IMPLEMENTING FOR RESULTS IN AFRICA: CONTEXT AND ISSUES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary is a knowledge product of the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCoP-MfDR) which aims to develop and promote a results culture in Africa to contribute to the Africa transformation agenda. It assesses the status of implementation for results in Africa and the options available to better address Africa’s development challenges. The key messages are outlined in this synopsis.

CONTEXT AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Africa’s growth potential has never been in doubt, rich in natural resources and qualified human capital to plan and implement policies, the requisite foundation for transformation is in place. According to the African Development Bank 2019 Economic Outlook Report focusing on three key areas: (1) Macroeconomic performance and prospects; (2) Jobs, growth, and firm dynamism and (3) Integration for economic prosperity, the state of the continent is good. The general economic performance is improving, even though it is still insufficient to address the structural challenges. The GDP growth is projected to accelerate to 4.0 percent in 2019 and 4.1 percent in 2020. A number of factors support this positive outlook. For instance, on 25 July 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/70/293, proclaiming 2016-2025 as the Third Industrial Development Decade for Africa (IDDA III). In addition, according to Foresight (2018), about half of the world’s fastest growing economies are in Africa, with 20 economies expected to grow at five percent or more over the next five years. The continent therefore has potential, ability and the goodwill to transform.

However, for Africa to realize its full potential, a lot must still be done in ensuring that strategies and policies are translated into action. Low implementation rates impeding the projected potential often arise from the fact that, development blueprints, strategies, plans and policies by the governments deal with complex and often closely interrelated issues, leading to opening-up of a gap between set objectives and actual implementation. The existence of good plans and strategies points to the fact that formulation of policies may not be a major issue in Africa, but rather their effective implementation, because it is only effectively implemented policies that can bring about development. In addition, low implementation rates can be attributed to the fact that for a long time many African countries, have suffered from unsatisfactory governance systems, inappropriate allocation of resources, inefficient revenue and weak delivery systems of vital public services, further leading to widening of the gap between policy and implementation.

According to Ahmed and Dantata (2016) implementation of programmes in Africa conjures up images of plans gone awry and those of social carpenters and masons who fail to build to specifications, who distort the beautiful blueprints for progress which were handed to them.
Since its inception, the African Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (AfCOP- MfDR) has been working alongside policymakers to bridge the implementation gap by promoting the adoption of MfDR in the continent. Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is a management strategy that focuses on development performance and on sustainable improvements in development outcomes. It is based on six pillars which include (a) leadership for results; (b) planning for results; (c) results-based budgeting; (d) institutional capacity to deliver goods and services; (e) information systems, statistical capacity and M&E for results; and (f) accountability and partnership for results. The key MfDR principles agreed during the Second Roundtable on Managing for Results in 2004 were (a) focusing the dialogue on results at all phases of the development process; (b) aligning programming, monitoring and evaluation with results; (c) keeping measurement and reporting simple; (d) managing for, not by, results; and (e) using results information for learning and decision-making.

AfCOP is therefore part of a global initiative providing a platform to share experiences and to help design better implementation strategies through dialogue and forums bringing together experts from different fields both from among practitioners and academia. It is fully convinced that with right policies and strategic approach, the social and economic progress that has been experienced in recent years could be the prelude to long-lasting and sustained prosperity in Africa. AfCOP is strategically positioning itself as a major driver of the Managing for Development Results agenda in the continent and has been a key contributor in major High-Level Meetings that shape the Development Effectiveness Agenda.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The primary objective of this paper is to share experiences on implementation as a pillar of Managing for Development Results in Africa. While acknowledging the existence of a gap between planning and implementation, the paper shares how Managing for Development Results (MfDR) principles, tools, experiences and lessons can improve implementation by strengthening institutional accountability in the governance of programmes and projects in the public service. Applying the principles of Managing for Development Results means managing and implementing development initiatives in a way that focuses on the desired results and uses information to improve decision-making. Implementation or managing for achieving results, as an MfDR principle shifts results focus to the outcomes of interventions and it seeks to ensure that conditions are put in place to guarantee that such outcomes are achieved in a sustainable manner. The paper highlights frameworks for creating incentive for implementation and pressures for delivery of citizen focused results within governments. It also provides practical guidance on Managing for Results by sharing lessons on implementation that has worked in selected countries.
The methodology of the study is based on a narrative literature review including two case studies on implementation. The two case studies, on Rapid Results Approach and Deliverology, were purposively selected because this paper is about sharing practical implementation experiences which many MfDR practitioners have encountered by applying these widely used approaches. The experiences shared on Managing for Development Results Implementation are primarily drawn from the Readiness Assessment undertaken between 2012 and 2016 in nine selected Common Market for East and Southern Africa (COMESA) countries.

The Readiness Assessment results revealed that while there are many differences in ratings between countries and across pillars within each country, it was possible to identify three groups of countries in terms of their progress towards MfDR:

- High: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, over 3.0 average scores.
- Medium: Burundi, Zambia, Malawi between 2.5 – 3.0 average score.
- Low: DRC, Zimbabwe, under 2.5 average score.

The primary objective for undertaking MfDR Readiness Assessment is identification of gaps with respect to planning and implementation of strategies. It is aimed at highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the existing structures and system to support planning and implementation based on MfDR principles. Like any change, MfDR requires unique systems and processes and roles and responsibilities that will support its institutionalization hence the need for adequate preparation. The assessments revealed that whereas use of RBM approaches in Africa is recent compared to other regions in the world; there are positive indications that governments are increasingly committed to the results agenda.
KEY FINDINGS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF READINESS ASSESSMENT

The implementation of the Readiness Assessment brought to light some challenges experienced at various stages of implementation of projects and programmes with multiple accountabilities. These include:

a. Lack of ownership:
The most common reason why plans and strategies fail is the lack of ownership. The assessment reports were developed by consultants through a project initiated by AfCOP. Due to weak or non-existent National Communities of Practice, many governments did not own the initiative especially where the high-level meeting did not have the right government representation.

b. Lack of communication:
The project was conceptualized at AICOP level - whose membership is on individual basis and the members do not represent government. Successful implementation therefore depended on total government buy-in. Because of that lack of communication to get buy-in most governments did not budget for implementation phase and may not have properly understood as a government their role.

c. Getting mired in the day-to-day operations:
Lack of focus on the bigger goal and being consumed by routine operations, can lead to losing sight of long-term goals. The AICOP project was to be implemented within existing government plans. Without proper integration strategies and a clearer understanding of how implementing the recommendations of the Assessment Report would facilitate results orientation, improve performance and better development outcomes, most public servants did not give it priority. They therefore continued working on their planned activities and even felt in some circumstances that the Readiness Assessment exercise was a disruption to achieving their planned goals.

d. Out of the ordinary:
MfDR is a relatively new concept, most countries and public service practitioners are not very familiar with it. The entire process of its introduction and implementation of the road map was therefore treated as something separate and removed from the mainstream management process. The Assessment Report was in most countries treated as an AfCOP/AfDB project, funded and implemented by AfCOP.

In addition, because the perceived benefits could not be clearly demonstrated it was looked at something which needed special treatment by a special unit or a separate reform initiative.

e. Not considering implementation:
On the surface, the Road Map looked at implementation. However, it was implementation of the road map, how to undertake the Readiness Assessment and NOT so much about implementation of the recommendations. Whereas the road map took into consideration training on MfDR and RRA for implementation of the recommendation – that aspect was to be supported by the respective governments which did not plan or budget for them.

f. No accountability loop with national governments:
The Readiness Assessment report was seen as a responsibility of the National Community of Practice, it therefore lacked accountability within government structure and high visibility that would have helped drive the change where the Focal Point was not highly placed in public service hierarchy. This meant that each measure, objective, data source, and initiative had no owner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most of these challenges can be overcome by applying MfDR principles in implementation. The objective of Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is to accelerate the pace of development. Its principles and practices are about facilitating effective and comprehensive processes for creation of value (results) and optimizing performance, by ensuring maximum efficiency and effectiveness in the achievement of government objectives and goals, and the continuous improvement of institutions. The two implementation approaches, Rapid Results Approach and Deliverology used as case studies in this paper illustrate how the MfDR Principles have been applied in implementation. The two approaches as MfDR implementation tools are consistent with the focus on Results, capacity enhancement, and ultimately ensuring delivery of planned development targets. They encourage the setting of clear targets and the use of performance measurement to drive continuous progress improvements. The case studies underscore the centrality of leadership in implementation for Results.
Experiences shared in this paper illustrate that implementation of development initiatives, whether internally or externally driven, using MfDR principles is fundamentally a process of change. Development practitioners must therefore pay attention to managing the various elements that are integral to the implementation process. The approaches discussed are by no means exhaustive, but they have highlighted some core or an irreducible minimum condition that is necessary in achieving results.

The approaches to implementation discussed in this paper emphasize and recommend the following:

**A. Clear Linkage between Planning and Implementation:** It is important to have a clear line of sight between planning for results and implementation for results. This requires clear assignment of accountability for planned results. African Union’s Agenda 2063 may face challenges due to this among others because of its top-bottom nature. It is an Africa’s Vision but implemented within countries. Balanced Score Card is one of the tools that have been widely used in capturing bottom-up information and ensuring that all critical aspects of strategy implementation are assigned clear indicators.

**B. Leadership to drive and to support the implementation is important**
Assessment revealed that transformational leadership at the top is essential in initiating and building momentum for results. The leadership must champion dialogue around results and persuade all key stakeholders to work together closely in attaining the desired results. New ways of thinking and co-operating by all stakeholders gradually lead to improvements in results.

**C. Focus on short term results:**
Focus on short-term results with impact by use of tools such as the Rapid Results Approach has a motivating influence on implementers. Such best practice interventions, when properly linked to existing medium and long-term strategies can lead to improvements that are sustained in the long term.

**D. Metrics and constant monitoring**
Assist in evaluating progress, detecting emerging challenges and correcting them in time. Implementation of plans is a performance issue. Metrics and evidence to support decisions facilitate achievement of desired results.

**E. Results are about the beneficiaries**
and not the implementers, it is therefore important to involve beneficiaries in the entire process from planning, to implementation and reporting and celebrating results.

Implementation is the operational phase where development aspirations are translated into reality for citizens. Through deliberate implementation initiatives, development effectiveness can be enhanced by addressing capabilities and gaps. Without it, plans go to waste, and aspirations are shattered. There are various approaches falling broadly within the Managing for Development Results and Results Based Management frameworks that have been applied to ensure achievement of expected results. Every country and institution should however carefully adapt the approaches to their unique contexts and avoid ‘a one-size-fits-all’ attitude to avoid instances where success being replicated could be due to unique to specific country circumstances. The emphasis in adapting any approach is therefore in its institutional context which is in turn shaped by the larger social, economic, political and legal realities of the that country. Effective and successful implementation is the key to Africa’s development; it is a building block that facilitates socio-economic and political progress. Implementing for results considers context, espouses equifinality and addresses risks, opportunities and conditions for success in achieving better results; performance measurement for transparency, consensus-building and having a common perspective on results, and for accountability, monitoring for single-loop learning; and evaluation for double-loop learning.