Good Government in Africa: What is the role of Bureaucratic Governance?

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Abstract: Contradictory premises on the relationship between good government and bureaucratic governance have continued to emerge in public administration scholarship. Bureaucracy is probably one of the concepts that have received heavy attack although it has shown unmatched resilience. It was the centre of attack by New Public Management (NPM) and Governance paradigms yet, it remains alive in most administrative jurisdictions. This has created a paradox whose genesis emanates from whether society needs government or not. Our view is that good government and bureaucratic governance share the same ancestors. Since government remains part of society hostility against bureaucratic governance is likely to be a wasteful effort as bureaucracy has historically been part of the government machinery. Bureaucratic systems have snaked through the government architecture throughout civilization. The only challenge is how to have a good bureaucracy that facilitates good government. Good government must be democratic, honest and able. Administrators in any country comprise the bulk of society compared to politicians. While bureaucratic governance still faces challenges of politics, complexity, postmodernism and the NPM doctrinal accusations, it appears to be the ‘solution’ to the current problems bewildering African administrative systems. Africa needs a relaunched public service with its foundations in African values.

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Introduction

Where is Africa’s biggest problem of politics or administration? Bad administrators are appointed by politicians and bad politicians are put into office by the administrators! The two knowingly or

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unknowingly have historically worked together to destroy the African society. While bad politics breeds bad administration, bad administration incubates bad politics. More interesting is that politics and administration have lived side by side by side of each other since time immemorial. In this paper, we interrogate broadly how good government can be promoted through building a good bureaucracy (run by administrators). If the human race was to be left on their own without any rules to regulate their behaviour and activities, there is a probability that society would have been in chaos. Life would not only be boring but disorganized. One would imagine what a society would look like where everybody would be doing what he or she wishes.

Government creates order in society and regulates (or deregulates) the activities of human beings. While most commentators would heap accusations against government for doing bad things, we must from inception be generous to government as well for the good it does, governments throughout the world do many good things. Governments create jobs, provide security for the life and property of the citizens, work on roads, protect the sovereignty of their states and provide other services. Governments, however, also are known for bad things! Those individuals behind doing good or bad things in society are either bureaucrats or politicians singly, or complimentarily. From the pre-colonial era through the colonial and post-colonial epochs, government has maintained a monopoly of responsibility to organize society. Government particularly in a democratic state has performed this task on behalf of the citizens. Government represents the invisible ‘state’. A state has people, physical boundaries, government and sovereignty. The question whether government has diligently performed its work to the satisfaction of majority citizens is fiercely debatable. But government remains a central feature of society.

To compete for individual survival on this earth, authority to regulate the behaviour of individuals in public space was the basis upon which philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke recommended governments to us. Governments were to have social contracts with the citizens. Such governments were to be good governments which must be able, incorruptible and competent. The role of bureaucracy in this endeavor is unquestionable. Why then has bureaucracy received all the attacks within the family of public administration yet good government and bureaucracy share the same ancestors? What would happen to African countries if a number of administrators involved in the protection of our borders as countries did a poor job? What would be the cost of terrorism to a country where bureaucrats do a poor job?

Excellence in public service delivery is undoubtedly a key variable for measuring good governance. The acute crisis in most contemporary African administrative systems is a result of poor administration. Dimeski (2011:188) demonstrates that New Public Management (NPM) as a global reform package has tools for enhancing efficient, effective and productivity suitable to the public sector as compared to bureaucratic governance. However, the current problems that intercede citizen expectations and government functions through the private sector marketization seem to strongly suggest that the market will not be the primary solution. In fact, governments that have made strides in
economic developments have done so through a strong interventionist strategy. In our view, we subscribe to the philosophical refocus of our public administration systems. Our unit of analysis when discussing problems of Africa need to be redirected to bureaucratic governance.

When Aristotle observed that for one man to superintend on many things required him to appoint a number of subordinates, it justified the necessity of administration as a central pillar in any social life (Dimock et al., 1953:3). In all administrative jurisdictions bureaucrats run the administration and implement public policies passed by politicians. Even then, politicians cannot do policy making without input and technical guidance from the administrators/bureaucrats. For this reason, bureaucratic governance has survived in democracies as well as in autocratic regimes. Societal activities have to be accomplished within a framework of acceptable rules implemented by the bureaucracy. Hughes (2003:18) maintains that public administration has a long history, long enough that it parallels the very notion of government. Indeed, public administrators have continued, and will possibly continue, to comprise the bulk of government employment and activities (Peters and Pierre, 2007:1).

The historical fact that civilization and administration have moved side by side since time immemorial is incontestable. During the ancient and medieval periods, there existed sound administrative principles to justify the governance of the times (Shafritz et al., 2011:214). However, early systems of administration were personal - based on loyalty to a particular individual such as a king or minister, instead of being impersonal, based on legality as conceived by an organization or the state (Hughes, 2003:18). Their practices often resulted in corruption and misuse of office for personal gain. Practices that may seem alien in our times were commonplace in earliest administrative systems. For example, patronage employment in state functions was a very common occurrence. People were employed on the basis of nepotism, reliance on friends or relatives or by paying to be recruited. There were certainly other good practices as well.

Bureaucratic organization has been affected by New Public Management (NPM) doctrines. However, some scholars have advocated the “rediscovery” of bureaucracy (Olsen 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). The crisis in African administrative systems seems immune from the NPM prescription. Some ancient administrations built on bureaucratic principles did some commendable job. The building of the Egyptian pyramids with good technology and bureaucratic management styles considering the time periods affords us testimony of the managerial and organizational abilities of ancient Egypt (Inyang, 2008:123).

Inyang (2008) reports that while their system of organization may appear unwieldy, cumbersome, and even wasteful, they point to how bureaucratic governance if well nurtured could contribute to economic development of African countries. The ancient Egyptians appreciated managerial authority and responsibility and they recognized the importance of pooling out job descriptions in detail. It is interesting to note that with this administrative system, one pyramid required 100,000 men, working for
20 years, covering 13 acres, using 2.3 million blocks each weighting an average of 2.5 tons. Beyer (1959:243) in a classic article gives us more insights on ancient bureaucracy. He reports that the old Egyptian empire was a unitary state which had local governments as administrative units. At the head of the central government was a king or pharaoh as he came to be known later. Theoretically, he was a god as well as a political ruler. Under the king was the Vizier or prime minister who not only presided over the entire administrative hierarchy but also was the chief justice of the country, with both original and appellate jurisdiction, had charge of the state’s central records office and served as the king’s chief architect. Under the general administration of the Vizier were a large number of administrative departments, among them the treasury, the granaries, agriculture, public works, the armory, and the army. In addition there were the temples of the gods and the mortuary temples of the kings.

In a related development ancient Egypt had local governments which carried out their responsibilities under provinces or norms as they were called by the Greeks. The governors of the norms were appointed by the king. There were also rulers of any large towns in their districts. Each norm was to some degree a copy of the central government and had such counterparts of the latter as treasury, the granaries, and the army. These officials performed central as well as local functions. These ancient examples in Egypt were only part of what bureaucratic arrangements existed in African kingdoms and empires. The Songhai Empire in West Africa and Buganda Kingdom in present Republic of Uganda were known for their strong administrative systems; the weakness therein not withstanding. Waldo (1981:25) reminds us that “public administration has a role in every important field of endeavor: agriculture, mining and metallurgy, commerce and manufacturing, medicine, transportation, engineering and education.” He reports that, the control of rivers, production of crops, constructing public works, creating and sustaining the military all need the tools, measurements and predictions of public administration.

In a democracy the citizens should have a clear voice and all activities of government should be driven by the desire to satisfy citizen aspirations. No government worth the salt can meet citizen aspirations without a sound and efficient bureaucracy. The problems in Africa-political, economic, and social would owe their genesis from a weak bureaucracy. The bureaucracy that can promote social transformation must be incorruptible, able, effective, accountable, transparent and efficient. We strongly posit that effective government does not just happen, even when there are well-designed constitutions. Good government also must be democratic, able and incorruptible. A democracy (direct or representative) is different from governments which are an absolute monarchy, dictatorship, or an oligarchy.

This paper interrogates an uncalled for paradox that bureaucratic governance is a necessary evil in contemporary administration. Yet our view is that it remains critical pillar for establishing a good government in Africa. While one would question why African countries have not established good government, we submit that the advent of colonialism disorganized a number of societal values upon which the African bureaucracy was anchored. We argue that good government needs a bureaucracy based on African core values. The rest of the paper is arranged as follows: Part two deals with theoretical framework for the paper. Principal–agent theory and democratic theory are the theoretical lenses adopted in the paper. Part three interrogates the linkage between good government and
bureaucratic government. In part four, the paper discusses the challenges and implications of bureaucracy in contemporary African public administration and then makes concluding remarks.

**Theoretical framework**

Most African governments claim to be democratic. By this, they would put citizens at the centre of all government activities. A democracy is a system of government in which the people are active participants of their own government. The ancient Greeks used the word to mean government by the many in contrast to government by the few. In a direct democracy, the people govern themselves by voting on issues individually as citizens. Citizens under participatory democracy engage in affairs that affect them. In indirect or representative democracy, the people elect representatives and give them the responsibility and authority to make laws and to run the government on their behalf. Under a representative democracy, citizens elect their representatives who in turn delegate some powers to those in bureaucracy to work. The citizens are thus the first principals and the elected representatives become the second principals as bureaucrats become agents. The logic of the principal-agent theory and democratic theory become critical theoretical frameworks for analyzing the relationships between principals and agents.

Agency theory is premised on relationships between strategic principals and strategic agents. Every democracy in the world is dependent on an efficient bureaucracy to function legitimately. The principal-agent relationship is constitutive of state institutions, in particular public policy-making institutions. Lane (1993) suggests that public policy making in the public sector involves the problems of typical principal-agent relationships within the private sector. The social contract has been one of the most influential theories of government in the past two hundred years, on which modern democracy and most forms of socialism are established. The social contract theory holds that governments are created by the people in order to provide communal needs that cannot be appropriately fulfilled using purely individual means. Governments exist for the purpose of serving the needs and desires of the people, and the government relationship with the people is clearly stipulated in a social contract (a constitution and a set of laws). Both the government and the people must abide by this contract. Agency theory deals with the design of these contracts.

In particular, agency theory focuses on the relationship between principals and agents who exercise authority on their behalf. However, whenever human interaction involves considerable transaction costs due to the inter-temporal nature of the interaction as well as the complexity of the agreement involved, principal-agent problems arise (Stiglitz, 1987). To address these problems, the principal-agent theory argues that principals must solve two basic tasks in choosing their agents, namely selecting the best agents and create inducements for them to behave as desired and monitoring the behaviors of their agents to ensure that they are performing their tasks well. This is why there are various forms of accountability relationships. Elected representatives are made to account for their actions through elections where those that did not meet the citizen social contract are removed. Bureaucrats also account to the elected representatives through the public accounts committee, local
government committee and other committees of parliament. Special constitutional offices like the auditor general and Ombudsman are also created specifically and report to the legislatures. Commercialization’s of politics and corruption that characterize most elected representatives in Africa have however caused serious assault on these doctrines.

There are two problems that face the principal in choosing the agent. First, the principal can never know everything about an agent. A supervisor can examine a potential employee’s education, skills and personality, and background, but he or she can never be sure of selecting the best person for the job. Potential employees will know more about their own qualifications than potential employers can ever learn. As a result, employers tend to hire lower quality applicants than desired. This is called “adverse selection” problem. Second, the principal can never be sure of knowing the full details of the agent’s performance (Arrow, 1985). Mukoro (2007) contends that leaders (politicians) and bureaucrats occupy a position of trust and service. They are voted into power and appointed into positions of authority, because the institutions in which they perform have statutorily designated it as such. Rules are made which becomes the binding force in the social contract. These rules and legal provisions must be obeyed and applied in all facets of engagement whether elective or appointive. The bureaucracy has a critical role in ensuring that systems work. We turn to this question in the next section.

**Does good government depend on bureaucratic governance?**

The good governance debate and the predecessor NPM doctrines root for a limited government. Governance measures the limited role of government in terms of legal checks (rule of law) as well as constraints on government scope and fiscal size. Governance is mostly used to explore the diminishing capacity of the state to direct policymaking and implementation hence “hollowing out of the state” (Rhodes, 1997). Skelcher (2005) submits that government has become fragmented because of a congested state. Government; or the state (though often wrongly used in this context) is only regarded as one of the actors in managing societal activities. Other players like the civil society organizations, the media, religious institutions, citizens, and the private sector become other important players.

While traditional public administration received serious assault during the 1970s with scholarship shifting to NPM and governance, our view is that the declaration of the death of bureaucracy is likely to remain a myth. Despite the heavy criticism against bureaucracy, it has remained around. There are good advocates of bureaucracy. Lynn, (1987:77) contends that bureaucracy is so often used as a derogatory term, that one forgets that it “was coined by a distinguished sociologist”. Bureaucrats are criticized as “simultaneously timid and ineffectual, and power-seeking and dangerous” (Waldo, 1982). New Public Governance (NPG) examines inter-organizational relationships and their effectiveness in public services delivery, subject to the efficacy of the governance processes that manage these relationships. However, traditional public administration had core values-public interest; service; honesty; integrity, fairness and equity while NPM approaches emphasize professional values
(corporate culture) like Innovation; creativity and continuous improvement (Kernaghan, 2000). Africa’s public administration lacks clear value frameworks at the moment.

Drawing on the Canadian experience, Kernaghan (2000) distills public services values as (1) Ethical values—Integrity; fairness, (2) Democratic values—Impartiality; rule of law and (3) Professional values—Effectiveness; service. Several countries in Africa have a robust history of traditional institutions and the roles which these institutions have played in the course of governance and administration (Mukoro, 2010: 259). The role these institutions in the ‘mis-governance and mis-administration’ of Africa is also paradoxically well documented. Public leadership must guide decisions and actions for sustainable quality services from public institutions, despite significant challenges arising from the global crisis (Alam et al., 2010). While Africa has been mired in a developmental crisis—the generalized incapacity of an economy to generate the conditions necessary for a sustained improvement in the standard of living (Stein, 2000), administrators have surely played their part in causing this crisis.

With the apparent patronage systems in most African administrative systems, the possibility of a good government will remain a dream unless concrete steps are taken. A good bureaucracy is a critical independent variable for establishing a capable government. This bureaucracy must be built on core African values as opposed to imported values that continue to be ‘board roomed’ by public service bureaucrats. Africa is a diverse continent but this diversity is rich in innumerable values that must be exploited to build a robust bureaucracy. The infusion of African values at all levels of government will help create strong and sustainable institutions upon which good bureaucracy and good government will depend. While Africa has to be mindful of the globalised nature of the world necessitating the importation of certain western values in our bureaucracies, such a practice should be so rigid and inflexible that only those that promote the African cause should be accepted.

African systems were historically governed by strict rules and regulations based on prescribed communal values. There could have been some exceptions to the communal ownership of these values. However, it is a known fact that in pre-colonial Africa individuals who violated the agreed societal principles faced the wrath of not only the administrators and politicians of the time but also the entire community members. Decisions were often arrived at through intense consultations and discussions. Society was organized on commonly agreed upon rules and regulations with appellant procedures. This arrangement created order in the management of public affairs. However, in contemporary systems politicians typically seem not to know which policies are best for citizen aspirations and often meander around what affects society. They often rely on bureaucrats and outside advisors pre-occupied with expanding the patronage systems in their own organizations. Bureaucrats are better informed and knowledgeable but have a core competence in manipulating policies to suit their interests.

When are governments said to be good? At a general level, it is when they are more effective in delivering on their mandates. The debate however goes deeper into democratic values. In a
democracy, citizens fund the activities of government through paying taxes. The citizens must receive ‘something’ from government in return. They generally want better public services (delivered efficiently, effectively, reliably, transparently and in accountable ways). These objectives are possible when governments are honest, attend to due process, and all institutions are working within the democratic principles of their establishment. Parliament must do its constitutional work uninterrupted, the executive must be thoroughly committed and competent and the judiciary must be truly independent. All other institutions at whatever levels that has been delegated any responsibility must do the same. When government officials lose their monopoly over force, or prove incapable of extracting needed resources to produce collective goods, non-compliance, resistance, and even state failure are far more likely.

Can governments exist without a bureaucracy? Is it conceivable to have good government without a good bureaucracy? What features should this bureaucracy have? The traditional or the Weberian type? The bureaucracy must be an efficient bureaucracy that takes the democratic values and doctrines seriously. It should be a bureaucracy that strives to promote fundamental public values from all fronts as opposed to the private sector styles of approach to public management which encourages even using public offices for rent seeking. Bureaucratic undertakings have to be within the contexts of the changing world of work. This creates problems for bureaucracy but which can be addressed through committed political and administrative actors. The behaviors and attitudes of all those who run government at whatever level must be tuned to serve the public interests diligently.

Olsen (2005), in an article titled ‘Maybe it is Time to Rediscover Bureaucracy’ posed the following questions which provide an appropriate template for our theoretical analysis:

Is “bureaucracy” an organizational dinosaur helplessly involved in its death struggle? Is it an undesirable and nonviable form of administration developed in a legalistic and authoritarian society and now inevitably withering away because it is incompatible with complex, individualistic, and dynamic societies? Are, therefore, the term bureaucracy and the theoretical ideas and empirical observations associated with it, irrelevant or deceptive when it comes to making sense of public administration and government in contemporary democracies?

Our strong view is in support of the need of a bureaucracy. This bureaucracy must be anchored on the task to modify the behavior and attitudes of public officers. Weber’s theory of bureaucracy highlights six dimensions that constitute parameters of efficiency that African administrative systems badly need: fixed offices; hierarchy; documentation; credentialism and training; hardening of tasks into occupations; and universal standards applicable to all. These principles when fully implemented allow for the efficient and predictable coordination and execution of human action. This is what African democracies lack in the contemporary times. Most African Administrative systems have massive corruption, nepotism, irrationality, and inefficiency which have increased in scope during the NPM paradigms.

Budd (2007) strongly believes that the need for bureaucratic safeguards from the legacy of NPM and the need for standardization in public services and the regularity of their production is urgently needed.
While there is no consensus on the criteria for measuring ‘good governance’, the term commonly includes aspects like political stability, combating corruption, nepotism and mismanagement and promoting transparency, accountability and proper procedures (Panda, 2006:271). Within the politics-administration divide, who is in better position to address the current problems in Africa – politicians or administrators? Vein du Gay (2000) castigates in his book ‘In Praise of Bureaucracy’ advocates of contemporary administrative reforms for claiming that economy, efficiency and effectiveness are fundamentally the same yet in any organizational context, the relationship between the three is complex. He described real purpose of the advocates of reform as follows:

Undermining the bureaucratic ethos is an avowed intention of contemporary reformers, but their understanding of “bureaucracy” like their concept of “efficiency” leaves a lot to be desired. Rather than referring to a form of organization exhibiting many of the characteristics of classic “bureau” contemporary reformers use “bureaucracy” as a composite term for the defects of large organizations.

Reading through the new and old variants of public administration and management, one would see some convergence, a fact that seriously undermines claims for a new and discrete ideal-type of public governance (Budd, 2007). New scholars have posed more fundamental challenges which call for a revisit of the debates posed by traditional public administration and NPM. Osborne (2010) for example has posed seven questions. First is the fundamental question which touches on the what should be the exact unit of analysis in exploring public policy implementation and public service delivery and their implication to theory and practice?. Second, is the architecture question which concerns the organizational architecture best suited for delivering public services in a pluralist state? Third is the sustainability question relating to how can sustainability of public service delivery be ensured? Fourth is the values question that concerns what kind of values underpins public policy implementation and public service delivery? The fifth question is the relational skills question which is about what key skills are required for relational performance? The sixth question is the accountability question – what is the nature of accountability in a fragmented and pluralist state? The final question is how do we evaluate sustainability, accountability and relational performance within open natural public service systems – the evaluation question?

An assembled response to each of the questions would in our view support the bureaucratic system. The unit of analysis in bureaucratic modes is the institutions together with the components. The organizational architecture is one based on clear rules and procedures which survive in a hierarchical arrangement. The sustainability of bureaucracy today despite the hostility has been tested. Traditional bureaucratic models were based on known values of public services and demanded accountability by all that were called to serve. It advocated for continuous training as a basis for enhancing relational skills performance. Certainly, public service has appropriate tools for measuring the sustainability, accountability and relational performance. However, bureaucracy needs to be supported by the behavioral models.

An organizational structure as a normative structure composed of rules and roles specifying more or less clearly, who is expected to do what and how (Scott, 1981) is central to government organization.
However, apart from the positive features that improve the efficient and effective functioning of an organization, bureaucracy is also associated with negative features such as 'red tape', non-accountability, unresponsiveness, delay, inflexibility, ineptitude, centralized elitism and undemocratic tendencies. These need to be addressed. Scott alludes to a wide range of theories for establishing governments: greed and oppression, order and tradition, natural rights, and social contract.

Democratic theory is associated with only three of the above reasons. The utility of the governance concept in describing the changing institutional nature of the government (state) is unquestionable although critics point to its conceptual and analytical relevance (Newman, 2001). Public governance which is the mechanism of dispersing powers and resources by public bodies to other players including the private and quasi-private agencies to manage and provide governmental functions and underlying services (Budd, 2007) has been a common concept in Public Administration scholarship. Trust and governance are central to any effective organization. How do governments ensure trust? Traditional bureaucratic public organizations were often determined by democratic imperatives.

Although the term 'bureaucracy', in many parts of the world has been associated with pejorative expression, and used to decry the inefficiency, rigidity and lapses that characterize public services, its relevance in improving African society needs to be highly supported. Some scholars have labeled bureaucracy to be “contrived, ambiguous, and troublesome” (Okotoni, 2001). We, however, posit that it is relevant for 21\textsuperscript{st} century administration and will possibly remain so. While “new public management” represents an attempt to translate managerial ideas from the private sector to public organizations, such as contracting out, client orientation and the introductions of market mechanisms, and network management focuses more on mediating and co-coordinating inter-organizational policy making (Klijn and Koppenjan, 2000:136), bureaucracy provides a regulatory regime upon which even the management practices are to be implemented. This in our view implies that even in a pure market-driven model of governance, bureaucracy is still essential.

Governance paradigm advocates for the transfer of government responsibility in delivering public services to other players like the private sector, civil society organization and the media among others. Such an arrangement equally demands an efficient bureaucracy to provide a strong oversight role. Unfortunately, most African countries seem to have transferred the responsibilities of public service to other players without stringent monitoring and regulatory role of the bureaucracy. This has created accountability problems as well as serious service delivery deficits. Budd (2007) concedes that once one starts to explore the realities behind the discourse of post-bureaucratic/transformed public governance change, one often finds little fundamental difference between mainstream public administration and new governance paradigms.

Scholars in Economics and Sociology argue that a strong and well-organized bureaucracy contributed to the economic growth in the Asian miracle economies of the 1990s as well as to the economic growth more generally in semi industrial countries (Amsden 1989; Evans and Rauch 1999). Its
contribution to Africa in creating good governance cannot be underestimated if only it can be well nurtured to the expected levels. The way the state bureaucracy is organized strengthens poverty reduction in developing countries (Henderson et al 2007). We find that the centralized pre-colonial political institutions of African ethnic groups reduced corruption and fostered the rule of law in colonial and postcolonial Africa based on bureaucratic model of administration. Gennaioli and Rainer (2005) for example argue that pre-colonial centralization improved public goods provision in colonial and postcolonial Africa.

**Challenges of bureaucracy**

Bureaucracy is often defended from the charges of being a narrowly hierarchical, standardized and inflexible organizational form (du Gay, 2000). However, its major challenge is how it stands up to the challenges of networked, virtual and partnership organizational forms which contain flexible working patterns and inclusiveness leading to the permeation of work into personal spheres and vice versa. Proponents of post-bureaucracy suggest that changes in economy and society sound the death knell for the bureaucratic organizational form (Hecksher and Donnellan, 1998). The failure of bureaucratic organizations is very much connected with issues of development since the bureaucracy is central to government's policy formulation and implementation process.

Fred Riggs (1964) in his prismatic theory revealed that administrative malfunctioning in the developing countries was as a result of the overlap of the administrative system with non administrative or cultural values of the society. Most scholars by application misinterpret this ecological influence to mean that African cultural values were incongruent to ideal bureaucratic features, hence the prominence of bureaucratic malfunctioning in Africa.

Good government is democratic, honest and competent (Nicholas, 2010:2). Public administrators are essential to attaining objectives of each of these pillars. Well managed government enhances the daily lives of citizens. The prices government pay for inefficiency in public services is always heavy. The good and bad things we see in society are from public administrators. What has bewildered African democracies is a dynamic theory that demonstrates how to go from ineffective to effective government. Snaking through the evolution of public administration paradigms from the politics-administration dichotomy to the current New Public Governance Paradigm provides useful ideas on what has gone wrong, where, when and what needs to be done better. Society needs good public services and these are only possible through an efficient administration.

The apparent paradox between bureaucracy and governance debates and the struggle for a superior approach to promoting efficiency has occupied scholars for a while but citizens do not see a difference as they continue to suffer due to poor services. We contend that good government will not be possible in Africa unless there is a re-launched bureaucratic governance. That bureaucratic governance must be based on African values and this raises important questions. How do we generate governments that promote economic growth, relative equality, and political equity? How do we end corruption and
institute impartial but compassionate bureaucrats? How can we transform governments that have failed their citizens abysmally into governments that protect their citizens, provide them with health, education, infrastructure and other public goods? How do we ensure that the agents account to the principals on terms agreed upon? What mechanisms are open to citizens in the African context to demand accountability from the agents within the current environment of corruption and dishonesty?

Concluding remarks

This paper argued that good governance and government is possible in Africa through an acceptable bureaucracy conforming to African value system. A variety of literature and other writings about critiques of most African administration put African leadership in the open space of criticism as custodians of corrupt and poor government administrations. A good government should be democratic, honest and able - but these are characteristics which were found to be lacking in some African administration. The lack or presence of these aspects in African political leadership is associated with the incompatibility between the African value systems and the western values that results in poor governance. In this paper we therefore conclude that Africa needs a re-launched public service with its foundations in African values.

References


