Public Management and Development in Developing Nations:
Conference Training Initiatives in Africa by the
Conference of Minority Public Administrators*

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Public administration is a multidimensional and multifaceted discipline which consists of many sub-fields. More than fifty years ago Luther Gulick described public administration as POSDCORD; planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting. The many dimensions of public administration include political, legal, bureaucratic, and managerial. In the United States and many other countries graduate course work consists of many of the following courses: Legal Foundations in Public Administration, Public Personnel Administration, Understanding Public Policy, Policy Analysis, Public Budgeting, Public Administration and Management, Organizational Theory and Behavior, and Research Methods. Students may also specialize or take tracks in such areas as Human Resources Management, Public Budgeting/Public Finance, Non-Profit Sector, and Public management. What about the teaching and practice of public administration in developing countries of the world such as in Africa?

Studies and research in Africa have identified a number of factors that have negatively impact the practice of public management and public administration. Some of the factors that have been identified are: 1) lack of capacity to meet the growing public needs; 2) overstretched and underdeveloped bureaucracies; 3) public administrative systems that are quite vulnerable to political influences; and 4) increasingly politicized public administrative systems (see Mutahaba et al, 1993; Menigistu, 2000). Menigistu points out that:

These problems manifest themselves in organizational dysfunctions that are also characterized by the absence of appropriate structures, poor activity coordination, unclear definition of roles, inhibitive relationships among research and policy developing units,... [and a] lack of policy management and communication skills (p.65).

Discussing public administration and management in Africa is a huge task. Africa is a huge continent, the second largest after Asia. It is estimated to be three and a half times larger than the United States with 54 countries. Roughly 100 languages are spoken around the continent (Ufomata, 2000). This discussion is further complicated by the state of public administration education in Africa. In this regard, Menigistu (2000:63) raises six important questions:

1) What is the organizing pedagogical philosophy in the construction of knowledge?
2) What is the conceptual foundation of the educational program?
3) What should be the content of the courses [and the coursework] i.e. what is to be taught?

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4) Who is to teach (the academic/practitioner dichotomy)?
5) How should that which students are learning to be evaluated?
6) What type of feedback mechanism should be in place in order to insure that what is being taught is relevant to the individual learner and the society that provides the funding for the education enterprise?

Perhaps, a more complex issue that these questions delve into is the notion of values in public administration. That is, should public administration be constructed to convey control, standardization, neutrality, remoteness, and red tape or transformational leadership, openness, diversity, and change (Human, 1988)? Or put another way, can African public administrators listen to local residents in an impoverished village in the morning and have a business lunch in a lavish hotel a few hours later before returning to the office to address a practical problem with colleagues.

This paper reports on an initiative of the Conference of Minority Public Administrators (COMPA) to exchange research and expertise to promote public administration and development administration in Africa using an international conference approach and format. The conference utilizes a collaborative effort of African, African American, and majority American institutions and organizations. The name given to this initiative is the “International Working Conference on Public Management and Development Administration”. The major objective of the paper is to point out how a professional organization, particularly one that consist primarily of public professionals of color, can get involved as a collaborative partner with developing countries to promote the advancement and training of public management and development administration.

**WHAT IS COMPA?**

COMPA is a national section of the 12,000 member American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) based in Washington, DC. COMPA consists of 500 members, all who are also members of ASPA, who seek to improve the “quality of life” of people of color and “communities of color” in various communities in the United States. COMPA has been and official national section of ASPA for some twenty five years. COMPA holds an annual three day conference in a different location in the United States. The next Annual Conference is scheduled in Little Rock, Arkansas in February, 2001. The previous conference was held in Las Vegas, Nevada in January, 2000. The Annual Conference has occurred for more than twenty five years. Some 300-350 mostly minority professionals and graduate students attend each conference. A good number of attendees and participants come from public administration programs at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and smaller colleges and universities. A number of public employers and doctoral granting programs attend the Annual Conference to recruit for positions or for graduate study in doctoral programs. The Annual Conference serves as a training and development conference providing a sharing of information in various fields and as a forum to discuss timely policy and public administration issues facing persons and communities of color in the United States. High ranking public officials participate as keynote speakers and participants.

COMPA has among its membership African American city managers, government administrators, professors of public administration/political science, nonprofit organization leaders, and others. The President of COMPA is City Manager of Glenarden, Maryland. The author this of presentation served as President of COMPA a few years ago. A previous President of COMPA has also served as President of ASPA and President of the International County and City Management Association. To encourage the participation of graduate students of color as presenters and participants, the Annual Conference provides at least five travel grants, awards a
cash sum to the graduate program which sends the most students, and awards two scholarships to study public administration at the graduate level.

THE INTERNATIONAL WORKING CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

In 1995 several members of COMPA convened to discuss the plight of public administration in Africa given the recent liberation of the Republic of South Africa. Present at this meeting were representatives from the University of Pittsburgh, Cleveland State University, Louisiana State University (the author), Old Dominion University and other universities as well as a contingent of public practitioners. The group was informed that COMPA had been approached by several high level public practitioners from South Africa to provide a training and development forum by which South African public administrators could enhance their skills. After further contacts with South African agencies and organizations and with the assistance of numerous other agencies, institutions, and universities in the United States, the first International Working Conference on Public Management and Development Administration convened in Johannesburg, South Africa in August, 1997. Some 75 public and private professionals from the United States attended and participated on the conference program along with public professionals from South Africa and other African countries. Public administrators, professors, consultants, NGO representatives, and others were brought together in a conference format for exchange of ideas and knowledge and information sharing in the areas of public administrative service delivery, infrastructure development, and capacity building. To say the least, the first International Conference was a tremendous success!!

In July, 1999 the Second International Conference was held in Accra, Ghana by invitation from high level Ghanian government administrators. The theme of the Conference was “Improving Government Performance in Development: An International Dialogue”. The conference was 4 days in length and included working visits to several Ghanaian ministries and other public offices and universities. Nearly 100 public and private sector professionals from the United States and participated on the conference program including public sector representatives from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, University of Pittsburgh Center, Cities of Richmond, California, Dallas, Texas, and Lauderdale Lakes, Florida. Several universities from the United States included Texas A&M University, University of Pittsburgh, Cleveland State University, Jackson State University, Clark Atlanta University, Southern University, Indiana University, and San Diego State University.

Some of the panel sessions and workshops were: “Innovation in the Delivery of Government Services to Citizens”; “American Funding Opportunities for African Development”; Effective Budgeting With Strategic Planning and Performance Management”; “Planning Water and Sanitation Projects in Developing Countries”; “Management, Education, and Training Practices and Techniques to Enhance Effectiveness and Efficiency”; “Environmental Issues and Development”; Issues of Governance”; “Processes and Techniques of Civil Service Reform in Ghana”; “Airport Infrastructure Maintenance and Development”; Human Resources Development”; “Women in Development”; and Comparative Approaches to Sustainable Development”.

Several Ghanian agencies and institutions were collaborative participants on the panel sessions and workshops. The academic and research institutes included the University of Ghana --School of Administration, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration, Ghana Institute of Local Government Studies, and the University of Ghana--Institute of African Studies. The high level government offices participants included the Ghana Minister of Local Government
and Rural Development, Ghana Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Ghana Civil Aviation Authority, Ghana Office of Civil Service, Ghana Minister of Education, EMPRETEC Ghana Foundation, and the Ghana Science and Technology Institute. Other African organizations participating in the conference were: African Association of Public Administration, Association of African Universities, Southern Metropolitan Local Council (Johannesburg, South Africa), University of the North-West (South Africa), and the University of Venda (South Africa). The second Conference was a successful by all accounts!!

The Third International Conference on Public Management and Development Administration is scheduled to take place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in June, 2001. Preliminary planning meetings have already occurred in Addis Ababa and a local host committee is well into conference planning and development. This conference is expected to attract some 125 public and private professionals from the United States.

CONCLUSION

The subject areas that have been especially well received by South African and Ghanian and public professionals are: civil service reform; human resources planning; training and development; public environmental issues, health issues; and governance issues. The first two conferences have helped to shape answers as to identifying critical public administration and management needs as well as factors which may inhibit government performance. A most important issue in the two African countries was civil service reform and professionalizing the public service.

REFERENCES