

Reflections from the Director of Planning and Programming Directorate,
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I participated in the workshop as a team member of the delegation of the Ethiopian government. As head of Planning and Programming Directorate of the federal Ministry of Capacity Building in Ethiopia, I am very much engaged in the implementation of public sector reform and capacity building initiatives already under way in the country in various sectors at different tiers of government.

How the Ethiopian government embarked on the public sector reform and capacity building programs is best described with historical trajectories. The incumbent government came to power by overthrowing the former socialist military regime with armed struggle. This coincided with the end of the Cold War, economic governance reform toward a market economy, multiparty democratization ideology, glocalization (globalization and localization at the same time)—all happened worldwide in developed and developing countries alike. The Ethiopian government, with a new constitution, introduced federal arrangements mainly based on national identity/ethnicity, multiparty democracy, market economy, and decentralization and launched these almost at the same time in the early and mid-1990s. The underpinning principles of the current Ethiopian government policies are referred to as a mix of market economy, revolutionary democracy, and developmental state. These underpinning principles are considered basics for other government policies and strategies. Strategies were prepared by the Ethiopian government for rural and agricultural development, industrial and infrastructural development, and social development starting around the end of last decade. Capacity building and public sector reform programs were designed roughly at the same time to assist the effective implementation of these sectoral strategies. These reform programs have been under implementation for about a decade and a lot of stories can be told of their successes and challenges.

As a person closely engaged in this process for five or so years, I had various questions in mind, and of course many of them were recurring on different occasions at meetings with stakeholders. Some questions relate to political ownership and commitment; governance structure for leading, coordinating, and managing public sector reform and capacity building initiatives; management of public sector reform in decentralized/federal systems where subnational governments maintain certain sovereignty; the role of institutional and human resources capacity to implement the reform; and the role of development partners. There are also basic questions related to the political economy of public sector reform: public sector reform for what (demand, purpose), who (drivers, targets), how (effective strategy), and when (timing, sequencing, sustainability).

The workshop was helpful in shedding light on questions like these by providing the opportunity to discuss experiences of other countries in Africa. Resource allocation from own source, committed governance structure to play a leadership role, and supporting rules and regulations are considered

indicative of political ownership and commitment to the reform in a country. It was also emphasized during the workshop that institutional and human resources capacity plays a key role in the implementation of public sector reform. Participants in the workshop reiterated the need for deploying and retaining the requisite human resources in order to be able to effectively implement the reform. It was observed that even when the political ownership seems to be high, institutional and human resource capacity remain challenging in many African countries. This is what I feel relevant here in Ethiopia as well.

Regarding the leadership and coordination structure of the reform, the participants took note of various possibilities that depended on the contextual environment. The Ethiopian government has organized a separate ministry in charge of initiating, leading, and coordinating the management of public sector reform. In Tanzania, a coordinating body was set up in the president's office, and the steering committee established for this purpose makes sure implementation and coordination of the reform in various sectoral ministries and agencies go smoothly. In Nigeria, state governments are said to be autonomous and normally are left to their own discretion. Development partners were expected to directly engage themselves with state governments in supporting the public sector reform initiatives in Nigeria.

Another learning point relates to the role of development partners. It was recommended that the World Bank and other development partners remain engaged with countries even when the political ownership and commitment are lacking. The consensus by the participants was that the World Bank role needs to be leading with creative ideas and best practices, particularly through technical support instead of dictating to governments using its financial power. I found this understanding very important in our case, as it provides an opportunity to maintain an engaged dialogue with development partners including the World Bank.

I feel the most important impact of the workshop has to do with the confidence it gave me in my role as a professional staff dealing with public sector reform in day-to-day operations. The experiences, success factors, and challenges I learned about during the workshop have given me the impetus to play a much larger role in the country's public sector reform agenda.

Finally, I must say that I was very much impressed by the management of the workshop process, where an enormous number of lessons and future actions were covered only within the two days of the workshop. The workshop discussions and resulting materials will remain valuable for me and other practitioners of public sector reform in the Ethiopian government.

Ato Ahmed Mohammed Ali, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, January 12, 2010