

Can "Pockets of Effectiveness" Trigger Public Sector Transformation in Africa?

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Since the early 1990s it has been realised that the key problem of Africa's development is a crisis of governance. Since then many improvements have been made. Wars have been ended, authoritarian regimes have been replaced by more democratic ones and the rule of law has been strengthened in some countries. But overall, governance in Africa is still in crisis. Especially the public sector is widely regarded as ineffective and often outright corrupt. Various public sector reform approaches introduced by international organisations have failed.

However, even in the most unfavourable governance contexts "Pockets of Effectiveness" do exist. These are public sector organisations which manage to provide the public services they are supposed to provide relatively effectively. After a brief overview of how and why such pockets exist at all, the paper will look into their potential: Can they trigger a wider transformation of the public sector in African countries towards more effectiveness? In a comparative perspective evidence seems to indicate that this is rather unlikely unless some very specific conditions are met. The paper closes with suggesting what these conditions might be.