Strengthening sustainable capacity development in Commonwealth East Africa through strategic partnerships

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Although substantial progress has been made globally in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other internationally agreed development goals, most Sub-Saharan African countries are unlikely to meet them by 2015.

Introduction

The UN assessment of progress towards the achievement of the MDGs, held on September 2008 in New York, noted that although most developing countries have stepped up their efforts towards achieving the MDGs, the current average economic growth for sub-Saharan Africa is inadequate for these goals to be achieved by 2015.

Of the eight MDGs, progress in reducing poverty remains the greatest challenge; 30 per cent of the world’s poorest citizens are African. This is especially disturbing since Africa is home to only 10 per cent of the world population. According to the World Bank, the poverty in Africa has doubled to some 300 million since the mid-1980s and is expected to climb as high as 400 million by 2015. The percentage of those living on less than US$1.25 per day hovers around 50 per cent.

Thus, Africa is the only region of the world where poverty is increasing. In stark contrast, dramatic gains in the fight against poverty have been achieved in other regions, most notably Asia. Africa’s escalating poverty comes despite an encouraging rate of economic growth, overall improvement in the policy environment and generally strong macro-economic fundamentals.

This poor progress can be attributed to the following two factors:

1. The annual current average growth rate of 5.8 per cent falls short of the 7 per cent generally believed to be the absolute minimum rate required to reduce poverty and improve human conditions. This is compounded by growth vulnerability arising from the monocultural nature of most African economies and their dependence on commodity exports.

2. Persistent concentration of growth in the capital-intensive but basic extractive sector results in low labour absorption since most economies have not achieved adequate productivity in the manufacturing and services sectors to sufficiently absorb surplus labour. Consequently, Africa remains off track in relation to moving towards sustainable growth and development and full integration into the global economy.

Achievement of the MDGs and other development challenges inevitably place a heavy burden on governments’ ability to either effectively provide or facilitate provision of the requisite services by non-state actors in order to enhance socio-economic development. The situation has been worsened by the ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the related high cost of medical care, the high mortality of skilled labour, unfavourable trade terms, rising food prices, unemployment, corruption, weak accountability, insecurity and vagaries of weather, in which drought and floods regularly occur in rapid succession.

These factors have in turn adversely affected public services’ ability to provide adequate and quality services such as education, health, water and sanitation, infrastructure, security, and maintenance of law and order. Indeed, the pervasive weak and/or inadequate capacity in the public service continues to adversely impact governments’ ability to deliver services, due to unsatisfactory performance and low productivity in the public sector.

These development challenges have been compounded by the 2008 global economic crisis in which the resultant downturn in global growth has invariably precipitated a decline in most commodity prices and tighter credit, thus significantly worsening the economic outlook for sub-Saharan Africa.

In light of the above, African countries must improve the performance of their public sectors if they are to achieve the goals of reducing poverty, accelerating economic growth, and providing better services to their citizens. Achievement of such improved performance requires countries to complement reforms with sustained capacity-building.

The Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (2008) recognised that limited capacity is one of the major constraints to development in Africa and highlighted the need for development assistance to be better coordinated and led by Africans. This requires a change in approach to development and emphasises the importance of capacity development in particular. Further, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), an increasingly widespread development approach largely adopted in sub-Saharan Africa, have unleashed new and broader demands for capacity-building.

Partnership models for improving public service performance

In conformity with the above, the Commonwealth Secretariat’s Governance and Institutional Development Division’s (GIDD) capacity strategy for Africa is currently premised on the need to address capacity constraints in the public service, mainly at middle
to senior levels, on a sustained basis, while working through appropriate partnerships at country and regional levels. In doing so, two important partnership models have been adopted.

**Model 1 – Using regional Management Development Institutes**

The first model entails the delivery of training programmes through national and regional Management Development Institutes (MDIs). Using this approach, GIDD has not only helped revive governments’ interest in MDIs but has also carved out a niche for itself in an area hitherto ostensibly unattractive to most development partners. Institutions that GIDD is working with include the Eastern and Southern Africa Management Institute (ESAMI), Seychelles Institute of Management (SIM) and the Kenya Institute of Administration (KIA).

There are two main reasons to support this approach:

1. MDIs were specifically established for the purpose of building and enhancing capacity and management skills in the public service and are therefore the right institutions in as far as national public service training is concerned.

2. The need to help build suitable and adequate capacity of local and regional faculty in order to sustain capacity-building of the public service. This is done through the involvement of local faculty in programme delivery with highly experienced international resource persons as leads. In addition, some of these local MDIs have excellent training accommodation facilities that offer a cheaper option than hotels. This translates into savings which can then be used to train more deserving officials.

At ESAMI, GIDD has for the last two years been running a popular programme on community policing and customer care for the Tanzania police. So far, over 110 senior officers have been trained, 36 of whom are trainers. These trainers are now cascading the programme to lower echelons of the Police Department. The Department has expressed satisfaction with the approach taken under this initiative and affirms that there are signs that the partnership between community police and local communities is yielding the expected results.

Similar findings have been observed in KIA where GIDD has been running an annual regional programme on Performance Management Systems (PMS). Last year, the KIA faculty, which benefited from a previous GIDD-supported programme, successfully ran a pilot PMS for the Government of Kenya. In order to build on this success and pave a way for the institutionalisation of the programme at KIA, plans for GIDD’s gradual withdrawal from the programme are under way.

Speaking at KIA during the opening of this year’s regional PMS programme in June, Kenya’s Minister for Public Service, the Hon. Dalmas Otieno, commended the Commonwealth Secretariat for helping to build the capacity of local MDIs. He noted that member states in the region were now spending fewer financial resources on costly training institutions by opting to train public servants in local and regional MDIs. The savings realised are being used to support essential social services such as health and education.

In moving towards replication of this model in other parts of the region, GIDD is currently in the process of recruiting a Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) expert for the Uganda Institute of Management (UMI). The gist of this support is to help UMI develop a postgraduate programme for Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation. M&E capacity is relatively weak in Africa. Even though governments are all implementing various public sector reforms, measurement of progress is not properly undertaken and documented, due to lack of adequate local M&E expertise.

**Model 2 – The partnership and network approach**

The second model being explored for the programme delivery partnership approach entails working with development partners, mainly through co-financing or parallel financing of various training programmes. This approach helps to leverage GIDD’s limited financial and human resources, enhance visibility and strengthen conformity to the Paris Declaration on the need to minimise the financial and administrative burden that stand-alone donor-funded programmes invariably place and perpetuate at country level.

This partnership approach has been undertaken successfully in Zambia, where a series of training programmes on Strategic Negotiations has been jointly supported by the European Union and the Secretariat through GIDD, over the last two years. So far, 120 Zambian public officials have been trained. The Zambia Government has been fully supportive of this partnership and has urged other partners to emulate the EU and the Secretariat.

This year, GIDD hopes to expand its partnership approach to include working with Global Development Learning Centres (GDLCs) in Kenya and Tanzania. Both Learning Centres are members of the Global Development Learning Network (GDLN), which has over 120 networked development communication hubs around the world. The core function of the network is to enable decision-makers and mid-level professionals and practitioners to access and share the wealth of knowledge and experiences available in the world through the global communication system, including video conferencing, internet, video, CD-ROM and print. This model, if successful, is likely to radically change the way GIDD delivers its programmes, as the use of video-conferencing will negate the need for costly air travel across countries. The savings accrued will be ploughed back to expand its programme outreach.

In promoting these partnerships, it is hoped that GIDD will continue to contribute meaningfully to Africa’s quest, of achieving sustainable capacity development in the public sector, for optimal performance and productivity. As resources shrink and needs expand, creativity in inventing innovative capacity-development approaches remains a non-negotiable imperative.