Editorial

Public Governance and Leadership: Ensuring the welfare of the citizenry

Dr. Prince Chukwuneme Enwereji

School of Public Management, Governance & Public Policy, University of Johannesburg

prince.enwereji@yahoo.com

Public governance has been described in various ways, but essentially, it refers to measures and procedures employed by the government to ensure the total welfare of the citizenry. Egeberg and Trondal (2018) affirm that governance refers to the structure by which organisations/nations are managed, as well as the procedures adopted to ensure that leaders are held accountable. This definition of governance describes it as an activity that incorporates formal and informal rules, procedures, and practices employed by the state to achieve desired outcomes that meet society's needs while making the most efficient use of available resources. In the view of Pomeranz and Stedman (2020), good governance emphasises how public institutions handle public affairs, manage public resources, and ensure the fulfilment of human rights in a manner that is free of abuse or corruption, and in accordance with the rule of law. In the context of effective governance, the structures must provide accountability; transparency; responsiveness; compliance with rule of law; stability (both socially and economically); equity and inclusiveness; empowerment; and broad-based participation. Dzebo (2019) further agrees that effective governance is the ability to implement processes to achieve results that conform to society's demands while making the most efficient use of available resources. Taking all this into account, and in reference to the African context, it is clear that efficiency is needed to achieve good governance in order to enhance positive change, right down to the grassroots level.

While the concept of leadership dates back to the earliest recorded history of humankind, the study thereof as a subject gained popularity in the early twentieth century. Since then, various theories have arisen, each of which has contributed significantly to the evolution of the concept. With so many theories being developed and applied in various organisations and situations, leadership as a concept has become a vast field of study and a challenging topic to define, grasp, and comprehend as a whole. According to Northouse (2021), leadership is one of the most observed yet least understood phenomena in academia. Various views have been provided by many scholars; nonetheless, leadership can be described in simple terms as a position of power held by an individual or individuals in a group that allows them to exert interpersonal influence over the members of the group to mobilise and guide the group's efforts toward specific goals (Bennis & Thomas, 2020). An 'individual's or a group's ability to influence and guide followers or other members of an organisation, referred to as leadership, is considered a critical management function, as it enables resources to be directed toward increased efficiency and goal achievement. Effective leaders clarify the mission, motivate subordinates, and assist them in achieving the set goals (Daniëls, Hondeghem & Dochy, 2019). The leadership process culminates in the achievement of a common objective via the dedication and desire of both leaders and followers. Leadership entails building relationships, and above all, it is about collaborating with and guiding people in new directions; it is about maintaining integrity and trust; and the process of generating the most pleasant interaction possible between leaders and followers, customers, employees, and all the stakeholders in governance.

The increasing complexities and demands resulting from continual societal change, as well as the constant push for higher levels of service provision, necessitate effective and ethical leadership. In the twenty-first century, good governance and leadership that is both effective and ethical are required for nations to be regarded as successful in the eyes of all stakeholders. It is impossible to achieve goals and deliver services needed by the citizenry without effective leadership and good governance at all levels in private, public, and civil organisations. Sloof and von Siemens (2021) confirm that effective leaders have a defined mission and vision for the future, and make decisions in accordance with those goals. Effective governance and leadership work collectively to implement a specific plan and contribute to the development of a successful management culture. Leaders are deemed crucial because they define how power and financial resources are distributed and make decisions that can have a significant impact on a country's prosperity. Finally, the proper administration of the state or society is the product of good governance and it safeguards the interests of the people, regardless of their social standing. It also places a strong emphasis on public sector management, the legal foundation for development, accountability, transparency, and information flow.

Reflecting on the qualities of leaders in the African context

According to Joyce (2017), leadership traits are the characteristics, talents, and behaviours of strategic leaders that result in outstanding performance. Mascagni, Nell, and Monkam (2017) confirm that many countries in the African continent have been unable to deliver basic services to residents due to strategic leadership challenges. When a country is subjected to ineffective leadership and poor governance, its economic growth is negatively affected. The slow pace and stagnancy of economic growth in most African countries is connected to a lack of regulatory quality, the ineffectiveness of governments, and total lack of corruption control. Weak governance is attributed to the inability of the government stakeholders to facilitate effective leadership and governance in fulfilling the service provision motive, social programmes, and infrastructural development. Real change will require courageous, bold leaders who exemplify value-driven leadership. Many African countries have robust policies in place to drive their economies and future growth, however, the gap between intention and implementation poses a stumbling block in re-writing the narratives of weak governance. This is often the case where leaders at the top know what needs to be done, but don't know how to position their structures to take action effectively. There is a need for leaders to create a sustainable implementation approach that can bring positive growth and change through sound policies. It can be argued that African politicians are to blame for the continent's current poverty and underdevelopment, as they have failed to identify or develop a leadership model or strategy that will work for the continent. One of the possible reasons for this failure is that they are focused on importing western-based concepts that simply don't work in most African countries.

The African continent continues to face major developmental challenges due to leadership issues. Corruption, fraud, undeveloped infrastructure, and unsustainable development have continued to plague the African continent due to the lack of effective leadership and governance (Amah, 2019). The numerous challenges, such as corruption and mismanagement of available resources, lie at the heart of all problems that have arisen in the past few decades since independence. The money spent on corrupt practices could instead be put to good use in Africa's development to fight poverty, and unless this is tackled, effective governance will not be achieved. Poverty in Africa will not be eradicated until African leaders work together to address the cause of the continent's underdevelopment. Africa as a continent may have achieved political independence, but it has not achieved economic independence.

Sadly, many African politicians are vying for leadership positions in government to control current resources and abuse the economy. Many individuals in Africa see government positions as a way to wriggle out of poverty. Most African countries cannot maintain their economies and provide public services with their current resources; therefore, they rely on assistance from western countries for financial assistance and loans. However, this financial aid provided by the western world is often abused by the African leaders who divert such funds for their personal use, leaving their countries' economies distressed and subject to recession. Africa urgently requires leaders who can transform their countries' economic conditions to ensure that basic services are provided to the citizenry. In the view of Mbandlwa (2020), African nations will never achieve any significant growth unless the bad leadership syndrome is addressed; and if corruption is not effectively handled, their development will be stifled.

The goal of the special issue

This Journal promotes academic scholarship through the publication of original manuscripts in the field of ***Public Administration, Management, Governance, Leadership, Public Policy, Public Leadership,*** and other related fields. This special issue presents scholarly articles based on governance and leadership in the African continent. The selected manuscripts provide insights on the effective governance methods to improve the functionality of the African continent, which has generally been riddled with poor governance. The intention of this journal the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) while providing measures for African countries to establish efficient institutions that promote accountability, democracy, good governance, and effective leadership. In the twenty-first century, good governance and effective leadership are required for nations to be regarded as successful and prosperous in the eyes of all stakeholders. There exists a direct correlation between successful leadership, good governance, and economic development. The fundamental reason for the lack of development and poor service provision in Africa, compared with other continents, is ineffective governance and leadership. Africa could witness remarkable growth opportunities if its leaders are able to facilitate effective leadership and governance.

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