

Editorial

“He who does not know one thing knows another.”

An African Proverb

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It has been over a year since the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. During this time, we have with ease, but sometimes with difficulty, adjusted to the new norm of working remotely while ensuring at all costs that we save lives and livelihoods. There have been areas of hope during this time. We have seen innovations in delivering public services, as new collaborations have forged new and better ways of managing the pandemic. Sadly, there have also been areas of despair, with the public sector struggling to roll out vaccines at the pace required to save lives. We have also witnessed cases of malpractice, maladministration and outright corruption during this time. A characteristic of these two diametrically opposed phenomena of hope and despair is the calibre of leadership. Good leaders inspire hope in the renewal and recovery of a post-COVID-19 world, while abysmal leadership engenders despair and a breakdown in public service provision processes. For Stoller (2020), the pandemic is an opportunity to reflect on leading healthcare through a crisis, cataloguing best practices, and cascading these leadership practices broadly. In this Editorial, we reflect on these diametrically opposed cases of hope and of despair.

We start by reflecting on the concept of social cohesion. Social cohesion is a critical concept in development and governance studies. Weak social cohesion is often related to slow economic growth and violent conflict (Langer, Stewart, Smedts & Demarest, 2017). Following Covid's exposure of deep social fractures based on gender, the rural-urban divide and social structures, building social cohesion is our hope for recovery and renewal in the post-COVID -19 era. So far, few attempts have been made to systematically measure this complex concept, creating confusion for institutions expected to promote social cohesion. **Khaile, Roman & Davids** explore various government documents to determine what is envisaged for municipalities to facilitate a sense of belonging as an aspect of social cohesion. Their study found that although documents refer to social cohesion and



superficially address a sense of belonging, there is a problem as records do not clearly articulate how social cohesion and a sense of belonging are actualised at the local government level. As the sphere of government closest to communities' living and working spaces, local government is best placed to provide the infrastructure required to establish lasting social cohesion, and its contribution cannot be overemphasised.

Kaupa & Naude discuss the role of Malawi's public healthcare sector in improving the availability of medicines and medical supplies at all levels of the public health delivery system. They investigated the barriers in the supply chain management of essential medicines in Malawi's public healthcare delivery system. They identified human and financial resource constraints and a lack of stakeholder collaboration as significant barriers in Malawi's public procurement and supply chain management systems. Their research proposed capacity building of human resources, the mobilisation of financial resources and stakeholder collaboration as possible solutions to overcoming the barriers.

In the article on leveraging the management of organisational culture change for improved outcomes in Nigeria's public health sector, **Ojogiwa & Qwabe** believe that how an organisation generates and defines its culture has implications for how it is transformed, managed and evaluated. **Ojogiwa & Qwabe** thus sought to explore the organisational culture required in the public health sector to achieve improved outcomes and performance in Nigeria's healthcare sector. Their qualitative study reveals that poor governance and leadership deficits were significant problems. This manifests as corruption, lack of organisational effectiveness and inefficiencies in the delivery of health services, which are amplified by the nature of the sector's bureaucratic approach and a weak culture of work ethics. These issues have to be addressed if Nigeria is to recover from the vagaries of the pandemic.

With the move towards working remotely to avoid the spread of COVID-19, eGovernance has much to offer in terms of accessing government services and improving people's lives, particularly for the most vulnerable. eGovernance allows all interaction with the government to be done through one counter, 24 hours a day, seven days a week – and without long queues. However, Basu (2004) warns that achieving a desirable level of efficiency and flexibility for developing countries will be difficult. In this regard, **Matsieli & Sooryamoorthy's** empirical study evaluates four websites of the ministries of the Government of Lesotho which use content analysis. Since the website content analysis metrics and criteria are not exhaustive, this study based its evaluation on four dimensions: accessibility, usability, transparency and interactivity. The findings indicate that the



ministerial websites of the Government of Lesotho are falling short in addressing these issues. This is why it is essential to assess the state of these websites regularly. Furthermore, countries must develop infrastructure and legal processes related to e-governance while allowing decentralisation and flexibility.

In their article, **Nokele & Mukonza** drew on an empirical study investigating the factors affecting the adoption of eGovernment in the selected Department of Home Affairs (DHA) centres in Limpopo, South Africa. The study confirmed a few common factors causing the slow adoption of e-government in the Department of Home affairs service centres in that province. In particular, ageing infrastructure, language barriers, and a lack of incentives were leading causes of the slow adoption of e-governance. **Nokele & Mukonza** propose several solutions that can enhance the adoption of e-government in the DHA.

In his article, **Carciotto** sought to understand the evolution of migration policy restrictiveness in South Africa based on an analysis of all legislative changes since the establishment of apartheid in 1948. Drawing on the DEMIG POLICY database, a large multi-country dataset, **Carciotto** assessed migration policy restrictiveness in South Africa between 1948 and 2020. Carciotto's research suggests that migration policies have become less restrictive but have variations in restrictiveness for different policy areas and target groups. In particular, the study suggests that entry and stay policies concerning labour migrants have become less restrictive due to an increased number of entry channels for highly skilled migrants. In contrast, over time, border control measures have remained restrictive – thus reducing the entry of low-skilled workers. Furthermore, the analysis of all policy measures related to refugees and asylum seekers has highlighted a growing trend in increased restrictiveness and the limitations of socio-economic rights of low-skilled workers.

The political-administrative dichotomy, which construes clear boundaries between elected officials and public servants, has long been a matter of concern in public policy implementation due to the often-blurry lines between the two. Steeped in agency theory that assumes that individuals are self-interested, opportunistic creatures, the political-administrative dichotomy pits the principle (politicians) and the agents (bureaucrats) at odds with each other when implementing public policy and delivering public services. In this context, the municipal officials – as the agents of municipal councillors – are depicted as potentially non-compliant, dishonest and corrupt. It is also expected that the state should establish measures for the municipal officials to ensure compliance. Viewed from this perspective, **Khaile, Davids & Khaile** highlight the theoretical limitations of the



principal-agent theory to explain the problem of non-compliance with municipal financial legislation in South Africa. They conclude that that the issue of non-compliance is attributable to both the municipal officials (agents) and the councillors (principal) and that both – not just the officials – are to blame when it comes to non-compliance. In this regard, the need for leadership in the polity and the public sector cannot be overemphasised. Greater cooperation between these two entities is likely to ensure efficient and effective delivery of public services, particularly in the COVID-19 pandemic. As I write this Editorial, COVID-19 cases are on the rise, and for the African continent, this is “driven by a mix of public fatigue, social mixing, ineffective use of public health and social measures, and vaccine inequity, and the spread of new variants,” according to WHO director-general. Furthermore, with vaccination in Africa accounting for just under 1.5% of all the vaccines administered globally so far (Mwai, 2021), it is clear that the pandemic is becoming a problem for Africans and, indeed, Africa.

Yet, much as it is disadvantaged by its weak healthcare systems, Africans benefit from past experiences. They can draw from lessons learned in responding to earlier epidemics – notably the 2014–2018 Ebola epidemic in West Africa and the ongoing Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) epidemic which has spread continent-wide since the early 1980s. Collective continental leadership facilitated the implementation of those learnings, and the same ought to inform the response to COVID-19. Moreover, as Barnard (2020) asserts, the collectivist culture of Africans where the group’s well-being tends to take precedence over individual freedoms has supported compliance – even when it meant the loss of livelihoods.

This collectivist culture has seen the Southern African Development Cooperation (SADC) develop as a regional body under which several countries unite to pursue common ideals. **Zubane** adopted regional integration theory to elucidates South Africa’s participation in regional international organisations within the context of SADC. He noted that South Africa stands to gain indirect economic gains that will significantly contribute to South Africa’s economic growth and development. However, he admits that SADC is not yet a fully integrated regional bloc due to existing barriers to the movement of resources and capital and a lack of market integration within the SADC countries. Market integration within SADC would remove trade barriers within member states and allow for the free movement of labour, capital and services. In the long run, it is expected that market integration within SADC would provide several social benefits, including broadening investment opportunities, thus contributing to economic growth. State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) across the world are the main drivers of the economy. But SOEs are fraught with



governance failures and are prone to corruption and socio-economic vulnerabilities. **Kanyane and Sambo** used a cross-analysis informed by a qualitative design to examine the governance of SOEs in the BRICS countries comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. They confirm that SOEs in BRICS are the principal drivers of the sector in emerging economies but hasten to add that the current SOE governance in BRICS countries is inadequate, necessitating the need to have overarching legal and institutional mechanisms that clearly define how SOEs should function effectively and efficiently.

As we see in the SADC and BRICS, the collectivist culture ought to be buoyed by scientific research to nurture homegrown solutions in Africa. Sadly, there is a skills shortage and no scientific research in many institutions of higher learning. **Malunda, Namubiru Ssentamu & Atwebembeire** echo these sentiments in their examination of Internal Quality Assurance Practices and Andragogy in Uganda's HEIs. They conclude that to enhance the quality of delivery for PhD students, administrators of HEIs should develop resourceful staff with the necessary andragogy skills. A high calibre of academic staff would promote quality delivery and ensure that the education offered at this level meets the expectations of the students and the requirements of the labour market.

In conclusion, the pandemic has brought into sharp focus the diversity of challenges on the African continent, and some of these are highlighted several of these. As we look forward to recovery and renewal post-COVID-19, we draw on the principles of collaboration between public and private entities. We rely on the solid organisational culture in many of our public administration processes, including E-governance and technologically based information systems, to promote the ideals of social cohesion. Fundamentally, however, and as many authors in this Issue highlight, we need strong leadership and strong institutions of higher learning to guide research and innovation so as to nurture homegrown solutions. We may not know everything, but there is a lot in Africa that we can draw from and move from despair to hope.

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