The role of professionalization in the South African public service and its contribution to the UN’s SDGs, Agenda 2063, and NDP 2030

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ABSTRACT

The South African National Framework towards the Professionalization of the Public Service, moots the belief that professionalizing public administration is one of the key requirements for building state capacity. An efficient and effective public service may positively impact the state’s development agenda. The United Nations’ (UN) 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) serve as a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all with the focus on ending poverty, and inequality, the protection of the planet, and the assurance that global citizens enjoy health, justice and prosperity. The core question that this paper addresses is: To what extent will professionalization of the South African public sector through learning and training programs offered at the National School of Government (NSG), contribute to the UN’s SDGs specifically and Agenda 2063 (Agenda 2063) and the South African National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 in general? The paper is premised on a systematic stand-alone literature review. Content analysis was used to make sense of the secondary data consulted by honing in on pre-identified search terms. The study found that while the training programs offered at the NSG are aligned with the government’s focus on professionalization of the public service, specific mention of the SDGs, the NDP and Agenda 2063, are not made. It is recommended that with much talk around the recalibration of the public sector by way of the NSG, an opportunity exists to explicitly teach the principles, objectives and aims of the aforementioned SDGs, NDP goals and Agenda 2063 objectives, in all its training programs, or that new programs are devised by the NSG solely focused on the attainment of the SDGs.

Introduction

In South Africa, the National Framework towards the Professionalization of the Public Service (2022), could be considered a “re-calibration tool”, where various sources and views shaping the discourse on building the capacity of the state, are combined. The belief is that professionalizing public administration is one of the key requirements for building state capacity (Department: National School of Government, 2022). Furthermore, an efficient and effective public service, as envisaged in the aforementioned framework, may positively contribute towards the state’s developmental agenda. The foregoing is contrasted against daily reports on “widespread service delivery protests, often accompanied by violence and wanton destruction of property” (Mohlala, 2022, n.p.), corruption, failed infrastructure, service delivery protests, unemployment, an inadequate electricity supply, to name but a few economic and social ills (Reddy, 2016; Masuku & Jili, 2019), which thwarts the government’s efforts towards the attainment of any developmental endeavours.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was launched in September 2015 at a United Nations (UN) Summit in New York (United Nations, n.d.). The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) serve as a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. At its core is a call to end poverty, inequality, the protection of the planet, and ensuring that global citizens enjoy health, justice and prosperity (United Nations, n.d.). Locally, the South African Government by way of the National Development Plan

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(NDP) 2030 proposed a multi-dimensional framework to roll back poverty and inequality, through increased employment, higher incomes through productivity growth, a social wage and good-quality public services (National Planning Commission, 2011). The stated objectives are in line with the propositions of the UN’s SDGs. Conversely, on the African continent, the African Union’s Agenda 2063, seeks to harness continental legacies personified in its people, cultures, history, natural resources and geo-political position to effect equitable and people-centred growth and development. It further aims to build on and accelerate implementation of continental frameworks and other similar sustainability frameworks and initiatives across the continent. Whilst the broad aims and objectives of the SDGs, Agenda 2063 and NDP 2030 are similar, interconnected and noble, at the centre of its implementation, and the attainment of any strategic framework, are employees. Employees are the backbone of any organization, public or private, and a sustainable strategy appear meaningless if employees are not involved or aware of how to achieve it. The National Framework towards Professionalization of the Public Service (2022) purports to support the notion of putting the right person, with the right skills and qualifications, in the right job, at the right time. This comes in the face of the African National Congress’ (ANC) cadre deployment policy which crippled many state-owned enterprises and public sector organizations as under-qualified and unskilled public sector employees were employed in positions for which they were not equipped (Hendrickse, 2022). Limited research explores how the alignment of the public sector’s professionalization efforts with the SDGs, NDP 2030, and Africa Agenda 2063 is being operationalized in policies and programs. Understanding the practical integration of these agendas within the public sector framework is crucial for effective implementation (See Ozar, et al. 2020; Hart, 2018).

The core question which this paper addresses is: To what extent will the professionalization of the South African public sector through learning and training programs offered at the National School of Government (NSG) contribute to the attainment of the UN’s SDGs specifically and the NDP 2030 and Agenda 2063 in general?

Literature review

Professionalization conceptualised

The word ‘professionalization’ comes from the word ‘profession’ implying what one does for work (Järvalt, n.d., p.4). The Oxford Learners Dictionary (2023) defines professionalization as “the process of making an activity more professional, for example by paying people who take part in it”. Gornitzka and Larsen (2004) contend that definitions of the concept ‘profession’ are varied. The authors claim that a profession is linked to specialised knowledge and proficiency where members of such a profession are expected to have a certain degree of theoretically and empirically based knowledge acquired through formal education or training at approved institutions. Such institutions in turn, sets standards of education and entrance into certain professions. Consequently, development and research are constantly undertaken with the view to improve a selected profession’s professional performance. According to Järvalt (n.d., 4) “each profession has its own world view, work ethics, values, commitment, and principles of conduct”. In the context of public administration in particular, Pugh’s (1989) early conception of professionalism and not professionalization is underpinned by six attributes, namely; “a conscious self-awareness of distinctive, shared attributes among a group of people, based on an explicit written knowledge base, commitment to apply this knowledge for the social good, according to a strictly adhered to code of ethics and conduct, formalised within an organizational structure of sort and formal recognition of outstanding performance” (Kroukamp and Cloete, 2018, p.63). The aforementioned authors contend that as civilization became more socially and economically intricate through industrialisation, urbanisation and bureaucratization, the study of professions shifted from the inflexible and static concept of crucial components, towards recognising professionalization as a dynamic process in which an occupation could strive towards the ideal of a profession (Kroukamp and Cloete, 2018, p.64).

Why professionalize the public sector?

The significance of cultivating a professional public service, has long been recognised in both academic and applied organizational scenarios. The question on how to profile the future of a more professional public service remains topical, particularly in environments that are characterised by wide-scale social and economic development as well as organizational change (Jarvalt, n.d., p.2). Matshabaphala (2014, p.199) found that the discourse around the professionalization of the public service, emanated from the perceived deficits evident in the professionalism infrastructure in some public spaces. Kroukamp and Cloete (2018, p.61) contend that “it is assumed that public organizations will act in a professional way in the execution of their daily tasks”. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many instances. Therefore, the sole aim of strategies and approaches towards professionalization of the public sector is to provide a better service to the public at large. Levin (2009, pp. 965 – 966) argues that: A competent, dedicated and professional public service is an essential attribute of a developmental state, as the primary implementer of government’s socio-economic objectives. The Constitution provides that the public service must loyally execute the lawful policies of the government of the day. With the exception of political appointees (advisers and ministerial support staff), the public service should continue in office and serve successive administrations to the best of its ability. [In the South African context]…the Senior Management Service (SMS) aims to attract a high calibre of senior manager in the public service, while the occupation-specific dispensation (OSD) was developed to attract and retain public service professionals.

1 https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/professionalization?q=professionalisation
It is evident that the core objective of professionalizing the public sector is focused on improved service delivery to the public. Hence, the formulation of the South African national framework towards professionalization of the public service. When drafting the aforementioned framework, lessons of experiences were drawn from countries such as: Malawi, Brazil, Botswana, Russia, China, India, South Korea, Estonia, Hungary and Singapore, which allowed for a form of benchmarking (Department: School of Government, 2022). A literature search pertaining to the professionalization of the public service in Africa in particular, unearthed a dearth of information focused on public sector reform or civil service reform (these concepts were used interchangeably). This led the researcher to ponder civil service reform or public sector reform in Africa, in the context of the professionalization of the public sector. The impetus of civil service reform in Africa, and its acceleration in the 1980s, appear to be informed by poor performance of the public sector according to Ndlovu, Thusi, Mlambo & Mkhize (2022, p. 329). The idea, as noted by Omoyeřa (2008) was that African governments required a departure from the old traditional way of running administration and an urgent need for a renewed public sector to propel governments in its quest for sustainable political, socio-economic and technological developments was called for. A strong desire existed for structural re-engineering of the public sector with the infusion of new values, ethics, professionalization, accountability and responsiveness geared towards effective and efficient service delivery. Much has been written on public sector reform and civil sector reform in Africa, Latin America and Europe (see: Ndlovu et al, 2022; Jarvalt, n.d.).

Based on the information provided in the preceding paragraphs, there is a willingness on the part of governments globally, to professionalize the public sector with the view to improve service delivery. The latter, improved service delivery, in conjunction with professionalization, have consistently been mentioned in this article as a plethora of written material exist on the topic. What would be interesting to note, for the purpose of this paper, is to what extent South African public servants will be ‘professionalized’ and furnished with the necessary training to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in turn, Agenda 2063 and the NDP 2030. Whilst these strategies are geared towards improved service delivery in general, it takes cognisance of the social, economic, political and ecological contexts in which services are delivered. In order to achieve the SDGs, Malatjie (2021, p. 119) purported that the South African government needed to make an urgent investment in “retooling public services and equipping public servants with the skills, knowledge and competencies on SDGs” by way of the National School of Government.

Building capabilities and engaging public sector employees to deliver on the sustainable development goals

Weybrecht (2017, p.84) asserts that the global community has been party to sustainable development for years, even before the formal definition devised by Brundtland was mooted. The author contends that the SDGs, a series of 17 goals with 168 related targets, as alluded to earlier, that the global community has set to reach by 2030, is different in a way, as the SDGs were developed through the largest international consultation with stakeholders ranging from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments and business. De Vries (2016) holds that the adoption of the SDGs should be considered against the backdrop of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which proved a big challenge when it came to its implementation. Malatjie (2021, p.111) challenges that the complexity of the goals, the lack of clarity in relation to the numerous stakeholders’ role in the implementation endeavours, hampered the progress of each goal, and the measuring of its success.

Bernstein (2017, p.213) contends that:

The purpose of the Sustainable Development Goals is to mobilize action to address systemic challenges across economic, social and ecological dimensions of sustainable development. However, even if the goals were perfectly designed according to criteria...[Fully coherent, built around consensual knowledge, action-oriented, with multi-layered differential targets, and adopted to national capacities and circumstances, they would still require appropriate governance arrangements to diffuse them and integrate them into institutions, policies and practices. The challenges then is how to balance requisite political leadership, political authority and steering at the global level with the reality that action and resources must be mobilized also at regional, national and local levels and by a wide range of public and private actions, partnerships and networks.

It is imperative that all stakeholders engage to make the SDGs a reality at local, national, regional and international level. Herein lies the dilemma, particularly when it comes to implementing the SDGs at national and local government level through public sector structures as Bernstein (2017, p.213) warns. According to Malatjie (2021, pp. 111-112) “knowledge and understanding of Agenda 2030 enables public servants to establish pathways for the achievement” of set targets. Furthermore, policy awareness in the public sector and amongst civil servants, increases the chances that centres of government will assign priority to the integration of the goals into national development plans and allocate sufficient resources for the implementation of the related programs. The NSG is well placed to incorporate training on the SDGs in already established programs on offer, whilst at the same time, advancing professionalization as envisaged in the South African professionalization framework. President Cyril Ramaphosa (the South African president at the time this paper was constructed) emphasised that “only a capable, efficient, ethical and developmental-oriented state can deliver on the commitment to improve the lives of the people of this country” [South Africa] (Department: School of Government, 2022, p. 3) and as such, the SDGs. The Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) for the 2019-2024 period focusses the government’s strategic commitment in line with the president’s statement. In this regard, it calls for the implementation of the following key interventions:

i. Professional, meritocratic and ethical public administration
ii. Improved leadership, governance and accountability
iii. Functional, efficient and integrated government
iv. Mainstreaming of gender, empowerment of youth and people with disabilities and
v. Social compact and engagement with key stakeholders.

(Department: School of Government, 2022, p.3; Department: Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation, 2020).

Returning to the SDGs, their foundation is generally premised on five Ps:

i. People: ‘We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.’

ii. Planet: ‘We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.’

iii. Prosperity: ‘We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.’

iv. Peace: ‘We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies that are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.’

v. Partnership: ‘We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people’ (United Nations, 2015, n.p.).

According to Essex, Koop & Van Leewen (2020, p.18) “Whilst the 17 individual SDGs are beneficial in that they together emphasize the extent to which sustainable development is interdisciplinary, they also result in isolating the different components of sustainable development. The further division of each goal into separate targets results in national management strategies aiming for distinct targets within the goals rather than a cohesive development strategy. The problem of individualizing the goals is that many have conflicting interests which result in synergies and trade-offs between the ability to meet all the SDGs”. The question that arises therefore is: What strategies and training programs do governments devise to ensure that the SDGs are inculcated in such? In the South African context, in addition to incorporating the SDGs explicitly in training programs, the government at the same time, as alluded to in these writings, mooted the notion of professionalizing the public sector.

The 6th Annual Meeting of the OECD Network of Schools of Government which took place in September 2018 in Helsinki, Finland, afforded an opportunity for Schools of Government of 27 OECD member and non-member countries to explore how they could support their respective governments to achieve the SDGs. In the South African context, the National School of Government “has a constitutional and legislative mandate to provide Education, Training and Development (ETD) in the three spheres of government, state-owned entities (SOEs) and organs of state”. This is in line with Section 195 of the 1996 Constitution which declares public administration to be development-oriented and participatory, with the basic values and principles being the basis of engagement between public administration that is: the three spheres of government, parastatals, organs of state and society (South Africa, 1996). Given the NSGs constitutional mandate, emphasis is placed on the fact that the organization is best placed to embed SDG goals in its training programs, whilst at the same time inculcating a culture of professionalism and professionalization.

For the achievement of sustainable development, it is imperative to harmonise three core elements, which are: social inclusion, economic growth and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and are all imperative for the well-being of individuals in particular and societies at large (United Nations, 2015).

The SDGs, as per the OECD Network of Schools of Government Helsinki meeting, in September 2018, compels a perplexing outcomes-oriented framework of goals and determinations for all countries, regardless of their status of development, which require close collaboration across policy areas, spheres of government and internationally. The complexity of the goals, must be matched by the skills of public servants, developed by organizations such as the members of the NSG. It was reported that many NSG members are providing opportunities for public officials to learn and adopt innovation skills and innovative approaches to develop and implement public policy and in turn positively impact SDG outcomes. Meeting participants also forwarded ideas around skills required for improving evidence-informed policy making and the implementation of systems approaches to problem solving. The meeting concluded with discussions on how best to leverage the potential of a NSG, with members identifying opportunities to improve the sharing of material and collaborate on SDG related themes (6th Annual Meeting of the OECD Network of Schools of Government, 2018).

The discussion now turns to the South African NSG and its training programs. The aim is to discern whether there is an intersectionality between training focused on the professionalization of the South African public sector and the achievement of the SDGs. Malatjie’s (2018, p.111) who wrote on the training programs of the NSG and its relation to the SDGs in particular, in her article titled: “Assessing the capabilities of NSG facilitators in building civil servants’ capacity for effective implementation of the sustainable development goals” provides insights into the readiness of the South African NSG facilitators to implement capacity development training for the attainment of the SDGs. The author affirms the role education and training could play in the aforementioned endeavour. Whilst Malatjie’s (2018) article focused on NSG facilitators in particular, the focus of this paper is on the training programs currently on offer by the NSG as there is a need to determine if knowledge around the SDGs and its implementation are implicitly imparted. According to Potgieter (2019), a capable and competent public service is required in order
for countries in general, to remain receptive to the aspirations of inhabitants, deliver effective public services and achieve national development goals and objectives. Furthermore, management development institutes, schools of public management at universities, schools of government and public service academies were created with the unique role of building capacity among public servants to better support the achievement of government objectives. Such establishments support governments through learning and teaching programs that give credence to the appropriate work ethic, productivity, norms and standards, and supporting the creation of a culture of continuous lifelong learning amongst public servants. Therefore, such organizations should be appropriately structured, governed and funded, and remain responsive throughout the development and rollout of relevant programs (Potgieter, 2019).

Let us turn to the South African NSG in particular in order to determine, what training aligns itself to the professionalization of the public sector, as well as the attainment of the SDGs. Hereewith a summary of the programs offered by the NSG.

Table 1: Summary of programs offered by the South African NSG

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<th>Pre-service learning and development</th>
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<td>Orientation and support to the Public Service Formal Graduate Recruitment Scheme</td>
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<th>Entry level programme</th>
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<td>Compulsory Induction Programme (CIP 1 - 3)</td>
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<td>Compulsory Induction Programme (CIP 4 - 5)</td>
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<td>Compulsory Induction Programme (CIP 6 - 12)</td>
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<td>Compulsory Induction Programme (CIP 13-14)</td>
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<td>Executive Induction Programme (EIP)</td>
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<td>Public Service Reorientation Programme (ROP)</td>
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<th>In-service learning and development</th>
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<td>Human resource management and development programs</td>
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<td>Introduction to HRM in the Public Service</td>
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<td>Application on Policy and Procedure on Incapacity Leave</td>
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<td>Strategic Human Resource Planning for the Achievement of Organizational Results</td>
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<td>Developing HRD Implementation Plans for the Public Service</td>
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<td>Grievance and Disciplinary Action Procedures</td>
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<td>Investigating and Presiding Skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence-based Policy Making and Implementation (salary levels 9-16)</td>
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<td>Recruitment and Selection in the Public Service</td>
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<td>Use of Human Resource Management Information Assessor Training Course</td>
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<td>Designing Curriculum and Learning Material for the Public Service (5 days)</td>
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<td>Designing Curriculum and Learning Material for the Public Service (8 days)</td>
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<td>Moderator Training Course</td>
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<td>Training of Trainers Programme for the Public Service Disability Management in the Public Service</td>
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<td>Human Resource Policy Development</td>
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<td>Labour Relations for Managers in the Public Service Managing Performance in the Public Service</td>
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<td>Making Performance my Responsibility</td>
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<td>Facilitator Development Programme</td>
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<td>Facilitating Participatory Community Engagement (Handbook for CDWs)</td>
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<th>Monitoring and Evaluation Programs</th>
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<td>Apply Monitoring and Evaluation Principles in the Public Sector</td>
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<td>Programme for the Monitoring and Evaluation Practitioner</td>
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<td>Organizational Design (OD)</td>
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<td>Theory of Change for Planning in the Public Sector Deepening Evaluations in Government</td>
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<td>Selecting Appropriate Methodologies for Evaluation in Government Evidence Based Policy Making and Implementation Course Planning for Implementation Programme</td>
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<td>Job Evaluation: Initial, Follow-up and Panel</td>
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<td>Managing and Commissioning Evaluations in Government</td>
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<th>Financial Management Programs</th>
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<td>Avoiding Irregular, Fruitless and Wasteful Expenditure (salary levels 9-16) Bid Committee (MFMA)</td>
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<td>Advanced Acquisition Management</td>
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In order to answer the research question: to what extent will the professionalization of the South African public sector through learning and training programs offered at the National School of Government (NSG) contribute to the attainment of the UN’s SDGs specifically and the NDP 2030 and Agenda 2063 in general, the paper aims to introduce and discuss literature available on the topic through a systematic stand-alone literature review. According to Okoli and Schabram (2010, p.1) three types of literature reviews exist. The first type of literature review is conducted to acquire the theoretical foundations for primary research. The second type of literature review is undertaken by graduates to complete their dissertations or theses, and the third type is a stand-alone systematic.
literature review. The latter is ideal for a study of this nature, as it will “enrich the debate on, and add to, the gaps in the current knowledge, views, trends, and approaches” (Jarbandhan, 2017, p.63) in relation to the professionalization of the South African public sector and its contribution to the attainment of sustainable development in general. Content analysis, which, according to Bryman (2011, p.18) is, “the study of documents and communication artifacts, which might be texts of various formats, pictures, audio or video, used by social scientist to examine patterns in communication in a replicable and systematic manner”, was used to make sense of the secondary sources of information attained from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ProQuest and the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC).

Results and Discussion

When we ask: What does professionalization of the South African public service entail, Gabara (2022) reports the following. It is imperative for public officials to have the right qualifications and the right technical skills, with a sound understanding and induction into the Batho Pele principles which are: consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, openness, transparency, redress and value for money (Department: Public Service and Administration, n.d.). The framework for the professionalization of the public sector, as alluded to earlier, aims to achieve the tightening of pre-entry requirements in conjunction with the effective recruitment and selection processes that inform meritocratic appointments at middle and senior management levels. Additionally, the undertaking of workplace induction and orientation programs that promote a healthy organizational culture, is crucial. This requires effective planning, performance management and performance appraisal systems, including performance standards and assessment instruments for different categories of public servants. Ideally, performance management can be aligned with a professional body or the registration with an association. The undertaking of continuous learning and professional development is paramount which implies the professionalization of certain categories of occupations (Gabara, 2022).

As mentioned at the outset, content analysis, a qualitative data analytical tool, was used to identify and assign meaning to specific secondary sources of information (Bryman, 2011). The researcher scoured the course content of the training programs on offer at the NSG, looking for terms that speak to the SDGs and the beliefs underpinning the professionalization of the public sector framework, as mentioned by Gabara (2022) and elsewhere. Search terms included: sustainable development, sustainable development goals and human resource and development modules that specifically speak to the tenets of the professionalization of the South African public sector framework such as: recruitment and selection, induction and orientation, performance management and appraisal systems.

As illustrated in Table 1 purporting a summary of training on offer for South African public sector employees, it can be surmised that bar the explicit mention of professionalization when examining the various modules on offer, modules located under the training programme pertaining to human resource management and development, speak to the principles of the professionalization framework in general. A missing component, in the researcher’s opinion, is an indication of how the modules aligns to the requirements of occupation-specific professional bodies. It would be interesting to note which professional bodies are appropriate and acceptable in the public sector and their requirements for membership. The public sector consists of a vast array of occupations, be it economists, social workers, teachers, correctional officers, project managers, firefighters, police officers, civil engineers, the military, immigration and customs inspectors, coast guard, city planners (Dowd, 2018), and the like. The training on offer at the NSG are generic in nature and not occupation specific. The training speaks to the suggested professionalization framework’s intended outcome and is mostly geared towards managers. Overall, what should be ensured is that the right person, is in the right position at the right time, sporting the right skills and qualifications, which could be enhanced through further life-long training as offered by the NSG. The issue of concern is the appointment of various public sector personnel without the proper skills and qualifications as per Hendrickse (2022) which frustrates the government’s endeavour to attain a professionalized and developmental state.

When one circles to the SDGs and how it is inculcated in the bouquet of training offered by the NSG, Malatjie (2018) turned to 176 purposely selected facilitators to determine if the SDGs are explicitly taught in the modules they facilitated. Only 54 of the questionnaires administered were returned. The author found in some instances at the behest of the facilitator, the SDGs receive a cursory mention. However, an explicit attempt on the part of the NSG is not made, to train the trainers and in turn public servants, on how to encourage the achievement of the SDGs in particular. Perusing the “In-service learning and development programs” as mentioned in Table 1 above, no module is solely dedicated to achieving the SDGs in general, or a specific SDG. Existing modules do not explicitly mention the SDGs or how to achieve such either. As found by Malatjie (2018) the SDGs are mentioned on an ad-hoc basis. Recently, an invitation was extended to academicians in the Public Administration and Management realm to attend the Africa Regional Symposium on mainstreaming the SDGs in the curriculum of Schools of Public Administration in Africa, to be hosted on 2 and 3 May 2023 (UN DESA DPIDG, 2023). This is a clear indication, in the researcher’s opinion, that institutions of higher learning, whose academic staff is usually contracted to facilitate training on behalf of NSGs on their various programs, and who assists as education specialists when the content of programs are developed, have in the past, missed an opportunity to explicitly inculcate the SDGs in various teaching and learning programs. If this is the case with universities and the like, how much more the omission on the part government, to offer training on the achievement of the SDGs via their NSGs in particular. The researcher concurs with Forbes (2022) who suggests that new training programs, or lesson plans, be devised in the following way by the NSG to ensure that the SDGs are explicitly focused upon:

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As illustrated in Table 1 purporting a summary of training on offer for South African public sector employees, it can be surmised that bar the explicit mention of professionalization when examining the various modules on offer, modules located under the training programme pertaining to human resource management and development, speak to the principles of the professionalization framework in general. A missing component, in the researcher’s opinion, is an indication of how the modules aligns to the requirements of occupation-specific professional bodies. It would be interesting to note which professional bodies are appropriate and acceptable in the public sector and their requirements for membership. The public sector consists of a vast array of occupations, be it economists, social workers, teachers, correctional officers, project managers, firefighters, police officers, civil engineers, the military, immigration and customs inspectors, coast guard, city planners (Dowd, 2018), and the like. The training on offer at the NSG are generic in nature and not occupation specific. The training speaks to the suggested professionalization framework’s intended outcome and is mostly geared towards managers. Overall, what should be ensured is that the right person, is in the right position at the right time, sporting the right skills and qualifications, which could be enhanced through further life-long training as offered by the NSG. The issue of concern is the appointment of various public sector personnel without the proper skills and qualifications as per Hendrickse (2022) which frustrates the government’s endeavour to attain a professionalized and developmental state.

When one circles to the SDGs and how it is inculcated in the bouquet of training offered by the NSG, Malatjie (2018) turned to 176 purposely selected facilitators to determine if the SDGs are explicitly taught in the modules they facilitated. Only 54 of the questionnaires administered were returned. The author found in some instances at the behest of the facilitator, the SDGs receive a cursory mention. However, an explicit attempt on the part of the NSG is not made, to train the trainers and in turn public servants, on how to encourage the achievement of the SDGs in particular. Perusing the “In-service learning and development programs” as mentioned in Table 1 above, no module is solely dedicated to achieving the SDGs in general, or a specific SDG. Existing modules do not explicitly mention the SDGs or how to achieve such either. As found by Malatjie (2018) the SDGs are mentioned on an ad-hoc basis. Recently, an invitation was extended to academicians in the Public Administration and Management realm to attend the Africa Regional Symposium on mainstreaming the SDGs in the curriculum of Schools of Public Administration in Africa, to be hosted on 2 and 3 May 2023 (UN DESA DPIDG, 2023). This is a clear indication, in the researcher’s opinion, that institutions of higher learning, whose academic staff is usually contracted to facilitate training on behalf of NSGs on their various programs, and who assists as education specialists when the content of programs are developed, have in the past, missed an opportunity to explicitly inculcate the SDGs in various teaching and learning programs. If this is the case with universities and the like, how much more the omission on the part government, to offer training on the achievement of the SDGs via their NSGs in particular. The researcher concurs with Forbes (2022) who suggests that new training programs, or lesson plans, be devised in the following way by the NSG to ensure that the SDGs are explicitly focused upon:

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i. The most important step is to define the goals, aims or objectives of the training programme. The first step is to define what you want the trainees or students/learners to achieve by the end of the training or teaching programme. It is imperative for these goals to be specific, assessable, achievable, applicable, and time-bound.

ii. Conduct a needs assessment or baseline assessment: This is needed to determine the current knowledge and skills of the trainees/learners/ students, and to identify the areas requiring improvement. This will help the facilitator to tailor the training or teaching programme to the specific needs of the participants. It is thus important to assess what the participants already know, and to build on such.

iii. Develop a curriculum or syllabus (series of lessons): Once the goals and needs of the trainees/learners/students have been identified, a syllabus should be devised that outlines the topics to be covered, the order in which they will be taught, and the resources needed.

iv. Determine the pedagogy and strategies: Decide on the teaching methods and strategies to be employed to deliver the content. Determine whether lectures, discussions, case studies, role-playing, or a combination of these methods are conducive for what you want to convey. Also, reflect on the learning styles of the trainees/learners/students and incorporate specific activities accordingly.

v. Create the training or teaching materials: Develop training or teaching materials such as handouts, visual aids and assessments that align with the goals and objectives the facilitator aimed to achieve.

vi. Implement the plan: Put the plan into action, and deliver the training or teaching programme to the trainees/learners/students.

vii. Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan: Assess the effectiveness of the training or teaching programme by collecting feedback from the trainees/learners/students, reviewing the assessments, and analysing the outcomes. Use this feedback to make improvements to future training or lesson plans.

Implications

Let us delve deeper into the implications and significance of this alignment:

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Alignment with the SDGs means integrating the principles of social, economic, and environmental sustainability into public service practices. It requires a focus on inclusive policies, poverty reduction, gender equality, quality education, clean energy, climate action, and strong institutions. Furthermore, monitoring and reporting mechanisms need to be established to track progress towards achieving the SDGs.

South Africa's alignment with the SDGs signifies its commitment to the global development agenda, fostering international partnerships, and ensuring the well-being of its citizens. Achieving the SDGs can enhance the country's global reputation, attract investments, and promote social cohesion by addressing inequality and promoting social justice.

Africa Agenda 2063

Africa Agenda 2063 emphasizes economic growth, technological advancement, and improved governance across the continent. Collaboration with other African nations is essential to exchange best practices, share resources, and promote regional stability and development.

South Africa's alignment with Africa Agenda 2063 strengthens its position as a regional leader, fostering political and economic integration in Africa. It promotes intra-Africa trade, cultural exchange, and the sharing of expertise, contributing to the continent's overall progress.

National Development Plan (NDP) 2030

The NDP 2030 outlines South Africa's long-term vision, focusing on economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. Professionalizing the public service is crucial for effective implementation of NDP objectives, ensuring efficient service delivery and policy implementation.

Alignment with the NDP 2030 fosters domestic stability, economic growth, and poverty reduction within South Africa. A professionalized public service enhances government efficiency, reduces corruption, and ensures that policies are implemented effectively, directly impacting citizens' lives positively.

Overall Implications and Significance

Good Governance

Professionalizing the public service aligns with principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability. This, in turn, enhances public trust in institutions and fosters a conducive environment for sustainable development initiatives.
Human Capital Development

Investing in a skilled and professional public service workforce nurtures human capital, fostering innovation and expertise crucial for achieving developmental goals.

Global Recognition

South Africa's alignment with international agendas like the SDGs and Africa Agenda 2063 enhances its global standing, promoting diplomatic ties, foreign investment, and collaboration on a broader scale.

Social Inclusion

By implementing policies that address inequality, gender disparities, and social injustices, a professionalized public service can contribute significantly to social inclusion, ensuring that development benefits all citizens equitably.

Conclusion

The core aim of this paper was to determine in what way the professionalization of the South African public sector contributes to the attainment of sustainable development goals. It is noted that none of the sustainable development goals can be achieved without bold and innovative efforts from public institutions and public servants. The ideas and creativity of civil servants are perceived as more important today, than ever before. There is a clear interconnectedness between the professionalization of the public sector and the achievement of the SDGs. Whilst the SDGs are varied and at times, when one is implemented, it may be to the detriment of another, a professionalized and capable public sector proves key when we endeavour towards achieving sustainable development, globally.

At a time, where there is much talk about the professionalization of the South African public sector in light of the pronounced new framework (2022), an ideal opportunity exists for the South African government, to clearly embed not only the SDGs in its training programs on offer at the NSG, but also to take cognisance of Agenda 2063 and the country’s National Development Plan and its goals. The clarion call of the SDGs is to transform “our” world. To end poverty and inequality. To protect the planet and to ensure that all people enjoy justice, health and prosperity. The aforementioned speaks to the very reason for the existence of the public sector particularly in its service delivery endeavours. Accordingly, an opportunity exists now, to inculcate the SDGs, the objectives of Agenda 2063 and the NDP goals, when training programs are designed by the South African NSG.

In conclusion. The alignment of professionalizing the South African public service with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Africa Agenda 2063, and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 holds significant implications and importance for the country's sustainable development, governance, and overall socio-economic progress.

In summary, the alignment of professionalizing the South African public service with the SDGs, Africa Agenda 2063, and the NDP 2030 is pivotal for fostering sustainable development, both within the country and on the broader African continent. It reflects a comprehensive approach to governance, emphasizing the importance of effective institutions, collaboration, and strategic planning in shaping a prosperous future for South Africa and its people.

The researcher proposes a follow-up study to assess the feasibility and effectiveness of explicitly incorporating SDGs, NDP goals and Agenda 2063 objectives into NGS training programs. This would assist with the implementation of the recommendations made in the paper.

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I am the sole author of this paper. All secondary sources underpinning the study, was duly referenced. The table and diagram used in the paper were drawn from open-source material and duly referenced.

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