

GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

IS THERE A USEFUL ROLE FOR THE UK?

Trevor Robinson
TJR@TrevorJRobinson.co.uk

IBIS Consultants Limited
&
Centre of African Studies

22 October 2009

THEMES

- **How much MODESTY? - about what UK specialists can and should seek to achieve**
- **Can we all get back to BASICS? – even if it seems too simple**
- **How to promote links between ACADEMICS & BUSINESS? - and governments, aid agencies, NGOs, and**

THERE IS NO BIG IDEA! THERE IS NO PHILOSOPHERS' STONE!

There are levels of “Governance & Management”

HIGH level geo-politics, national politics, strategies, priorities

(Cold War; terrorism; oil; water; trade; proliferation; environment . . .)

MANAGEMENT level policies, systems, procedures

(management of finance, people & resources; information; capacity development . . .)

SURVIVAL level coping mechanisms

(public servants getting by; public hoping for services; day to day practical difficulties . . .)

Are outsiders too lenient at the top, too tough on the middle, and unsighted at the bottom?

High Levels of “Governance & Management”

- **Realpolitik**
- **“Africa Works” - by P Chabal & J-P Daloz (1999)**
- **Africa does work - - for its elites**
- **Millennium Declaration, White Papers, EITI, . . .**

BUT THIS IS FOR AFRICAN & UK MINISTERS; UN; USA; Barons . . .

± World Bank, IMF, EU, the UN System

What to do at high levels?

**“The Future of Freedom” (2003) and “Illiberal Democracy” (1997) by Fareed Zakaria
and “Swords and Ploughshares” by Paddy Ashdown (2007, and 2003)**

What matters is not the formal process of elections but:

- **Personal security**
- **Rule of law**
- **Increasing prosperity**
- **Accountability**
- **Free-ish media**
- **And . . . ?**

What to do at middle levels?

BACK TO BASICS:

GOOD ENOUGH PLANNING: write 3/4/5 priorities on the back of an envelope; allocate spare resources to these; assess progress; hold a jollification

GOOD ENOUGH INFORMATION: follow the money; who is doing what where; what other resources are around; what outputs and outcomes

MORE MERIT NOT LESS: élites rule OK; “fair and open competition”; the Minister’s niece not his even more thuggish nephew

IS OR CAN BE FOR OFFICIALS, CONSULTANTS, BUSINESSES, NGOs

What to do at survival levels?

Need for REALISM (again):

- **The air conditioned cocoon**
- **The language barrier**
- **The time constraint**
- **What is really going on?**

AND

- **Public servants will feed and educate their families**
- **Chose the right place to be**
- **Corruption can be pervasive**

Buses in Lagos

Ruthlessly paraphrased from Michael Peel, who cites Sina Odugbemi, in “A Swamp Full of Dollars: Pipelines and Paramilitaries at Nigeria’s Oil Frontier” (2009)

Revenue in a day	c. 32/33,000 Naira [c. 150 Naira / US Dollar]
------------------	---

Paid to owner of bus	(c. 8,300)
----------------------	------------

Fuel	(c. 12,000)
------	-------------

NURTW officials	(c. 8,000)
-----------------	------------

Police	(c. 2,000)
--------	------------

Balance	c. 4,000
---------	----------

of which half to the driver and a quarter to each of the two crew

Basic courtesies

Senior Ghanaians in 1992 critical to the point of anger about consultants:

- **Lack of courtesy – turning up ostensibly to make an appointment but in fact fully intending to stay; stressing their own flight deadlines**
- **Not knowing even basic information about the country before arriving and not seeking to understand and learn while there**
- **Simply re-presenting facts supplied by the Ghanaians; making obvious recommendations (which if that was all that was involved would have been actioned long before); making recommendations that miss the point / do not reflect Ghana's priorities and circumstances**

What does business want?

- **Corruption: world reputation, different levels, agents, tipping baggage porters**
- **Rule of law, enforceable contracts, Courts system, transparency**
- **Personal security, and even comfort**
- **Infrastructure: transport, communications, power . . .**
- **What else?**

Perhaps above all: PREDICTABILITY

Western management consultants are there to provide Western management advice

Looking back 15 years to 1992

Seconded to SOAS but there is no philosopher's stone in the Library

Tried to predict a thesis 15 years later. So in 2007 started a review:

- **None of us is very much interested in 15 years ago; even if we ought to be. Why not?**
- **It is depressingly true that rather a lot about approaches to institution building looks very much the same then as now. How could we all do better?**
- **There may be more of interest in the process of secondment and the attempt to link the two organisations. What does the process look like with hindsight?**

And I gave up!

Academic / business interactions

- **Lots of clichés**
- **Different time and other pressures**
- **Different approaches to “peer review”**

But do the French or Americans or Africans do better?

Where IS the thought leadership?

In any case how can we do better? And what is the ABG for?

So what can we conclude?

Recall Chris Cramer “Civil War is Not a Stupid Thing” (2006)

“institutions are the sediment left behind by a political conflict and their form typically reflects a particular arrangement of the relative power of different groups”

Things being as they are; which in a sense they must be

Make progress where there is the opportunity

Support the Young Turks

Realistic plans and modest targets

Or more subjectively

Quite a lot does get done

Revolutions do not work

Governments are a problem - - as are all large organisations

Is Edmund Burke making a come back? Not least his “little platoons”

BACK TO BASICS