisation difficult (Benson, 2022). The literature on decentralization's effects on public sector performance and corruption in numerous developing countries suggests that the effects of decentralisation on promoting good governance and reducing corruption are likely to be unclear and context-dependent (Vashchenko, 2022).

Civil service auditing is a fourth civil service reform approach. Independent external auditors can detect illegal acts and collect evidence of wrongdoings based on suspicious situations, which can then be used to prosecute the responsible public officials (Klochan et al., 2021). Successful performance auditing detection measures could become deterrence for corrupt behaviours (Klochan et al., 2021). Justice Plana's attempt to combat corruption in the Philippines' Bureau of Internal Revenue included auditing and prosecution (Vashchenko, 2022). Justice Plana's anti-corruption strategy was based on introducing a new performance evaluation system, collecting information on corruption through intelligence agents and audits, and effectively prosecuting corrupt tax officers after being confirmed as the new Commissioner of the corrupt Bureau of Internal Revenue (Kerr & Khatiwada, 2021). While Justice Plana's campaign had a multi-pronged approach, the increased surveillance intensity combined with a credible threat of penalty was especially effective in deterring corruption in the Bureau of Internal Revenue (Kerr & Khatiwada, 2021). The danger of being caught and prosecuted made authorities re-evaluate their choice to participate in corrupt activities (Kerr & Khatiwada, 2021).

A fifth and relatively new approach to civil service reform is bottom-up monitoring whereby participation of community members at the grassroots level in local monitoring is encouraged to create bottom-up pressure for reform (Seo & Myeong, 2022). Community members are involved in the service providing process through bottom-up governance models, which allow people to monitor public authorities, have a role in policymaking, and hold service providers accountable to incentivise them to deliver public goods and services effectively (Kamau & Mbirithi, 2021). Scholars and politicians regard Porto Alegre's Participatory Budgeting as an outstanding example of bottom-up changes (Hentschke, 2021). Citizens can use participatory budgeting to voice their demands for better service delivery and to influence budget money distribution at the municipal level through negotiations (Tsani, 2021). This project, which began in 1989, is believed to have increased accessibility to and the quality of public, particularly for lower-income people. For example, in 1989, 27,000 new public

residential units were built (relative to just 1,700 in 1986), the schools quadrupled from 1986 and 1997, and the proportion of Porto Alegre's budget dedicated to education and health care increased from 13% in 1985 to almost 40% in 1996 (Schneider & Busse, 2019).

Methodology

In order to develop the transformation blueprint for African cities, this paper adopted a focus group interview approach by inviting three seasoned civil servants to diagnose the common problems of African cities based on their decades of experience and to develop comprehensive solutions to these problems. In total, five one-hour focus groups interviews were conducted and the ultimate outcome was 'The African City Transformation Blueprint (TACTRAB)' which is discussed in detail in the next section.

The African City Transformation Blueprint (TACTRAB)

Figure 1 presents TACTRAB which this paper argues can transform African cities into prosperous places where citizens can enjoy the highest quality of life. It can be observed from Figure 1 that there are two critical prerequisites that must be in place for the blueprint to be effectively implemented: 1) A leader with political will, and 2) a leader with moral courage. Political will is important because only a leader with the genuine interests of citizen's welfare would be willing to undertake such a comprehensive blueprint that would require the tumultuous change of the current status quo of governance in most African cities.

Similarly, moral courage is vitally important because the current African elite in the public and private sectors that are enjoying and profiting from the status quo are not going to stand idly by while their present and long-term plans are uprooted by an 'overzealous' leader who dares to put the interests of the citizenry above their own. The leader has to be very mindful of the fact that assassination attempts will not be outside the realm of possibility and must make peace with this reality if true change is to be attempted, let alone achieved. The travails of the current Governor of Borno State in North East Nigeria, Professor Babagana Umara Zulum serve as a prime example; He has been targeted for assassination "more than 40 times" by *Boko Haram* terrorists and their sponsors for daring to put the interests of Borno States citizens above those of the minority elites (Adebulu, 2021).

Once a leader with these two qualities is available, then the implementation of TACTRAB can begin in earnest. The public sector entrepreneurship portion of the blueprint involves the city conducting a baseline study of all resources available within its territory. The next step is to rank these resources based on commercial viability, and then to develop strategies through which this resources can be harnessed in a sustainable manner so that the current benefits attained from these resources will not be at the expense of the livelihood of future generations in terms of irrevocable environmental damage and exhaustion of the identified resource due to over-exploitation without thoughts of replenishment and renewal.

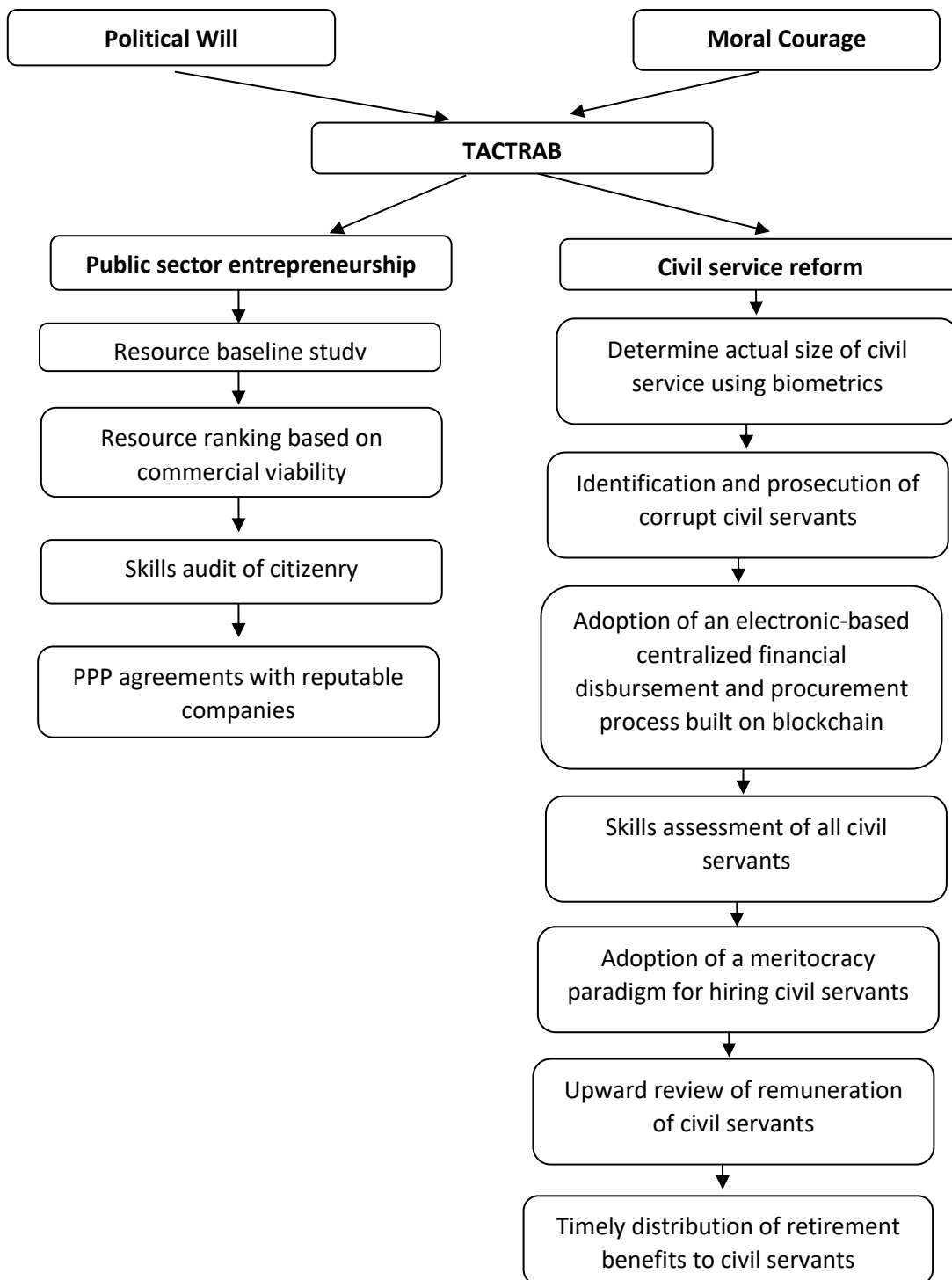


Figure 1: The African City Transformation Blueprint (TACTRAB)

Continuing with the PSE portion of the blueprint, the City needs to conduct a skills audit of its citizenry in the public and private sector in order to determine resources that can be harnessed by solely relying on local expertise; these resources should be

prioritized as they provide long-term employment opportunities for citizens of the City as well as providing much needed funds which the city can use to provide critical infrastructure that will enhance the quality of life of its citizens. As for resources that require foreign expertise to sustainably harness, the city should then engage into public private partnerships (PPP) with reputable companies. It is very important that these PPP agreements include clauses that require these companies to employ a certain number of local citizens at management levels (not merely as gatemen or low-level labourers) and this should involve providing technical training to these citizens who will then be groomed to take over the management of the resources once the PPP agreement concludes. In addition, the City should ensure that the PPP agreements includes an advance payment from the company in lieu of future revenues so that the City can immediately use these funds to pursue other policy initiatives such as the provision of critical infrastructure, the improve of remuneration packages for civil servants and the execution of civil service reform which is the second part of TACTRAB.

As it relates to the civil service reform portion of TACTRAB, the blueprint recommends that the City first needs to determine the actual size of its civil service. This is because the civil services of many African cities are notorious for having poor record-keeping abilities which opens the doors for the existence of many ‘ghost workers’ as an effective strategy for financial embezzlement among senior and middle-level civil servants. In order to eliminate the ‘ghost-worker’ phenomenon in African cities, a comprehensive screening process must be conducted whereby all civil servants will be required to provide documents verifying their employment status and their data will then be captured using biometrics.

As already alluded to in the previous paragraph, financial mismanagement is a cardinal feature of the inefficiency of African civil services. An important quest in transforming this narrative is ensuring that individuals guilty of misappropriating public funds be identified and duly prosecuted for their crimes. This will serve as an important deterrent for civil servants with dreams of getting fat on public funds. In order to achieve this important objective, African cities must engage independent audit firms to conduct a comprehensive forensic audit of public service accounting records. It is important to reiterate the importance of the twin principles of political will and moral courage at this point because they play a critical role in ensuring that guilty civil servants are prosecuted to the full extent of the law regardless of who they are and the political ‘godfathers’ that might support them; these ‘godfathers’ tend to attempt to interfere with the justice process when it involves their relatives and confidantes.

Once the civil service has been sanitized of corrupt civil servants, the next step in the reform process is to ensure that the financial disbursement process which allowed such financial shenanigans to take place in the first place is changed to prevent future

occurrences. TACTRAB suggests that African cities adopt an electronic-based centralized financial disbursement and procurement process built on blockchain technology. Such a robust e-based system is virtually tamper-proof and would ensure that all financial transactions are transparent and easily tracked in real-time thus severely restricting the ability of civil servants to mismanage and divert funds.

The fourth and fifth steps of the civil service reform process address the quality of civil servants in terms of competence and capacity. The common hiring process based on nepotism means that for the majority of African cities, the quality of civil servants is compromised as relatives of the higher-ups who are unable to secure private sector jobs due to poor academic performances are the ones that are given civil service jobs. This crop of civil servants usually lacks any sense of public service motivation and has very weak technical skills which translate into inefficient and ineffective service delivery. The fourth step of the civil service reform process suggests that the City conduct an extensive skills assessment of all civil servants so as to determine their capacities and skill gaps so that comprehensive capacity-building training sessions can be designed to address these skill gaps. Additionally, the skills assessment will ensure that civil servants are properly allocated to the right ministries, agencies or departments where their innate skills and talents can be maximized for the betterment of the City's public service delivery.

Still dealing with the issue of civil servant capacity, the fifth step of the reform process suggests that a paradigm of hiring future civil servants based on a wholly meritocratic process must replace the current nepotism-based hiring paradigm that plagues the African civil service. This new paradigm is sure to cause a stir among the higher-ups that have been using the civil service to provide employment for their friends and relatives. At this point, the City's leader must display an unshakeable sense of political will and moral courage to ensure that this meritocracy paradigm becomes the new norm for hiring civil servants.

The sixth step of the civil service reform process is to address the current remuneration standards for civil servants. African civil servants are notoriously poorly paid relative to their counterparts in developed continents. There is a need to upwardly review the welfare packages of civil servants so that they can be more motivated to give their best to the achievement of the goals and objectives of whatever ministry, department or agency they belong to. An important question to ask at this juncture is 'how will this upward review be funded?' The PSE portion of TACTRAB will hopefully provide an abundance of funds, some of which can be used to increase the salaries and welfare packages of African civil servants.

The seventh and final step of the civil service reform addresses a fear that many African civil servants have – life after retirement. This fear stems from the fact that many retired civil servants in the past have been left penniless due to non-payment of

their gratuities and pensions as these funds have been embezzled by unscrupulous middle-level and senior-level civil servants. The blockchain-based financial disbursement system described in step three can also be utilized to ensure that pension contributions are properly kept and distributed to their owners as at when due. Being assured of having access to their retirement benefits at the end of their years of service would provide great comfort to African civil servants and increase their level of dedication to ensuring high quality service delivery.

Conclusion

Africa has always been lauded as a continent with tremendous development potential. This paper argues that the time to turn potential into reality is long overdue and presents a blueprint dubbed 'The African City Transformation Blueprint' or 'TACTRAB' that is based on the policy initiatives of public sector entrepreneurship and civil service reform which African city leaders can use to transform potential into reality. The paper argues that for TACTRAB to be implemented effectively, an African city leader must possess unshakeable political will and fearless moral courage as he or she is sure to face stiff opposition from the elite of society who are prospering from the status quo of bad and selfish governance that plagues a majority of African cities.

The public sector entrepreneurship portion of TACTRAB focused on the sustainable harnessing of available resources within an African city as a viable means of achieving financial independence for the African city while the civil service reform portion of TACTRAB centred around revitalizing the African civil service through the adoption of a paradigm of transparency, accountability and meritocracy that will hopefully make the civil service more efficient and effective in terms of service delivery.

The paper acknowledges openly that the successful implementation of TACTRAB will be a very difficult and arduous task, but positive change is always tough to achieve, so that is nothing new. However, what is crystal clear is that this change must occur if the lives of citizens in African cities are to get any better than they currently are. It is unacceptable from a basic human rights point of view to have some African cities still without basic amenities like constant electricity and running water in 2022 whereby other cities around the globe have been enjoying these amenities for over 100 years. These cities are populated by human beings just like in African cities, yet the disparity in development and quality of life of citizens is unfathomable. To truly transform African cities into prosperous cities with happy citizens, true servant leaders with the interests of all citizens in mind, powered by principles of moral courage and political will, must emerge to begin the difficult but necessary process of change.

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