Chapter 1
Development Administration in Contemporary Africa:
An Explorative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the definitional and conceptual issues in the academic field of development administration and highlights the views about Western models within the grain of African traditional society. It identifies a major set of socio-cultural and economic parameters that strongly characterise or otherwise influence development administration in contemporary Africa. It finds that, in general, Western-oriented approaches remain incongruent with African traditional conventions. The chapter concludes that if a growing emphasis on the socio-cultural components within development administration discourse is a direct response to historical and environmental situations in contemporary Africa, then it is an essential consideration that must shape the field.

1. BACKGROUND

Since the emergence of development administration in the early 1960s, it has become a distinct enterprise of academic discipline and practice. It has become a field of study that pronounces the ideology and capacity of the government, non-governmental entities and political leaders of developing countries towards the achievement of social transformation. There was a consensus among academics and political leaders alike (Turner & Hulme, 1997; Luke, 1986) that development administration was created and promoted to play a crucial role in creating "stable and orderly change" (Dwivedi & Nef, 1982, p. 62).

The dominance of modernisation paradigm characterised the practice of development administration. It was a Western-oriented socio-economic mechanism, parallel to the fundamentals of Keynesian welfare economics (rational scientific principles). Radiating from the established technological advancement of the West, it was believed that with appropriate instruments—financial, technological and organisational— modernisation would automatically convey to developing countries the same levels of benefits, just as it happened in Europe and North America. In particular, foreign aid and transfer of eco-technical expertise through an overhauling administrative system were thought to be necessary to bring instant prosperity miracle (see Esman, 1988; Luke, 1986; Dwivedi & Nef, 1982). In addition, development administration was also meant to act as a veritable means for nation- building by transferring the eco-technical expertise (inputs) received into developmental outputs (Ibid.). Essentially, this was to provide balanced social, economic and political transformation of a nation through administrative development which became a necessity for institutional building and modernisation of the local bureaucratic machinery to achieve development outcomes. However, these developmental outcomes were modernisation-induced and predictably based on Western-induced prescriptions of social change without paying cognisant attention to socio-cultural context of each country in developing world.

As a leading light of modernisation, bureaucracy was used as a managerial-style of administration to plan, coordinate and control the process of national development. Development administrators were considered to act as useful links with modern world whose interests and policies were assumed to be in tandem with those of the developing world. The Marshal Plan was the source of inspiration for this developmental philosophy, as it was evident that their success at "reconstruction was taken to be a guarantee of success for development" (Dwivedi & Nef, 1982, p. 60). However, the idea of development administration as a means for managing economic aid or providing technical assistance to developing countries began to be questioned throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

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