

A note to the Sanord conference at Aarhus 13.15 august 2025

A combined evaluation of the Admin Africa Project

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The Admin Africa Project- Possible lessons from the Norway-southern Africa Admin-Africa projects. Relations in research, education and academic organization in the project over the period 1996-2007.

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The problem

The Admin-Africa Project (AAP) funded and supported by universities in Norway and South-Eastern Africa, was in operation between 1996 and 2007. Colleagues produced several publications and supported nine PHD's to completion, (eight) at the African universities.

To what degree did the AAP manage to sideline the traditional neocolonial relation between western and African academia? How was that tradition present in the project? How can AAP's organization and collaborations be said to have transcended that tradition?

What were the titles of the nine PhDs and what have been the careers of the PhD candidates since their graduation?

Which books and published articles have colleagues funded/supported within the AAP produced? Has cooperation with AAP colleagues/institutions continued after 2007 and in what kind of collaboration?

The project

The AAP, formally between the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and the University of Bergen (UiB), unfolded between the years 1996 and 2007. Its focus was on trust relations between people and authorities in three sectors of the new South Africa. in education/schools; local health work; and in agriculture, between farmers, municipalities, provincial authorities, and farm workers in land redistribution. AAP extended its analysis through PhD studies into Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Ghana. The project was financed by NUFU, the Norwegian university organization for cooperation with universities in the southern hemisphere. The project engaged the expertise of about ten senior researchers, half from universities in Norway and the other half from African universities; and nine PhD students. The latter all from African universities and eight of whom completed their PhDs at their home universities.

Presentations of work in progress and tutorial meetings were held yearly in either Cape Town or Harare. Early inspiration and assistance for the land reform study came from colleagues at PLAAS – the institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies – and the School of Government at the University of the Western Cape. Colleagues there were professors Ben Cousins, Chris Tapscott, Ruth Hall and Chisepo Mphaisha. The Admin-Africa Project had the privilege of accepting contributions from Diana Gibson, Neleke Bak, Steven Robins, Clifford Shearing in Cape Town; Jan Froestad, Tor Halvorsen, Steinar Askvik, Audun Offerdal at the University of Bergen and Odd Helge Fjeldstad at the Christian Michelsen's Institute (CMI) in Bergen; the late Francis Appiah (Ghana), Donald Chimanikire and Eldred Masunungure (Harare), the late professor Josaphat Kanwanyi (law) and Professor Kjell Havnevik (economics) in Uppsala, Sweden. During its course, project funds were misused in Dar es Salaam. Askvik/Bak. *Trust in public institutions in South Africa*. Ashgate 2005

The land reform project

Chris Tapscott and Ben Cousins kindly introduced the land reform study to members of the legislatures and the land bureaucracies in the Western and Northern Cape provinces. This made conducting a written survey among elected representatives and interviews and survey among bureaucrats possible. Meetings and extensive interviews in the Elsenburg agricultural administration (Western Cape) and Ben Saaiman's engagement were of significance to the land study – Gran. *State power in land reform*. African Minds 2024.

Administrative support

The Admin-Africa Project benefitted from strong and engaged administrative support at the University of the Western Cape and the University of Bergen, where special mention must be made of Wendy Stoeffels and Bjørn Andersen, respectively. The Department of Administration and Organization Theory in Bergen was ground zero for the Admin-Africa Project. The late Professor Knut Dahl Jacobsen served as mentor at the start of the project. The project had its own staff in Margot Skarpeteig and Famara Sanyang.

Thorvald Gran. Four problems and background

The AAP was successful with 9 completed PhDs, 8 delivered at the candidates' universities, one at the University of Bergen (Anne Dzenga). Seniors in the project produced several fine publications along the way with an early documentation in the Askvik/Bak book from 2005. The research funding came 100% from the north. The three universities in South East Africa, UWC, University of Harare and UDSM – and the University in Accra - supported and coordinated the participation of local colleagues. In the research process the two sides, the north and south colleagues, took active part in organizing, defining and theorizing, perhaps with a slight northern dominance.

I see four problems in AAP.

- The problem of focus: While the project from the Norwegian side raised the general question of trust, trust between people and school-, health- and land authorities in SA, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Ghana, that problem focus met with some skepticism in the collective program development. That skepticism was in my opinion, not worked through to a new and more generally accepted problem focus in the project. I believe a reason was a somewhat locked Norwegian team. The lack of solution led to a fragmentation of the research work, with each researcher on his/her specific theme, and notwithstanding a lot of interesting and important work, but without a best possible integration into an overarching problem and a common publication on trust between new institutions and people especially in SA.

- The problem of fund control: **North**: full control of funds assigned for research and education by the individual assigned researcher; **South**: major fund control by the engaged university, implying a limited part of the assigned funds to the researcher from the home university. This This meant some difference in researchers' autonomy between Norwegian colleagues from UiB and CMI and colleagues/ students from the south - in practice from UWC, Harare, Dar es salaam and Accra.

- A third and minor but manifest problem was corruption. It was solved formally by exclusion, but the real effect over time was, I believe, manifest. It created an air of mistrust. Once registered and acted on, the embezzlement of funds was a non-problem, a non-theme inside the project.

A fourth problem was in administration. Again I believe it was a minor problem. It unfolded between UiB and UWC administrators. The Norwegian team was supported by administrators from UiB, some of whom joined work in Cape Town. There were cases of unpleasant power and status struggle across that divide. My evaluation is that the project leadership (myself included) was not good at managing, clarifying and helping transcend that struggle.

Aspects of AAP background

All the seniors had publications prior to AAP that in different ways influenced the development of the project and the individual studies that materialized through the AAP cooperation, Tapscott on local government, Ben Cousins on land, Neleke Bak on education, Diana Gibson on health care, Chisepo Mpaisha on project management, Clifford Shearing on policing and Steven Robins on gang power in SA, to mention a few.

Some dimensions of problem and methods in the Norwegian team emerged from Knut Dahl Jacobsen's "*Technical Assistance and Political Structures*" (Jacobsen 1964, my translation from Norwegian). He took a group of political science researchers from Oslo to the University of Bergen. The project was to improve the welfare state through offering fact-based knowledge of the role of the public administration. It should investigate multiple aspects of the relation between politics, market actors and administration, between rising and entrenched political power in the state and the organization and function of a growing and many-headed public administration manned by ever-new professionals. The Jacobsen project added to work by Stein Rokkan and Fredrik Barth, already in Bergen. Jacobsen recruited Audun Offerdal, Torodd Strand, Alf Inge Jansen, Johan Olsen, Kåre Rommetveit, Steinar Stjernø, Øyvind Østerud, Thor Øivind Jensen, Tor Halvorsen and a strong host of PhD

students. The project investigated how administrative organization had political influence, how the welfare state was torn between ideals and reality and how municipalities could gain more power and autonomy. Theories of professional and political action models or project narratives competed with theories of the bounded rationality of employees in explaining skewed delivery of welfare services and the skewed distribution of political power. While Stein Rokkan engaged in the comparative study of state building. Jacobsen saw state building in elite power terms, elites struggling historically and militarily to gain control of territory, with state building related to the ability of social groups to professionalize their activities and to gradually inundate the state with ‘their’ professionals. The success of political movements in elections often opened for a stronger inundation of group-identified professionals into the state apparatus: for example, new agronomists into the state in the 1870; new welfare sociologists 1890’s, new social economists in the 1930’s and new political scientists in Norway from 1948 onward.

The Jacobsen project expanded to new state and trust building in territories south of Sahara and to the role of international and Norwegian development aid in those processes. A finding was that the Western model of social democracy was often popular with elites, but the lack of locally embedded professionals often left an open space between government and people. The mediating and civilizing element of professionals was missing in some of the east/south African states, making for easy corruption, isolation of often greedy government elites and military and police power quickly used in conflict situations. Appiah, Chimanikire and Gran. *Professionalism and good governance in Africa*. Abstract Liber Publishers 2004. South Africa however, proved the point that the presence of professionals in the state was no guarantee for civilized democratic governance. Jacobsen’s exposition of action models, how people understood their situation, developed their definition of assigned tasks and reflected on and acted on their commitments and obligations, gave rise to ideas of not-rule-regulated reflections and reasoning between decisions in professional bureaucracies.

Seniors

Seniors engaged in research and tutelage in AAP: Donald Chimanikire (Zimbabwe), Chris Tapscott, School of government, UWC, Chisepo Mpaisha, School of government, Ben Cousins Plaas, Neleke Bak (UWC), Stephen Robins (Stellenbosch), Diana Gibson, Amsterdam, Francis Appiah Ghana and UiB, Einar Braathen, Kjersti Gjuvslund, Jan Froestad,

Department of government, UiB, Tor Halvorsen, UiB Global, Thorvald Gran UiB, and guest researcher at Plaas, UWC and at USN. Steinar Askvik UiB, Odd Helge Fjeldstad CMI

PHD candidates

Annie Dzenga (Zimbabwe),

PhD: The Politics of Service Delivery: A comparative study of administrative behaviour in South Africa and Zimbabwe

Chapter 14 in Askvik/Bak 2005: Trust in institutions in sub-saharan Africa's emerging democracies.

Jaqui Goldin (SA),

PhD: Trust and Transformation in the Water Sector in South Africa

Chapter 9 in Askvik/Bak: Pre-packed trust and the water sector.

Michele Esau (UWC),

PhD: Legislative oversight as a mechanism for enhancing institutional trust in a democracy.

An exploratory study of selected western and African countries. 2003

Chapter 3 in Askvik/Bak: Legislative oversight and trust relations.

Nazeem Ismail (UWC)

PhD: Integrating indigenous and contemporary local governance issues surrounding traditional leadership and considerations for post-apartheid South Africa.

William Ellis (UWC).

PHD: Genealogies and narratives of San authenticities.

Searching for data:

Rashid Kalema (SA),

Lecturer Unisa Johannesburg. No info on PHD title.

Ng'wanza Kamata (UDSM)

Professor UDSM. No info on PhD title

Kwame Domfeh (Ghana),

Professor University of Ghana. No info PhD

Gideon Zhou (Zimbabwe),

Professor University of Zimbabwe. No info of PhD

Annie Barbara Chikwanha. Experiences

Being a participant in the Admin Africa project changed my entire world view and approach to academic work. Coming from a background where theory and abstract thinking were not the norm in academic discourses and practice (Zimbabwe), the opportunities granted by this project led to exposure to theory formulation processes and this was supported by the extensive interactions with my doctoral studies supervisor, Thorvald Gran, and the rest of the members in the project. The Norwegian team in the project clearly had the upper hand in concept formation, and linking abstract with empiricism which benefitted the entire cohort of doctoral students in the project. We were introduced to more rigorous ways of interrogating academic concepts and empirical issues which enhanced our different approaches to our theses, strengthened our theoretical positioning enabling us to connect the dots through different ways of learning.

As a doctoral student, this collaboration was very useful and provided the much-needed insights into how other academics handled their work and scrutinized different phenomena in their environments. The doctoral students in the project came from countries [Zimbabwe, Ghana and South Africa] that were all struggling with transitioning to democracy and with different ways of ‘thinking’ especially since there was a disruptive shift to accommodate the new post-colonial political dispensation that was threatened by mistrust, fear of loss by other actors on the political and economic landscape. Attempts to hold on to dominant positions that drove the national narratives showed the chasm that was set to grow in these countries.

Relevance of the project

I first participated in the Admin-Africa Project (AAP) seminars and workshops in 1998 when I was a junior lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe. These platforms brought together Norwegian and Zimbabwean academics from the faculty of social studies. The Institute for Development Studies managed this relationship with Dr Donald Chimaniro steering the Zimbabwean partnership and coordinating the participants. This was the very first collaboration platform for many of the younger academics who contributed to the project through their presentations at these initial fora. Subsequent workshops were later held in South Africa which exposed us, the Zimbabwean young academics, to regional exchanges and experiences. The first outputs were seminar/conference papers and for some of us, it became a

chance to shape our academic careers by working on PhD proposals that were reviewed by the Norwegian colleagues. Their guidance in bringing the proposals to an acceptable standard was invaluable.

Acknowledgement of indigenous ideas

The best part of these discourses and collaboration was the acknowledgement of our indigenous ideas that were shaped by our different lived experiences. The introduction of the concept of trust as the fulcrum of the research project was very beneficial for us as African scholars, and in my case, it coincided with work I later became involved in- measuring trust in public institutions in opinion surveys. The AAP was a big departure from the dominance of western epistemologies that often dominate collaborative projects in the sense that the western theories, frameworks, and methodologies often considered the default or “universal”, blended well with African knowledge systems that emphasize other data collection and interpretations. Every researcher was thus able to shape their own study and view the communities under scrutiny using their own lenses, and there was always a good rapport in the many workshops that were held throughout the project.

The challenges around the organization of the concept of trust was, in my opinion, driven by the approach of a conceptually grounded method of structuring a research project that we were not familiar with, especially at my Zimbabwean university. The projects we were used to were usually organized to tackle specific/distinct problems and had to develop into advocacy work that included the dissemination of findings to public officials and tracking uptake by public practitioners. Most of these research projects were funded by USAID and the approach of the AAP was very different and liberating in many ways. However, the reality was that leading academic journals, publishing houses, and peer reviewers at that time (even now) were still predominantly based in the Global North, hence African scholars were generally pressured to conform to Western paradigms to be published or cited and this was outside the project’s control. During the project’s period, decolonizing Africa’s knowledge systems had not yet gained traction, and all participants were not concerned with this. The chance to articulate our own research problems within a ‘set conceptual framework’ pushed us to explore other ways of pursuing academic projects.

I published two articles in the AAP project:

1. **‘Trust in Institutions in sub-Saharan Africa’s Emerging Democracies’** in *Trust in Public Institutions in South Africa* Nelleke Bak and Steinar Askvik (eds.), Ashgate, 2005.

2. **‘Professionalisation of the Nursing Profession’ in *Professionalism and Good Governance in Africa***, Chimanikire Donald, Francis Appiah and Thorvald Gran, (eds.) Copenhagen Business School Press, 2005.

Cooperation with AAP institutions was *ad-hoc* after 2006 and in 2011 ADMORG-UiB invited me to be an external examiner for a doctoral thesis on public governance in public schools in Tanzania.

I also collaborated with a researcher, Milfrid Tonheim, from Admorg in 2011 on 2 projects one in Zambia - an evaluation of the SOS Children’s villages, and in 2012 on South Africa’s Foreign Policy under President Mbeki.

Fund management

My funding was disbursed directly from UiB but I had full autonomy on the use of the funds.

I had adequate funds for research and for my education at UiB and this was always paid out timeously as per the signed standard agreement that students sign. The funds covered my participation in the AAP activities.

Opportunities that emanated from participation in AAP

The experiences from my AAP’s participation enabled me to build capacity in research that made it possible for me to do research in 33 African countries with three think tanks. From 2002, I was with the Afrobarometer Network in South Africa and was responsible for managing public opinion surveys in the Southern African region. In 2007, I moved to Kenya and Ethiopia with the Institute for Security Studies where I worked on human security and criminal justice systems in African countries. In 2012, I moved back to South Africa and worked for the Southern African Institute for International Affairs. I became involved in many other projects and served as a board member of International IDEA (HQ Sweden) for eight years and for another 8 years I am currently a full professor in the Dept of Politics and International Relations at the University of Johannesburg.

Some of the other prominent work I have done is listed below and I do give credit to the experiences accumulated from my participation in the AAP.

1. I have led a team of five regional experts in conducting research and reviewing the management of elections under the theme ‘Electoral Systems and Election Management Bodies in the East and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Region’ for COMESA’s Regional Political Integration and Human Security Support Program (RPIHSSP) on Conflict, Early Warning and the Strengthening of Democracy and Governance.

2. As the ISS's internal liaison person to the African Union's Department of Political Affairs, I was part of the advisory team on the development of the reporting mechanisms for the African Charter on Democracy, Governance and Elections that operationalises the African Governance Architecture. I also contributed to drafting background documents for the African Union's Shared Values and was a member of the committee that worked on the development of the African Union's African Human Rights Strategy in 2010. For seven years, I assessed the State of Democracy and Governance in Southern Africa for the Department of Political Affairs at the African Union Commission, a project that was funded by the UNDP.
3. In 2012-13, I led a team of five regional experts in conducting research and reviewing the management of elections under the theme 'Electoral Systems and Election Management Bodies in the East and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Region' for COMESA's Regional Political Integration and Human Security Support Program (RPIHSSP) on Conflict, Early Warning and the Strengthening of Democracy and Governance.
4. In 2014 I led a multi-country comparative research project utilising a Human Rights Based Approach on public service governance. The project was funded by ActionAid. Tasks included designing toolkits for the public to demand accountability from governments and to lobby for the delivery of inclusive good public services (Gender Responsive Public Services (GRPS)). I also contributed to designing and piloting GRPS advocacy strategies for the countries in the project: Zambia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Uganda.
5. I was the team leader in a study to design the European Union's support mechanism for the African Governance Architecture (AGA) and Civil Society Networks governance initiatives, gender and human rights. The study covered all the African Governance Platform institutions (African Commission on Human and People's Rights, African Court on Human and People's Rights, African Peer Review Mechanism, Department of Political Affairs at the African Union, Pan African Parliament, and the African Union Anti-Corruption Advisory Board).
6. Member of the International Advisory Committee (IAC) for the Research Programme on Security & Rule of Law in Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings (FCAS) since April 2014. Programme is run by the Netherland Research Council and the NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development providing advice on methodologies for use in conflict

areas; as well as assessing and recommending proposals for funding from universities and think tanks.

7. Advisory Board Member of the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) Center of Excellence for post-conflict societies at the Institute of Peace and Security Studies (IPSS), Addis Ababa University, since November 2019.
8. Advisory Board member for the Consortium for Regional Integration and Social Cohesion–Social Elevation (RISC–RISE), since April 2020.

Overall, my perception was that AAP was a generally smooth-running project given that managing academics is like herding cats- each has its own mind and thinks differently.

Donald Chimanikire

The project united scholars from East, Southern and West Africa, including Europe and the outputs were generally good. The scholars involved in the project regularly met at different universities to present papers that were sponsored by Admin Africa. These papers cut across different themes and workshops served as sounding boards for many doctoral students who presented their proposals and ideas. The Program funded adequately the students at a time when new technology was being introduced, and they were all able to buy laptops which made their work easier.

In Zimbabwe Gideon Zhou completed his PhD degree and became a Senior Lecturer in Public Administration on graduation and he is now a full professor in the department.

I was co-editor of the book on Public Administration; Professionalism and Development, Copenhagen Business School Press, pp.1-303 (2004). The book was prescribed as an undergraduate compulsory text at the University of Zimbabwe.