Exploring the Role of Ethics in Fostering Strong Public Servants in Selected African Countries

Akeem Adewale Oyelana[1*] and S.M. Kang'ethe[2]

*[1]University of Fort Hare, Department of Public Administration, Private Bag X1314,
Alice 5700, South Africa
[2]University of Fort Hare, Department of Social Work and Social Development,
Private Bag X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
E-mail: [1]<201100592@ufh.ac.za> and [2]<skangethe@ufh.ac.za>*

ABSTRACT Indubitably, the need for countries to fight various kinds of malpractices that bedevil their effectiveness and efficiency of their countries' economic growth and development cannot be overemphasized. This is more compelling to countries from Africa whose economics are stagnating or moving at a snail's pace with poverty becoming a huge norm. The aim of this paper is, through a review of literature is to elucidate the various forms of malpractices besetting public service delivery and therefore leading to countries economic stagnation with examples from a few African countries. The paper has also conceptualized both the ethical code and a code of conduct. The need for countries to uphold ethical codes as a guide and driver to maintaining ethically sound civil service delivery has also been emphasized. The paper has discussed the malpractices associated with bribery, corruption and embezzlements of funds. The paper has recommended to governments to uphold and institute the culture of leadership goodwill as a strategy to extinguish various forms of malpractices immensely prevalent in many African countries. This is with the hope of achieving countries with reduced forms of corruption if not countries with zero forms of corruption.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'ethics' means the code of conduct that governs the duties and responsibilities of all the government employees from the top hierarchy officers to the lowest rank officers. Adhering to this code is critical in order to ensure a smooth running of the government organisations in African countries (Blake 1997). Perhaps this is rendered central because of the observation that many government organisations in African countries exhibit poor ethical principles with those who hold public offices neglecting their mandates due to their selfish ends. Gravely, these unethical conducts among public servants in many African countries have led to a constellation of immoral behaviours leading to immense abuse of public office. These behaviours have been responsible, for example, of wreaking havoc, mayhem, disorderliness, chaos and disarray in the public offices. This scenario

Address for correspondence:
Akeem Adewale Oyelana
University of Fort Hare,
Department of Public Administration,
Private Bag X1314, Alice 5700, South Africa
Cell: +27837286640
E-mail: 201100592@ufh.ac.za

hugely explains why development in many African countries has taken a snail's pace. According to Nyumbu (2013) and Lawan (2008), the need to build confidence in governments in light of the increased concern on corruption and unethical behaviour of their civil servants prompted governments to review their approaches to ethical conduct. There are two broad approaches by which governments attempt to improve public service ethics, *compliance-based ethics management* and *integrity-based ethics management*. While the former approach depends on rules and enforcement and seems more appropriate to situations in which unethical behaviour is rampant and will be difficult to change widespread corruption, the latter is based on inducements and support and appears more appropriate to situations in which there is a strong shared sense of values and a higher degree of homogeneity. But in reality, countries in most cases take a mixed approach (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). In addition, Vasavakul (2009) and Wallbott (2012) further indicate that the ethics infrastructure put forward by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) based on countries' experiences and studies provides a comprehensive framework to review the institutions, systems and mechanism

important to promote ethics in the public sector. It is based on key principles that identify the function of guidance, management or control against which a given public ethics management system can be tested. These three functions are made up of eight corresponding elements - codes of conduct and professional socialization– *for guidance*; coordinating bodies and human resource policies – *for management*; and legislative framework, accountability and public scrutiny – *for the control function*. Various countries applied one or a mix of these packages to encourage and support ethical public service environment, but the following are few case evidence reflecting on the behavioural approaches and specifically explaining the guidance function in promoting public service ethics and values.

Problem Statement

Observably, the role of ethics in developing and promoting an ethical and a moral cadre of public servants in African countries cannot be overemphasized. This is because of various levels of corruption and higher levels of abusing public offices. Optimistically, adhering to an acceptable level of ethics is likely to usher in appropriate public friendly operations of the public offices, workers' improved state of punctuality, honesty, trustworthiness and faithfulness among the public servants. This calls for immense goodwill from all the stakeholders starting with the government, private sector, and the public itself to work collaboratively to foster and ensure this public good takes root in their respective countries. It is very important at this juncture to state that all the stakeholders own the fact that various kinds of unethical standards, such as lateness to work, huge bribery and corruption within the workplace and immense embezzlement of government or public funds, continue to stagnate and retrogress the development of the African countries. This paper elucidates different kinds of malpractices that constitute unethical behavior and possibly the effects they have on the productivity of the public servants in some African countries.

METHODOLOGY

The paper has used a desk review methodology to debate, reflect, critic, and discuss the role of ethics in fostering strong public servants in selected African countries. The paper has reviewed different documentary sources to shed light or derive insights of the state of ethical lapses displayed by many public servants of many African countries. The paper hopes to offer some recommendations as to how the phenomenon of poor adherence to ethical code of behavior in the workplace and in governance issues can be turned around. This is to give hope that the innumerable malpractices that continue to demonize African countries can be reduced if not annihilated altogether. The paper has immensely used government oriented journals and books; as well as these researchers' intuitive experience and knowledge in public Administration and ethics pertaining to the public servant in African countries.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence of Ethical Malpractices among the Public Servants in Some African Countries

Before delving into ethical lapses within the public servants, these researchers consider it pertinent to discuss some concepts that are central to understanding a constellation of ethical lapses. These concepts are ethical code and code of conduct.

An Ethical Code

Evidently, the term 'ethical code' refers to the principles and values that that must be contained in the ethical code of conduct in an organization. It is a collection of rules and guidelines that dictates the do's and don'ts of the workforce in any organization. A good worker is the one who is not only adequately conversant with his/her organization's rules and conditions of service, but must also adhere and be faithful to them (Gilman 2005; Lewis and Gilman 2005). It is adhering to the laid down rules and guidelines that ensures the organization's effectiveness and efficiency (Gilman 2005; Lewis and Gilman 2005).

A Code of Conduct

Generally speaking, without a code of conduct in an organization, no one can guarantee order and chances of organizational effectiveness and efficiency could be rare. A code of conduct forms the basis in which the governance

structures of an organization can be made to be accountable. It is also a benchmark to organizational progress, transparency, honesty and punctuality. It is the tool to guide or indicate workers deviance from the norms. It is a normative tool of organizational operations. With many countries of Africa being accused of mal- governance, this is an indicator that the operational codes of conduct are either not there, or if there, they are not strong, or simply they are made ineffective by the governing structures. There is therefore a strong need for a written guiding code of behaviour in order to foster an ethically strong body of public servants in many African countries. It is on this note that Gilman (2005) and Lewis and Gilman (2005) recommend that organizations must expose all the workers to all the contents of the organizational code of conduct if the organizations are to adequately meet their set goals and objectives. In contemporary epoch, Vyas-Doorgapersad and Ababio (2010) have revealed the importance of ethical codes in upholding the principles and standards of right conduct in the administrative sphere of governments. An essential requirement in this is that public servants respect the rule of law and the dignity of the individual in carrying out official responsibilities (Levine et al.1990; Hunt 1997). To this end, various countries have put in place institutional codes of conduct. In Uganda, for example, a Leadership Code of Conduct and a number of new institutions were created to provide overall guidance and set standards in public service ethics and integrity. Equally in South Africa, the Code of Conduct has been supplemented by training in the public service, and most public administration educational programmes include components on ethics (Gilman 2005; Lewis and Gilman 2005). Similarly, public servants in Senegal are briefed about the ethical standards by which they are bound to follow during their pre-recruitment induction training (United Nations (UN) 2001b). Sound management strategy to the development and implementation of codes that secure genuine participation of employees is as important as putting in place the code of conduct itself (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 1996).

Hence, Gilman (2005) and Lewis and Gilman (2005) pointed out that the Codes of Conduct or Codes of Behavior are designed to anticipate and prevent certain specific types of behavior

such as conflict of interest, self-dealing, bribery, and inappropriate actions. Although the codes of conduct can be brief, most often they are fairly lengthy and detailed. The rational for the detailed scope of this kind of code is that it is necessary to both protect the employee while at the same time protect the reputation of the government. Most codes of conduct focus on the "dos and don'ts" rather than on affirmative obligations. That is, they detail specific actions in which employees should not to engage.

Malpractices Indicative of Ethical Lapses

Bribery

Usually, bribery occurs in an organisation when individuals holding some position of power use their positions to enrich themselves by demanding extra payments from citizens in return for services they render to them (Fan et al. 2009:1). The act denies the recipients their constitutional rights to access the services. Also the service usually cost more than it should. This also has an impact of making those who do not have money to pay the demanded bribe or not to access the service (Mauro 1998). One of these researchers remembers vividly that in the last two decades, it was very difficult in Kenya for the public to easily get passports to travel outside the country without paying some extra money over and above the official fee. The phenomenon of kickback was almost institutionalized, although those connected to the powerful governing class could get everything with ease. The issue of accessing services depended on "who one was" and who one was connected to. The issue of bribery was grave and took many forms such as women offering sex in order to get the services they ought to get free (Nielsen 2003; Kadembo 2008). This being just a tip of the iceberg, the phenomenon of asking for bribes is a cancer in many African countries that needs to be annihilated altogether (Kadembo 2008; Riley 1998). Perhaps this explains why some junior officers such as court clerks are able to have very expensive vehicles as well as be able to have wealthier investments. Indubitably, corruption in the form of public servants asking for bribes has been a cancerous disease in many African countries and could explain why African countries are always in the bottom of the ladder in the Transparency International grad-

ing (Nielsen 2003). Only a few countries such as Botswana have escaped being blacklisted as some of the most corrupt countries in the world and has instead being credited for its prudent management of its economy (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2004). It is crystal clear that the issue of public servants displaying various unethical behaviors has made service delivery face arduous tasks. The state of bribery makes the service delivery a very poor one. This is because the public servants' interest is to serve those who pay bribes and therefore have to strategically discriminate in their service delivery "modus operandi. This has made the public to lose confidence with their governments' and sometimes prompting public outcry and protests. It is these researchers' thinking that the public has the right to demand effective and efficient service delivery. Accountability should be linked to one's remuneration.

Corruption

The term 'corruption' refers to various illegal or dishonest ways of conducting a business, whether private, or public. It entails following a shortcut to achieve a financial gain against the laid down government processes and procedures (National Treasury Republic of South Africa (NTRSA) 2000/2001). Indubitably, corruption in Africa remains the hugest bottleneck besetting development and government senior civil servants and their cohorts are usually the beneficiaries of the act (Riley 1998). The act disregards the moral and the ethical path of doing things, the only ultimate goal being to make financial gains outside the legal framework. This is ironical because all the governments have organs that are supposed to be public watch dogs. According to Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities (PCCA) Act 12, section 4 of 2004 of the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa, any person who directly or indirectly accepts, agrees or offers any gratification from any other person, whether for the benefits of himself or herself, or for the benefits of another person has/have eventual engaged in corruption (Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa Judgement 2004; Selebi's Judgment 2011). The irony of the developing countries is that the senior most members of the ruling class pretend and promise that they are fighting corruption, and yet they do not want the country to close all the

vents of corruption. This is because they and those allied to them are usually the beneficiaries of corruption. For example the top leadership would use their offices to give jobs to those who support or supported them while they were ascending to power. The appointment usually disregard the level of qualification one holds (Kadembo 2008; Riley 1998). They may also appoint those who promise to align themselves with the ruling class, or those who they think are likely to be their staunch supporters in governance matters. Such kind of scenario has been a commonplace in many countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe and Nigeria. Perhaps this explains why most state corporations whose heads are usually rewarded by the ruling class have been doing badly. This is another way of indicating how the nature of African governance contributes largely to underdevelopment. The ethics of governance and appointment remains a theoretical tool in the books while practically, most African governments have been running their countries like their own homes (Kadembo 2008). Furthermore, PCCA Act 12, section 3 of 2004 of the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa and sections of offences in respect of corrupt activities relating to public officers of act 12 further stress that corruption occurs in any organisation if any person directly or indirectly gives, agrees or offers to give any other person any gratification, whether for the benefit of that other person or for the benefit of another person.

Embezzlement

Alexander (2010) revealed that regardless of any country, embezzlement is fraudulently taking of personal property with which one has been entrusted. It is also regarded as one of the most common white collar crimes in history. When the corrupt officers use their positions to enrich themselves by stealing from state or government budget, this is embezzlement (Fan et al. 2010). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines the term 'embezzlement' as the "misappropriation or misapplication of money or property entrusted to one's care, custody or control" (Alexander 2010; DeFranco 2013). In many African countries, the directors or heads of state corporations are unashamedly embezzling funds without thought of what will happen tomorrow. This is because they feel they need to enrich themselves as fast as is possible and when the

organization collapse, they would be in a position to have money to vie for some public elective posts. In fact, in some countries like Kenya during the reign of Daniel Arap Moi, it was revealed that some heads of parastatals were appointed in order to "help themselves" or make money as much as possible in order to be fundraising for Moi government's government and especially using the money to woo voters to elect them into office. This present gross misuse of the office and explains why Africa countries state of governance has been a disgrace, inefficient and ineffective (Musa 2001). To say the least, embezzlement of funds as an unethical conduct among the public servants is very rampant and has hugely dented the image and reputation of most African countries. The leadership has not allowed a fertile ground to punish those who embezzle, because they usually happen to be their political cronies or sympathizers. Sometimes they protect the culprits by appointing some investigative commissions which will never finish their assignments.

CONCLUSION

Realistically, ethical codes of conduct need to be respected, not only in African countries, but also in the rest of the world because adhering to the ethical conduct in an organisation leads to organisations' effectiveness and efficiency. The government and any other friendly organizations such as the NGOs need to facilitate and ensure that ethical codes of conduct are extremely and thoroughly enhanced, monitored and evaluated at regular intervals to reduce all the unethical behaviours and practices among the government officers in African countries. High levels of corruption, embezzlement of public funds and gross abuse of public offices have continued to make African countries service delivery a lagged –out process, as well as compromising productivity. African countries leaders need to offer goodwill and be emulable examples of accountability. The effect is likely to trickle down to the public servant at the lowest ladder. The public also need to do the best within their constitutional rights to stop the corrupt from abusing the offices. Whistle blowing should be encouraged, but the government needs to protect the whistle blowers against any possible clandestine victimization. Having effective ethics office to pin the dishonesty public officers in the country would be critical

Interventions to Bolster the State of Ethical Standards among the African Public Servants

Leadership Goodwill

Undeniably, poor ethical standards and lack of commitment in the workplaces in many African countries is pervasive to an extent that only a serious paradigm shift of the governing leadership attitudes and ideologies can turn around things positively. Perhaps if the leaders themselves can be good examples of accountability, the other level managers are likely to follow suit. While in the 80s the western world tried to advocate for leaders and managers to be accountable, this never changed the ethical standards of the public servants, especially the senior most. The institution of corruption watchdog offices such as the ethics office in Kenya has not managed to totally discourage the public officers from embezzling funds and doing other dishonest practices. However, with the top governance structures showing commitment to duties and service delivery, this can bear fruits and the junior managers have to internalize the wind of change to the benefit of the service recipients.

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