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AFRICA PUBLIC SERVICE DAY REPORT

23 JUNE 2005

1. Purpose

To provide feedback on the outcome of the Africa Public Service Day held on the 23rd of June 2005.

2. Background

The United Nations General Assembly, through a resolution, designated June 23 as the United Nations Public Service Day to “celebrate the value and virtue of service to the community”. In Africa, the First Pan-African Conference of Ministers resolved to institute the day for celebrating ‘public service’ as a means of highlighting the critical role of the public service for development.

Africa Public Service Day (APSD) is an annual event celebrated by public servants throughout the continent. It is a day characterised by events that bring public servants together to commemorate the value and virtue of service delivery improvement through initiatives that depict achievements in public service delivery. The APSD is also celebrated in the spirit of intergovernmental relations in Africa to rebuild the continent.

In 2005 a colloquium, hosted by the Minister of Public Service and Administration was held by various academics, commentators, policy analysts and government officials. The theme of the 2005 APSD was: “The role of the State in the reconstruction of Africa”. The satellite linkage of various APSD venues across the country was used to stimulate debate among government leaders, academics, public servants, students and the public at large on the following sub-themes:

- Sound Governance;
- Aid and Development;
- Continental Solidarity;
- Building the Capability of the African Public Service; and
- Administrative Justice.

The satellite linkage of the 2005 APSD occurred at the Universities of Pretoria, Stellenbosch, Fort Hare, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, and the Bloemfontein Telkom Centre and this reflected a creative search for solutions facing the role of the state. Question and answer sessions were held with the broader public and students to reflect on the main discussions and get additional inputs. Finally, the facilitators compiled reports summarising the discussions of the day.

3. Discussions

Most African States are characterised by underdevelopment and poverty and many are faced with governance challenges. New initiatives have been taken within the ambit of NEPAD as a way of improving governance and collaboration among member states. Key to these initiatives is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) aimed at assessing the way States are governed. Poor governance has been identified as the main cause of challenges that characterise most African States. Good administrative justice and a capable public service on the continent would contribute towards sound governance.

3.1 Role of the State

The state should function as a catalyst for change in ensuring economic growth, social inclusion and ensuring moral regeneration. It should be the regulator of different sectors of society to ensure that public service meets the goals of the state. The unification of different spheres of public service, including state institutions, could be an alternative to facilitate good governance. Those who are responsible for delivering services should do so within the confines of the law and not seek to enrich themselves with the state resources.

3.2 Sound Governance

Leaders of African countries must be committed to the rule of law, accept accountability for the outcomes of developmental service delivery. The

challenge therefore is to develop a leadership culture based on credibility and integrity, respected by society and public servants alike.

Public servants form the second group of stakeholders, and defining the “model public servant” starts with accountability and integrity. Public servants need to show compassion with people and the services they provide must be competitive.

There is no room for arrogance of the bureaucracy and its hiding of incompetence behind ideologies. It is on the basis of a willingness to acquire relevant skills and mastering contemporary technologies that competitiveness in the public sector will be realised. The combination of compassion and competitiveness will invariably lead to context-relevant customisation, which is a characteristic of good governance and of a caring state.

Finally, government must encourage whistle blowing. The broader public interacts with public servants and are exposed to the manner in which public servants utilise state resources. By providing a platform with information on identifying corruption, the public will serve as an independent reporter who alerts relevant state institutions to wrongdoing. Senior public servants must lead by example in managing state resources and curbing corruption. They should encourage public servants to be vigilant in helping to alleviate corruption in their ranks.

3.3 Building the Capability of the Public Service

Public servants, information and communication technology (ICT) and state infrastructure are the main facilitators of service delivery. Their strengthening will therefore lead to improved access to public services. Partnerships between states, academic institutions and the private sector could provide means by which a speedy improvement of government capabilities could be achieved.

Universities should be responsible for providing knowledge and skill to people who will provide public services. Research in academic institutions should be guided by the actual challenges facing governments and society at large. This research should provide possible solutions that government could take forward.

Programmes to deal with human resource liabilities should be developed by national, provincial and local governments. These programmes may be based on the findings of research relating to gaps in capacity. This will ensure that training is utilised effectively, enabling academic institutions to fulfil their role of actively participating in finding solutions to our developmental goals.

Management mechanisms such as Performance Management Development System (PMDS) must be in place for assessment and acknowledgment of good work.

ICT should be used to innovate better processes of delivering public services. eGovernment enables access to required information, empowering citizens to know where to access services. It also provides government with alternative options to deliver services, reducing current limitations of time and location.

The current government infrastructure is not user-friendly. Service delivery points are located too far apart from each other. In most cases, the layout does not accommodate the needs of the elderly and the disabled. Alternative means such as mobile services and the amalgamation of services by various departments should be explored.

3.4 Representivity

Public services are historically characterised by gender imbalances and racial disparities that need to be redressed. In redressing these challenges, issues

relating to demographics, gender, disability, age, religion and ethnicity should be taken into consideration.

3.5 Continental Solidarity

African countries need to assert their role in international bodies including the United Nations, World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Globalisation is a big challenge and requires the application of innovative approaches. African states should move away from a relationship of dependence on developed countries and build partnerships that make them equal partners.

The recent transformation of regional institutions such as the Organisation of African Union (OAU) to create the African Union (AU) and the establishment of NEPAD has gone a long way in forging continental solidarity. These institutions could be used to:

- Promote democracy.
- Implement good values amongst the state within Africa.
- Manage the diversity on culture in Africa and develop trust.
- Build public service capacity of member states.
- Facilitate benchmarking and sharing of experiences.

3.6 Aid and Development

In 2005, the plight of African countries received attention in the global arena. The commitment of the G8 Countries to help towards realising the UN Millennium Development Goals (halving poverty and underdevelopment in the world by the year 2015) needs to be pursued. Regional and continental institutions should develop socio-economic plans that are home grown. Indigenous knowledge on the African continent and the Diaspora should be leveraged to produce possible solutions to address continental challenges.

3.7 Public participation in governance

Citizens should be encouraged to participate in government programmes through consultative forums such as:

- Imbizo
- Letsema
- Lekgotla

The state should balance the sharing of roles and responsibilities among the spheres of the public service by balancing centralisation with decentralisation. Changes in demand for public services and other environmental factors should influence decisions on whether to centralise or decentralise. The state should be clear of what is expected from it.

4. Lessons Learnt

The format adopted in the 2005 APSD was new and therefore led to some teething problems in preparations. Although the kind of information and telecommunication technology used was ground breaking, there were connectivity problems at some sites and this impacted on the smooth running of the event. Time allotted to the colloquium was not well balanced with those invited.

These limitations resulted in most of the prepared inputs by various panellists not shared with all. They also compromised the value that could otherwise have been drawn from the session.

Attendance by public servants and other senior government officials was compromised by the manner in which communication was carried out. Electronic and print media were not effectively utilised to increase coverage and hence the poor attendance.

5. Proposed Way-forward

Key to the future events is timeous preparations that will address concerns mentioned in section 4.

The following plan of action is proposed:

- a. Report and follow up to selected/targeted African countries, provincial, municipal and community leaders on the need expressed to continue the reform dialogue and potential future service delivery partnerships;
- b. Set up a “chat room” for internet based dialogue;
- c. Create further opportunities for reform-related discussions between all stakeholders in provinces. Local and provincial events could be used to promote the event and also to take discussions further.
- d. Use APSD to initiate active and qualitative discussions about the effect/impact of the HIV/AIDS pandemic on service delivery within the Continental.

On the content, another topic such as “development of the state” needs to get more focus during APSD deliberations. This needs to be done in order to consider the contemporary approach in certain quarters to posit human security as a critical aspect of the developmental state. A better understanding of what the real challenges are for a developmental state will remove any ambiguities about the essential and vanguard role of the State in meeting these challenges.

6. Annexures:

- **A – Contact details of panel members;**
- **B – Questions asked during the APSD deliberations; and**
- **C1 to C4 – Reports from the Facilitators.**