

# Africa Public Service Charter



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



We belong



We care



We serve



# THE AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE CHARTER AT A GLANCE

## Introduction

The Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU) adopted the African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration (referred to as the “Charter” throughout this article) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the 31<sup>st</sup> January 2011.

The continental public service charter was sanctioned by AU Member States in early 2011 was a culmination of a decade-long development and consolidation. Formalised at the 3rd Pan-African Conference of Ministers of Public Service in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2001, the genesis of the Charter stretches as far as 1998, when the Second Pan African Conference of Ministers of Civil Service, which met in Morocco, made a declaration that set the process towards an African public service charter in motion.

The adoption of the Charter therefore, substantially reiterated the political commitment of AU Member States to strengthening professionalism and ethics in public service in Africa.

## The Charter in a nutshell

The Charter is underpinned by the need to promote the values and principles of democracy, good governance and human right in the carrying out of the mandate of the Public Service and Administration across the African continent. Its adoption is furthermore a reaffirmation of Africa’s collective desire to strive tirelessly for the modernisation, improvement and entrenchment of new values of governance in public service, and guided by the common desire of AU Member States to strengthen and consolidate public service in order to promote integration and sustainable development on the continent.

Although committed to promoting a Public Service and Administration that uses the optimum conditions of equity and efficiency, the effective application of the Charter seeks to take into account conditions unique to member states.

## binding Nature

Unlike in the past, the version of the Charter as adopted in January 2011 seeks to have more legal vigour than hither before. Its formal adoption by Member States of the AU would, for example, requires that the Charter to be ratified by most AU countries.



While the ratification of the Charter is purely voluntary, it is hoped that compliance could also be encouraged through the influence of AU agencies or Regional Economic Communities, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), in the case of South Africa and its neighbours.

### **Three strategic thrusts of the Charter**

The Charter has three strategic thrusts that are designed to provide a common platform to define and measure the continents' governance and public administration programme:

- It defines the key components of a professional and effective public service and its role in building the capable state;
- introduces common measures and systems to ensure transparency and accountability in the public sector; and
- establishes a general framework of guiding principles, policies and management and management mechanisms to be used as a common language in the area of public service in African countries.

### **Why are Charters important?**

- Primarily, the application of a charter increases transparency and accountability to citizens.
- A charter is a powerful tool to involve employees in the improvement of the organisation.
- The Charters underpin our administrative reform process...
- Charters are very helpful to come closer to meeting the objective of improved service delivery.
- An important objective of a charter is to encourage improved trust between citizen and provider, through improved transparency and accountability.

### **Conclusion**

The ratification of the Charter by AU Member States makes it a legally binding document, and consequently requires the signatories to implement its core set of principles and values in the respective countries. It is expected that ratification and implementation of



Charter by Member States of the AU would incorporate the following elements:

- Ethics and Professional standards should be mainstreamed within all public sector management, capacity building and reform initiatives;
- Leadership and management at all levels need to create the enabling environment for the establishment and sustainability of an ethical and professional public service through example and encouragement;
- There is a need to sensitise the civil society to the ideals of the African Charter.
- Whilst agreeing that low pay does not fully explain the pervasive growth of corruption, service conditions of public officials should be improved in order to help discourage inappropriate behaviour;
- Improvements in service delivery and professional standards can both be achieved through enhanced systems and procedures in the public service;
- Policies and practices need to be instituted aimed at empowering and rewarding ethical behaviour.

Overall, it needs to be borne in mind that public service reform and capacity building is an expensive exercise. Making sure the Charter becomes a living document would require resources and the ongoing support of NEPAD Governance units and other development partners.

### **Compiled from the following:**

1. "IMPLEMENTING THEAFRICAN CHARTER FOR THE VALUES AND PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES", Alfred Tjiroua Tjihambuma, Office of the Prime Minister Republic of Namibia
2. "Public Service Reform –The Namibian Experience", Etienne Maritz, Office of The Prime Minister
3. African Union, 2011, African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration.