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The Bumpy Road to Good Governance and Public Service Delivery

Analysis of the Challenges to Strategic Plans Implementation in Public Organisations in The Gambia

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Abstract: Scholars have long established the connections between strategic plans and service delivery and how lack of dedicated plans to clinically bypass the attendant complexities and intricacies tends to undermine the efficacy of the implementation process. Most research on the crucial antidote against bad governance, which is often attributed to arbitrary policy making, dearth of accountable leadership and uninformed decisions have been conducted in the developed climes where public service delivery are comparatively better served. Research about strategic plans in Africa, where most public institutions grope in the dark for lack of strategic torchlights to navigate the bumpy road to delivering public goods at a challenging time when citizens are becoming more demanding of governance dividends, is commensurably low. The paper, therefore, analysed the challenges to strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of public service organisations (PSOs) in The Gambia. Cross-sectional data about institutional challenges to adopted strategic plans were collected from relevant authorities and key informants, and descriptively analysed. The study revealed a range of challenges confronting implementation of strategic plans by PSOs in the country, namely, poor public service emoluments resulting in low staff morale and systemic corruption (RII = 3.90), political interference (RII = 3.88), inadequate facilities (RII = 3.86), lack of top management commitment (RII = 3.81), lack of political will (RII = 3.81), inadequate strategic management professionals and expertise (RII = 3.67), and insufficient budgetary allocations (RII = 3.66). Added to this, negative employee behaviour and attitude, negative and unfavourable internal and external environmental changes and conditions,

and corruption and mismanagement of funds among others were the challenges that confronted PSOs during strategic plans implementation. The research validates strategic plan as a good governance tool for public service delivery in The Gambia.

Keywords: challenges, strategic plans, implementation, public service organisations and service delivery, The Gambia

1. Introduction

The logic that failure to plan is a plan for failure appears to be instructive in the contemporary world, when most governments of the world are struggling to meet up with the ever-expanding needs of the citizens. In the developing world, Public Service Organisations (PSOs) have received less than commensurate attention, despite the crucial roles they play as life-saving service delivery organisations. The United Nations devised a way of identifying countries in accordance with the state of the economies and public service delivery statuses. As such, three development categories, namely, developed, moderately developed and developing countries have emerged from the categorisations. Public service delivery tends to be more established, with stable administrative and predictable decision-making systems and consistency in policy environments, in the developed countries. Conversely, the developing countries are still facing myriads of challenges that often undermine public service delivery. Apart from the seemingly insurmountable issues of acute shortage of resources, weak institutions and political instability, more often than not, the institutions saddled with public service delivery often lack strategic plans that should serve as the compass at critical times. However, most studies on African development often harped on leadership crisis, unstable and volatile political systems, corrupt practices, dearth of 'big push' resources and climate change issues. The few ones that touched on this important area of development studies have attempted to examine the countries as a whole with little or no tenacity and the variegated peculiarities of each country.

Strategic planning has been considered a decision-making process and technique in managing public organisations. In the real sense, strategic plans are roadmaps that are clearly drawn for the purpose of effective service delivery. Strategic planning may be and often is a component of strategic management practice that connects planning with execution on an ever-continuous basis (Bryson & Edwards, 2017; Bryson et al., 2017). Strategic planning is a process that defines an organisation's vision, mission and mandate. It assesses the opportunities and threats that exist in the external environment; evaluates the strengths and weaknesses within the organisation and manages the strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation to produce sustained value with a view to accomplishing organisational goals and objectives. Strategic plan helps chart future plans and directions and pathways to an organisation in order to achieve corporate goals. Strategic planning could equally aid organisations accomplish established objectives or targets with a view to becoming more efficient and effective. Boris (2015, p. 16) described service delivery as "the provision of social or public goods that will promote

socio-economic wellbeing of the citizens⁹. The present global economic downturn poses essential challenges to public service organisations in providing services to the public – regardless of whether these organisations are located in government, private or non-government/non-state sectors (Osborne et al., 2014).

In The Gambia, strategic plans are statute-inclined. Every PSO is expected to have a strategic plan approved by its governing board. Added to this, public service delivery was carried out under a series of challenges during the Yahya Jammeh administration (1994–2017). The era experienced challenges such as uneven allocation of government resources, corruption, embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds, political interference, absence of professionalism and inadequacy of competent and experienced professional staff (Centre for Democracy and Development [CDD], 2017). Other challenges included: poor governance, overstuffed civil service with ghost workers; disregard for human rights and democracy and appointments lacking merits. Again, Jammeh's administration appointed and sacked permanent secretaries, director generals, managing directors, senior officers and similar heads of institutions in the public service without following due process (CDD, 2017). To this end, poor leadership characterised public service delivery to the citizenry in most developing countries (Economic Commission for Africa [ECA], 2003) such as The Gambia. Public service delivery has been decentralised in The Gambia with a view to accomplishing the development aspirations and plans of the country. Contextually, decentralisation describes a process where the central government relinquishes public functions to government agencies/institutions, semi-autonomous government organisations or the private sector (Conyers, 2007).

Given the intricate and volatile nature of organisational environment issues and challenges as explained above, decision-making within the Gambian public service sector might have become daunting hence required the adoption of strategic planning. Human, physical and intellectual resources should be strategically managed to accomplish effective public service delivery. The production, distribution and value-addition of these resources require strategic management in order to optimally contribute to public service delivery. The citizens' expectations of efficient and effective public service, high-quality services, consumer-orientation and increased responsiveness to service delivery from public service organisations necessitated the application of strategic management. The Gambia's public service organisations or government institutions and agencies require the capability to formulate and implement strategic plans in solving public service delivery problems. In addition, organisational leaders use strategic planning and management to accomplish organisational mandates, vision, mission and goals and objectives. Managers in organisations equally apply strategic management methods in crafting new competences, exploit existing opportunities and enhance capacity within the organisation. In some, strategic management aims to create and strengthen market position in a changing and competitive business environment.

The Jammeh's administration came to power in 1994 through a coup d'état and ushered in the Second Republic in 1996 (1996–2017). During this period, the Central Government of The Gambia had strategies and development plans, which hitherto were believed to have not been successful in producing the desired results. For instance, public

service delivery in The Gambia faced numerous challenges as explained earlier. However, the plans appeared to have contributed to the country's overall economic growth and development. The major statement of the research problem was how to establish the challenges to strategic plans implementation in public service delivery.

To transform the economy and stimulate economic growth and development, the Yahya Jammeh government developed a socio-economic development strategy called Vision 2020 for the period 1996–2020, aimed at improving the standard of living of the Gambian citizenry through transformation of economy into a dynamic and middle-income nation. This strategic blueprint focused on agriculture and the service industries including the financial services sector, tourism industry, trade and transport, energy and telecommunications; health, education as well as other social services.

The under-listed Vision 2020 of the public service aimed to enhance performance and cost effectiveness in the delivery of quality public services through the central government and public service organisations. To achieve this vision, it required government ministries, public agencies/institutions and enterprises to formulate, implement and evaluate strategic plans to help spur economic growth and development and to enhance public service delivery. Consequently, from 1996, the Jammeh's regime developed several strategic plans for the country as well as for various public service organisations in line with the Vision. Since the enunciation of the strategic policy plans in 1996, few studies have attempted to engage the workability of the policy implementation in ensuring that the set objective of enhancing good governance is achieved. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to analyse the challenges to strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of public service organisations from its inception in 1996 to the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak period in The Gambia.

2. Literature review

2.1. Strategic planning

Strategic planning is a deliberate, systematic and ongoing process of defining an organisation's mission, vision and objectives, and developing a roadmap to achieve them through optimal allocation of resources, prioritisation of initiatives and alignment with internal and external stakeholders. Höglund, Holmgren, Mårtensson and Svårdsten (2018, p. 824) described strategic planning as involving “formulating strategies that give a holistic view of the organisation by mixing long-term thinking, goal analysis, and subjective evaluation of values, goals, and priorities”. Mintzberg (1991, 1990) defined strategic planning as “the process by which the guiding members of an organisation envision its future and develop the necessary procedures and operation to achieve that future”. In a similar vein, Poister and Streib (1999, p. 310) postulated that “strategic planning is a principal element but not the essence of strategic management, which also involves resource management, implementation and control and evaluation”. In contrast, Pasha, Poister and Edwards (2015, p. 888) defined strategic planning as “a rational-comprehensive approach to strategy formulation that uses a systematic process with

specific steps such as external and internal assessments, goal setting, analysis, evaluation and action planning to ensure long-term vitality and effectiveness of the organisation”. Similarly, Bryson and George (2022, p. 11) defined strategic planning as:

Strategic planning is a reasonably deliberate approach to strategizing by public organisations or other entities which focuses on strategy formulation and typically includes (a) analysing existing mandates, mission, values, and vision, (b) formulating updated mission, values, and vision statements, (c) analysing the internal and external environment to identify strategic issues, and (d) formulating concrete and implementable strategies to address the identified issues.

Furthermore, Poister (2010, p. 247) described strategic planning as “a big picture approach that blends futuristic thinking, objective analysis and subjective evaluation of values, goals, and priorities to chart a future direction and courses of action to ensure an organisation’s vitality, effectiveness and ability to add value”. Additionally, Bryson (2011, p. 26) stated that: “strategic planning is a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it.” Similarly, Berry and Wechsler (1995, p. 159) also gave a succinct definition of strategic planning in the context of a survey of state agencies in the US:

Strategic planning is a systematic process for managing the organisation and its future direction in relation to its environment and the demands of external stakeholders, including strategy formulation, analysis of strengths and weaknesses, identification of agency stakeholders, implementation of strategic actions, and issue management.

Joyce (2015) posited that this definition could diagrammatically illustrate the process of strategic planning and management using Ansoff’s (1968) ‘decision flow diagrams’ which he believes should not be confounded with strategic management theoretical models. Ansoff’s decision flow diagram illustrates the procedure for gathering and analysing data and making decisions regarding goals, situation, choices, as well as the allocation of resources. Joyce (2015) argued that organisational leaders and managers can observe a decision flow diagram and sense they have swiftly comprehended the significant ideas of how to make judicious strategic decisions. It is easier and more understandable because the major elements of strategic decision-making are easy to observe. They can perceive how decisions probably need to be in order and how others should influence decisions, or how decisions are depending on others. They can also apply the diagram to establish that nothing important has been ignored or left out (Joyce, 2015).

Joyce (2015) posited that the success of a strategic plan will depend on the skills, motivation and values of the persons spearheading the strategic management tasks, the specified formulation of the strategic management procedures that is being applied, the government organisations that provide the environment as well as the responses of the individuals who are affected by the strategic management intervention (Joyce, 2015). Rose (2005) contended that policy-makers can study from public policies that are functioning

successfully in other countries; however, an effort is required to create models of policies that are transferrable beyond national frontiers.

Joyce (2015) argued that presently, we are far away from achieving this goal and states that one research that might be perceived to be in line with this agenda was that of Pettigrew, Ferlie, and McKee (1992), whose attempts comprehend what kinds of situations in a public service sector context were favourable to strategic change. Bryson (2010) emphasised the slow development of strategic management theory in the public service sector. Consequently, strategic planning procedure in the public sector include: defining the mission statement; formulating strategic goals; analysing the stakeholders; analysing the situation (SWOT); identifying strategic issues; identifying possible courses of action; evaluating actions; planning execution (financial management); planning stakeholder management; and monitoring and evaluation.

2.2. Governance and public service delivery

Governance and public service delivery are intricately linked concepts in the public administration literature. Effective governance is often considered a precursor to efficient public service delivery, as it enables the creation of an institutional framework that promotes accountability, transparency and responsiveness (Kireeva, 2018; United Nations Development Programme, 2015; Sulaiman, 2021). Good governance, on its part, is a global phenomenon and of recent origin (Patiy, 2016). For Patiyy (2016, p. 9) a “good state’ concept, which is closely related to the idea of good governance and good administration underpins the ethical norms of both the common good and good public service”. Research has shown that good governance practices, such as participatory decision-making and citizen engagement, can improve the quality and accessibility of public services (The World Bank, 2017). Even though “good governance may be seen as a value itself”, the ultimate implications often reflect the true meaning when examined in terms of public service delivery (Michalak, 2017, p. 67) may become more clearly visible when we examine it in a particular context, from a perspective of other values and interests. However, some studies have highlighted the challenges in achieving this synergy. For instance, researchers have noted that bureaucratic red tape and corruption can hinder effective governance, leading to inadequate public service delivery (Kaufmann et al., 2010). Moreover, the increasing complexity of public services has created challenges for governments to balance efficiency, equity and effectiveness (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). These findings underscore the need for contextualised governance reforms that address specific public service delivery challenges. Convergent research findings emphasise the importance of institutional capacity and leadership in bridging the governance – public service delivery divide. Studies have demonstrated that strong institutional capacity, characterised by skilled human resources, adequate funding and robust monitoring systems, is crucial for effective service delivery (OECD, 2017). Similarly, transformative leadership has been linked to improved governance outcomes, including better public service delivery (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Abdulkareem, 2024).

Divergent perspectives emerge when examining the role of technology in enhancing governance and public service delivery. Some researchers argue that digital governance initiatives can increase transparency, citizen participation and service efficiency (Gil-García & Pardo, 2005). Others caution that technological solutions may exacerbate existing governance challenges, such as unequal access to information and digital literacy gaps (Wessels, 2023; Heeks, 2006). This divergence highlights the need for nuanced understandings of technology's potential and limitations in governance and public service delivery contexts. Despite these divergences, the literature consistently emphasises the importance of citizen-centred governance approaches in improving public service delivery. Research has shown that co-production and co-creation initiatives, which engage citizens in service design and delivery, can enhance service quality, accountability and responsiveness (Bovaird & Loeffler, 2012). By prioritising citizen needs and perspectives, governments can foster more effective governance and public service delivery systems that ultimately improve the well-being of citizens.

2.3. Empirical review

Hughes (2003) acknowledged the existence of problems and constraints in the public sector compared with private sectors, and observed that public organisations might plausibly benefit from a strategic approach. Lynn (1987, 1996) established that governments' strategy-led decision-making procedures are more ad hoc, than being planned and rational. Flexible strategic responses but ill-directed in nature inevitably emerge as a result of dynamic and complex political conditions. The eventual beneficial impact of strategic management action for governments could manifest in electoral success, which aims at responding to the intricate needs of most polity, in a specific time frame within an array of policy arenas, but their strategic responsive actions can be deceitful (Leskaj, 2017). Thus, in the public sector, it could be expected that the political dynamics of governance would make it difficult to implement rational archetypes of strategic management, given that politics (inevitably) permeates the other areas (Leskaj, 2017). To this end, Lynn (1987, 1996) contended that some strategic management actions could be individually directed and political, but are related to personal and organisational advancement.

Leskaj (2017) found that inadequate provision of financial and required human resources would lead to challenges in implementing strategies of institutions; decreased levels of motivation arising from low pay wages and autocratic leadership, as well as the existence of bureaucratic structures considered incompatible with the organisational strategies. These challenges could affect strategy formulation, implementation and assessment in public organisations. Mnjama and Koech (2019) affirmed that organisational leadership fails to motivate employees to implement strategic plans, but found unsustainable budgets for strategic plans implementation.

In addition, George, Desmidt, Cools and Prinzie (2017) found that the challenge to strategic plan implementation is how to convince planning team members (PTMs) with knowing style to champion strategic plans because their non-commitment could inspire

resistance in the course of implementation; and Kabeyi (2019) confirmed political interference, inadequate resources and global economic conditions as challenges to strategy implementation. Another challenge is that the strategic planning process, the characteristics of the organisation and the planning team may also influence strategic planning in public organisations (Bryson et al., 2009; Armstrong et al., 2012; George & Desmidt, 2014).

Several scholars earlier highlighted various factors that determine strategies and strategic planning in organisations: competitive forces (Porter, 2004); operating environment (Heymann, 1987; Kemp et al., 1993; Ring, 2000); political setting i.e. policy areas, concerns of the electorate, policy supporters and trends (Joyce, 2000); the system of government both at national and international level (Bozeman & Straussman, 1990; Ring & Perry, 1985); poor discretionary power could constrain their ability to strategically manage (Nutt & Backoff, 1993); and the degree of decentralised structure of programmes or service delivery system (Frederickson & Frederickson, 2007; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

Furthermore, the type of the governing body (e.g. authority board, legislative body and local governments) could determine how and the degree to which strategic management processes are conducted (Poister et al., 2010); the public organisation's value system, organisational culture and leadership style (Monahan, 2001); managerial capability and analytic abilities (Joyce, 2000; Shapek & Richardson, 1989); the amount of time involved and quality of experience in strategic planning and management (Vinzant & Vinzant, 1996) are factors that influence the ability to effectively implement strategic planning and management (Poister et al., 2010); and coordination problems, absence of support and resistance from various levels of management (Okumus, 2003).

From the review of empirical literature, it could be observed that public service organisations could gain more beneficial outcomes from strategic planning and as well face a number of challenges in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of strategic plans, which could constrain the achievement of PSOs' objectives. However, having a strategic plan does not translate alone to successful accomplishment of organisational aims and objectives. Strategic planning positions an organisation within a competitive industry, and how it anticipates and deals with the complexities and challenges of a competitive and vibrant business environment matters.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design, sampling techniques and sample size

The study adopted a descriptive research design method and used multi-stage sampling techniques in order to obtain the sample size for the study. To meet the objectives of the study, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were employed. The research attempted to investigate the perceived challenges of strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of public service organisations (PSOs) in The Gambia. Primary and secondary data were used for this study. Primary data were collected through the

administration of questionnaire and in-depth interviews. At the first stage, random sampling was used to select five (5) PSOs out of the seventy (70) public organisations. At the second stage, a total sample size of 211 was randomly selected from the total sample frame of 1,058 which comprised senior public servants (grades 8 and above) in five (5) selected PSOs in The Gambia namely: Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (GCCPC) (21), Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA) (200), National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC) (500), Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) (32) and University of The Gambia (UTG) (305). The sample size of 211 respondents represented approximately 20% of the sample frame (1,058) were selected for the administration of a set of questionnaires using probability proportional-to-size sampling technique. To ensure avoidance of any of the five (5) PSOs being undermined in the study, the researchers applied the Rangan Kamaisan proportional distribution or allocation method. The formula is thus given as:

$$ns = \frac{N_p \times n}{N}$$

ns = sample size allocated to each PSO

N_p = population of each PSO

n = total sample size

N = total population size

The distribution were as follows: GCCPC (4), GRA (40), NAWEC (100), PURA (6), and UTG (61). The five (5) PSOs were chosen because they produced current strategic plans and relevant policy documents. The senior public servants were selected because they were responsible for formulation and implementation of the strategic plans, and for their roles, proficiency and experience in strategic planning and public service delivery issues. Convenient sampling was used to select senior public servants and beneficiaries (consumers) of each of the five (5) PSOs, totalling 211 respondents. The set of questionnaires was administered on both senior public servants and beneficiaries of public services such as water and electricity users, telecommunication subscribers, tax payers, students, entrepreneurs and companies, etc. The selection of the beneficiaries was based on their roles as end users of public services and experience in dealing with the selected PSOs in public service delivery. In addition, two (2) sets of interviews were conducted on 20 respondents as follows: 10 strategic plan committee members from five (5) PSOs, and 10 prominent leaders among the beneficiaries of five (5) PSOs. Secondary data were obtained from policy documents, strategic plans, journal articles and textbooks and the internet. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics. It was chosen for this analysis because it provides a comprehensive and concise overview of the distribution of the data, enabling a thorough understanding of the dataset's characteristics. Additionally, descriptive statistics allows for the identification of patterns, trends and correlations within the data, facilitating informed decisions and laying the groundwork for further inferential statistical analysis. The study covered PSOs in the Greater Banjul Area comprising Banjul, Kanifing Municipality and West Coast Region.

3.2. Measurement of variables

The independent variable of this study was strategic plans implementation and the dependent variable was public service delivery. These variables were studied to accomplish two objectives of the study. To achieve the objectives of the study, statements were set under each objective using Likert rating scales as measurement of variables. Questionnaire was administered to categories of respondents in PSOs in the study areas. For this study, the researcher adapted some instruments of the structured survey questionnaire of Ijewereme (2018) who investigated strategic planning and performance issues. These types of measurements of variables produced categorical responses needed to accomplish the specific objectives of the study. The measurement of variables in this study was based on five-point Likert scale to obtain answers from respondents. The Likert scales that were used were as follows:

For degrees of agreement: 5 = strongly agree (SA); 4 = agree (A); 3 = undecided (U); 2 = disagree (DA); and 1 = strongly disagree (SD). The Likert scales assisted in measuring the intensity of responses. Subsequently, these quantitative responses were analysed using Relative Impact Index (RII). Internal consistency technique was used to estimate the reliability of measurement scales for the study; and for this reason, Cronbach's alpha coefficient indicator was used. For this study, Cronbach's alpha $\alpha = 0.8$ which could be interpreted as a correlation coefficient whose value ranged from 0 to 1.

4. Results and discussion of findings

4.1. Challenges to strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of public service organisations in The Gambia

This section analysed the perceived challenges of strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of public service organisations in The Gambia. Using Likert scale ratings, the respondents were asked to choose among: 5 = strongly agreed, 4 = agreed, 3 = undecided, and 2 = disagreed and 1 = strongly disagreed, with 12 assertions made by the researcher on the challenges facing strategic plans implementation. Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of respondents on each statement, and the values were organised ranging from 1 to 5. In addition, the Sum score and Relative Impact Index (RII) were adopted to identify and rate these challenges using mean value statistics.

Most of the statements were relatively acknowledged by the respondents and all weighted average scores were above 2.50 mid-points. However, the rating was further shown to identify the most and least pronounced cases. As presented in Table 1, low salaries (remuneration) resulted in low staff morale (item 5), hence was highly rated as the leading challenge of strategic plans implementation with sum score (791) and RII (3.90), respectively. The former was followed by political interference with the sum score (787) and RII (3.88) of items nine (9) being second on the list. It was also noted that inadequate facilities had the sum score (784) and RII (3.86), respectively, thus, placing item 12 as the

Table 1.
*Challenges of strategic plans implementation
 in achieving the objectives
 of public service organisations in The Gambia*

Statement	Number of respondents	Sum score	Relative Impact Index (RII)	Remarks
Inadequate strategic planning / management professionals and expertise	203	745	3.67	6 th
Lack of top management commitment	203	774	3.81	4 th
Insufficient budgetary allocations	203	742	3.66	7 th
Inadequate financial resources	203	739	3.64	9 th
Low salaries (remuneration) resulted in low staff morale	203	791	3.90	1 st
Non-adherence to organisational culture/philosophy (policies, rules, values, and work ethics)	203	741	3.65	8 th
Negative employee behaviour and attitude	203	739	3.64	9 th
Negative and unfavourable internal and external environmental changes and conditions during the implementation of strategic plans	203	729	3.59	10 th
Political interference	203	787	3.88	2 nd
Political manipulation	203	773	3.81	5 th
Corruption and mismanagement of funds	203	729	3.59	10 th
Inadequate facilities	203	784	3.86	3 rd

Source: Authors' compilation based on the field survey, 2019

third-rated challenge confronting strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of public service organisation in the study area.

In addition, lack of top management commitment in item 2 was rated as the fourth challenge facing strategic plans implementation with sum score (774) and RII (3.81), respectively. Political manipulation (item 5) was placed on the fifth position with the sum score (773) and RII (3.81); and inadequate strategic planning/management professionals and expertise with sum score (745) and RII (3.67) was sixth among the challenges confronting strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of the public service organisation.

Moreover, insufficient budgetary allocations as third item was highly rated seventh with sum score (742) and RII (3.66), respectively. The former was followed by non-adherence to organisational culture/philosophy (policies, rules, values and work ethics), with the sum score (741) and RII (3.65) of item six (6) was eighth on the list. It was also noted that inadequate financial resources had sum scores (739) and RII (3.64), and negative employee behaviour and attitude had sum scores (739) and RII (3.64), thus, placing item 4 and 7, respectively, as the ninth-rated possible challenge, while negative and unfavourable internal and external environment changes and conditions during the implementation of strategic plans had sum scores (729) and RII (3.59); and corruption and mismanagement of funds with sum score (729) and RII (3.59), made item eight (8) and eleven (11) the tenth-rated challenges confronting strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of public service organisation in the study area.

To complement quantitative data, interviews were conducted to give additional information on the challenges to strategic plans implementation in attaining the objectives of public service organisations in The Gambia. The interviewees were asked what challenges affected strategic management practices in their organisations. Some senior officers listed the following challenges: insufficient short term training and financial constraints, time management problem, overlapping of mandates, inadequate petroleum engineers, political/government interference, the lack of a board of directors, unclear tax collection method, corruption, nepotism, incompetence, customers' concealment of total revenues and skills gaps in human resource management (HRM).

In addition, inadequate funding/budgetary allocations, inadequate subvention (where applicable), understaffed/insufficient professionals, absence of cooperation from other sectors' regulators, carefree attitude of employees/negative employee behaviour, lack of competition and consumer protection culture, lack of motivation, poor infrastructure/inadequate facilities, insufficient remuneration and inadequate performance appraisal system among others were equally considered challenges. This is because as long as the staff in the public service are not monitored, appraised, recognised and promoted, or demoted based on their performance, it will be difficult to change people's mindset and achieve efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery. The views of the interviewees concerning various challenges here appeared to be in agreement with the questionnaire responses; however, a few of the challenges were not captured by the questionnaire, they were not contradictory.

4.2. Measures for curbing the challenges/weaknesses and improving strategic plans implementation in PSOs in The Gambia

Under this minor theme, the senior public servants were asked to highlight/suggest the steps various PSOs have taken to overcome the challenges and weaknesses, and to suggest or recommend steps for efficient and effective "application of strategic management in public service delivery" in The Gambia. The respondents suggested several measures to improve strategic plans formulation, implementation and evaluation in their organisations in order to enhance service delivery in the public service, including: procurement of

human resource information management (HRIM) software to address the time management issue/challenges; signing memorandum of understanding (MoUs) with public institutions with overlapping mandates and drafting new regulations, and requesting for approval from Attorney General's Chambers (AG Chambers); commitment of the Director Generals (DGs), Managing Directors (MDs), Commissioner Generals, Chief Executive Officers, and Executive Secretaries, top management officials; and re-strategising to comply with government needs.

Furthermore, respondents suggested that PSOs should reduce travelling expenses; divert certain expenditures to building and improving infrastructure and facilities; embark on awareness campaign to build confidence in people within PSOs; self-assessment of institutions; and declare proper sales revenues to GRA to avoid loss of revenues to the State. Moreover, they proffered that the Government should increase subventions for PSOs and take up responsibilities like building infrastructure for the organisations; develop training policies and strategies (where unavailable) to bridge the skill gap; organise donor conferences to market the strategic plans of PSOs; gain support from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA), and international financial partners/donors; make adequate budgetary allocations to PSOs to finance their activities in order to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in public service delivery.

In the higher education sector, the beneficiaries recommended that UTG should invest more in staff training through collaborative partnership with other universities; solicit funding through research, consultancies and proposals writing on behalf of the university; the Government should increase subvention to the university, and make it a policy for all national/public consultancies to be awarded to the university; employ qualified, competent and experienced people; have its policy documents and strategic plan intact, encourage with allocation of research grants to lecturers/professors; write proposals to attract external grants and raise more funds for the university. The Governing Council should also help in mobilising funds; diversify sources of revenue so that they do not depend solely on subvention; and competent, diligent and experienced staff should be at the helm of affairs in the University (competence–skills–job matching); organise refresher courses, workshops, and short-term trainings for staff who are responsible for implementing the strategic objectives.

Finally, the respondent offered that the Government should understand the mandate and functions of public agencies under its purview to help mitigate a lot of challenges for the PSOs; conduct advocacy campaigns, training partnerships/memorandum of understandings (MoUs) with organisations where mandates overlap; put in place a standard appraisal system for the public service; ensure there are consequences for action or lack of action; devise debt recovery mechanisms; training the employees within and outside the country; work with financial partners/donors like the World Bank, IMF, ADB, IsDB, etc.; and in the case of electricity, move from fuel to the use of green energy, solar installation and windmill, hydroelectricity; increase subvention form the government; renewable energy implementation; commitment from the citizenry; removal of nepotism from all the institutions in the country; move into digital system to control all the activities to ensure transparency.

4.3. Discussion of findings

The study analysed the challenges of strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of public service organisations in The Gambia. The findings of the study showed that low salaries (remuneration) resulted in low staff morale, was highly rated (1st) as the leading challenge of strategic plans implementation with RII (3.90). This result corroborated the World Bank (2010) report, which stated that salaries in the Gambian civil service were low in comparison to low income countries, which explained the high rate of attrition of skilled professionals; and report of AfDB-WB (2017), which showed that the low salaries and incentive structure of the Gambian public service did not encourage performance and that public institutions' significant physical, financial, and human resources were mismanaged for years. The results also showed that political interference, with RII (3.88) was the second (2nd) highly distinguished challenge facing strategic plans implementation. The responses from interviews of senior public servants and beneficiaries of PSOs confirmed that political interference was a significant challenge confronting strategic plans implementation during the period of review. It was also noted that inadequate facilities which had RII (3.86), was the third-rated (3rd) challenge confronting strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of public service organisation in the study area. In addition, lack of top management commitment was rated the fourth (4th) challenge fronting strategic plans implementation with sum score (774) and RII (3.81). Political manipulation was the fifth (5th) rated with RII (3.81), and inadequate strategic management professionals and expertise with RII (3.67) was rated the sixth (6th) among the challenges facing strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of public service organisations.

Also, an insufficient budgetary allocation was highly rated as the seventh (7th) with RII (3.66). This was followed by non-adherence to organisational culture/philosophy (policies, rules, values, and work ethics), with RII (3.65), was rated the eighth (8th) on the list. Additionally, it was noted that inadequate financial resources which had RII (3.64) and negative employee behaviour and attitude with RII (3.64), thus placing both as ninth (9th) and ninth (9th) rated possible challenge respectively. Negative and unfavourable internal and external environmental changes and conditions during the implementation of strategic plans which had RII (3.59), and corruption and mismanagement of funds with RII (3.59), were both tenth-rated (10th) respectively as the least challenges confronting strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of public service organisation in the study area within the specified period.

The findings of this study on objective four (4) acknowledged the study of Tamimi, Khalil and Abdullah (2018) that poor performance, corruption and absence of development constrained strategic management within the public sector. The results of the study on non-adherence to organisational culture/philosophy (policies, rules, values, and work ethics), and inadequate financial resources corroborated the study of Hytönen and Ahlqvist (2019) that lack of cooperation and inadequate planning resources for astute visionary activity were gaps in spatial planning; and reports of AfDB-WB (2017) and CDD (2017) with similar challenges in the Gambian public service under the period of review such as uneven allocation of government resources, overstaffed civil

service; persistent corruption, embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds; poor governance, absence of professionalism, lack of competence and experience, nepotism and appointments lacking merits among others.

Equally, the study supported the report of Morachiello, Nicolau and Hegbor (2015) that strategic resource allocation was weakened by unreported and unmonitored arrears, scarce resources, effect of non-compliance with internal control rules and procedures and inadequate human capacity undermined efficiency service delivery in the Gambian public service; and the study of Leskaj (2017) found that inadequate provision of financial and quality human resources will result in problems when implementing strategies of institutions; decreased levels of motivation resulting from low pay and autocratic leadership; and that the existence of bureaucratic structures that are incompatible with the organisational strategy serve as challenges to strategy formulation, implementation and assessment in public organisations.

Furthermore, the findings also corroborated studies of Bryson (2017), Bryson and Edwards (2017) that public sector organisations need to build the required capacity, i.e. skills, resources, knowledge, ability to collect and analyse data, and different types of leadership in order to successfully carry out strategic planning in the public sector; Mnjama and Koech (2019) established that organisational leadership failed to motivate employees to implement strategic plan and found unsustainable budget for strategic plan implementation; and Kabeyi (2019) found political interference, inadequate resources and global economic conditions as challenges to strategy implementation.

Furthermore, the findings on the challenges supported the assertions of earlier studies that to do strategic planning, PSOs are expected to build necessary capacity; match skills and resources with the convoluted processes and practices involved (Poister & Streib, 2005); inadequate capacity (Jaw & Isbell, 2019); get required resources, financial capacity (Boyne et al., 2004; Wheeland, 2004); knowledge about strategic planning (Hendrick, 2003); and competence to collect and analyse data and to choose between possible solutions (Streib & Poister 1990). In addition, various leadership styles are required to participate in effective strategic planning; process supporters have the authority, power and resources to start and maintain the process. Those who lead the process are required to help manage the routine procedure (Bryson, 2011).

5. Conclusion

The findings of the study showed the following challenges facing strategic plans implementation with rating and Relative Impact Index (RII) put in parenthesis: low salaries (remuneration) resulted in low staff morale (1st highly rated, RII = 3.90); political interference (2nd highly rated, RII = 3.88); inadequate facilities (3rd highly rated, RII = 3.86); lack of top management commitment (4th highly rated, RII = 3.81); political manipulation (5th rated, RII = 3.81); inadequate strategic management professionals and expertise (6th rated, RII = 3.67); and insufficient budgetary allocations (7th rated, RII = 3.66). However, the findings of the qualitative study showed that political/government interference, inadequate funding/budgetary allocations, inadequate subventions (where applied),

understaffed/insufficient professionals (skills gaps in HRM), insufficient remuneration; poor infrastructure/inadequate facilities among others were clearly identified as the foremost challenges facing strategic plans implementation in achieving the objective of PSOs in The Gambia.

The study concluded that the leading challenges faced in strategic plans implementation in achieving the objectives of PSOs in The Gambia included: low salaries (remuneration) resulting in low staff morale (RII = 3.90), political interference (RII = 3.88), inadequate facilities (RII = 3.86), lack of top management commitment (RII = 3.81), political manipulation (RII = 3.81), inadequate strategic management professionals and expertise (RII = 3.67) and insufficient budgetary allocations (RII=3.66). Added to this, negative employee behaviour and attitude; negative and unfavourable internal and external environmental changes and conditions and corruption and mismanagement of funds among others were challenges that confronted PSOs during strategic plans implementation.

6. Recommendations

1. To address the challenge of inadequate strategic management professionals and expertise in PSOs, the government should undertake human capital development strategy for all PSOs in the country through short-term and long-term training and development programmes/activities, especially to strengthen existing management teams and strategic plans committees responsible for strategic management plans and policy issues in PSOs to improve the quality of service delivery to the public. The government should also build and strengthen the capacity of the National Assembly's Select Committee on public agencies and public enterprises called Public Agencies' Committee/Public Enterprises' Committee (PAC/PEC) (now called FPAC [Financial and Public Accounts Committee]) to rigorously scrutinise the activities of PSOs for improved service delivery to the public and enhance financial performance. The government should also institute good governance and undertake a complete overhaul and institutional reforms across the public service in The Gambia to accommodate changes in the dynamic business environment.

2. Top management and Board of Directors/Board of Commissioners/Governing Council should ensure that there is strict punishment, sanction or suspension for employees with negative behaviour which are incompatible with the organisations' rules and regulations and fail to adhere to organisational culture/philosophy (policies, rules, values and work ethics). Take decisions on strict disciplinary action for employees with care-free attitude and unethical behaviours to promote a high sense of responsibility, professionalism and integrity in the Gambian public service.

3. The government should desist from all forms of political interference and political manipulation in the operations of PSOs as this may subject public servants to undue pressures and influences in their execution of duties and responsibilities, thereby undermining public service delivery objectives in the country.

4. Lawmakers should devise and approve attractive remuneration/pay package for public/civil servants to attract best-brains, talented and experienced professionals to

public service. They should emphasise more on performance, punctuality and regularity at work and assign targets to plan of activities. Discourage the culture of “mashlaha” (leniency/humane) syndrome and monitor public/civil servants as they carry out their work in order to improve service delivery to the public.

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