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Public Administration Capacity and Economic Performance in Sub Saharan Africa

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Abstract:

Public administration capacity remains central to the economic performance of Sub Saharan Africa, where many countries continue to experience uneven growth despite repeated fiscal reforms, governance reforms, and national development plans. This paper examines the relationship between public administration capacity and economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa through qualitative content analysis of five recent empirical studies. The selected studies focus on state capacity, government effectiveness, good governance, governance quality indicators, fiscal policy, and economic growth in the region. The paper is anchored on State Capacity Theory, which explains the ability of the state to enforce rules, mobilise resources, manage public institutions, maintain order, and implement policy. Findings show that public administration capacity influences economic performance through government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, and political stability. The paper argues that economic policy and public expenditure cannot produce sustainable growth where administrative systems are weak, corruption is high, fiscal management is poor, and legal institutions lack credibility. It concludes that strengthening public administration capacity should be treated as a core economic development strategy in Sub Saharan Africa.

Keywords: Economic performance, Governance, Public administration capacity, State capacity, Sub Saharan Africa

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Public administration capacity is a major determinant of economic performance because it shapes the ability of the state to design policies, implement programmes, manage public resources, enforce rules, and provide public goods. In Sub Saharan Africa, the development challenge is not only the shortage of financial resources, but also the weakness of public institutions that are expected to convert available resources into productive economic outcomes. The quality of public administration therefore matters because economic policies are only effective when public institutions have the capacity to implement them.

The economic performance of Sub Saharan Africa has remained uneven despite repeated macroeconomic reforms, public sector reforms, anti corruption programmes, and national development plans. Some countries have recorded periods of growth, but the growth has often been fragile because of weak institutions, commodity dependence, fiscal pressure, insecurity, corruption, political instability, and limited implementation capacity. This makes public administration capacity an important factor in explaining why similar economic policies may produce different outcomes across countries.

Public administration capacity refers to the ability of government institutions to perform essential administrative, fiscal, legal, regulatory, and service delivery functions. It includes government effectiveness, rule enforcement, public financial management, regulatory quality,

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political stability, control of corruption, and bureaucratic competence. These dimensions determine whether public policies are implemented efficiently and whether public resources are used productively.

Recent empirical studies support this argument. Adaid, Banda, Chirwa, Chidzanja, and Mavhura (2025) show that state capacity is relevant to growth in Sub Saharan Africa, especially through security, fiscal capability, and administration of justice. Simba and Nyadera (2024) establish a relationship between good governance and economic growth in the region. Şit et al. (2024) show that governance quality indicators and government institutions are relevant to economic growth. Sori, Birhan, and Thomas (2024) find that government effectiveness positively influences economic growth. Ayana, Demissie, and Sore (2023) show that governance indicators affect the relationship between fiscal policy and economic growth.

These studies suggest that economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa cannot be separated from the strength of public administration. Fiscal policy, public expenditure, investment promotion, infrastructure development, and economic regulation depend on the capacity of public institutions. This paper therefore examines public administration capacity and economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa using qualitative content analysis of five recent empirical studies.

Statement of the Problem

Sub Saharan Africa continues to experience a persistent development challenge marked by unstable growth, weak institutional performance, low administrative effectiveness, corruption, fiscal stress, and insecurity. Many countries in the region have adopted development plans and reform programmes, but outcomes remain limited in several cases. This suggests that the problem is not only the absence of policies, but also the limited capacity of public administration systems to implement such policies effectively.

Weak public administration affects economic performance in several ways. Poor government effectiveness reduces the ability of ministries, departments, and agencies to deliver services and implement development programmes. Weak fiscal capacity limits revenue mobilisation, expenditure control, and resource allocation. Weak rule of law reduces investor confidence and undermines contract enforcement. Corruption diverts public resources from productive use. Political instability and insecurity increase uncertainty and weaken investment.

The major concern is that economic policy is often treated as a technical issue while the administrative capacity required to implement it is underestimated. A government may design a sound fiscal policy, but the policy may fail if budget implementation is weak. A country may increase public expenditure, but growth may remain limited if procurement processes are corrupt or projects are not completed. A government may introduce business reforms, but investment may remain low if the rule of law is weak and regulatory systems are unpredictable.

Therefore, the relationship between public administration capacity and economic performance requires scholarly attention. Recent studies have examined state capacity, good governance, government effectiveness, governance quality, and fiscal policy in relation to growth. However, these studies need to be synthesised within a public administration framework. This paper addresses that need by using content analysis to identify the major themes that explain how public administration capacity shapes economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa.



Objectives of the Studies

The main objective of this paper is to examine the relationship between public administration capacity and economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa through content analysis of recent empirical studies. The specific objectives are:

1. To identify the major dimensions of public administration capacity that influence economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa.
2. To examine how government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, and political stability shape economic performance in the region.
3. To determine the policy measures required to strengthen public administration capacity for improved economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa.

Research Questions

1. What are the major dimensions of public administration capacity that influence economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa?
2. How do government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, and political stability affect economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa?
3. What policy measures are required to strengthen public administration capacity for improved economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa?

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Review

Public administration capacity refers to the ability of public institutions to formulate, coordinate, implement, monitor, and sustain public policies. It includes the competence of the bureaucracy, the quality of implementation, the ability to manage public resources, the credibility of legal institutions, and the capacity to deliver public services. In this paper, public administration capacity is understood through five main dimensions: government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, and political stability.

Government effectiveness concerns the quality of public service delivery, policy formulation, implementation, bureaucratic competence, and credibility of government commitment. Fiscal capacity refers to the ability of the state to mobilise revenue, prepare budgets, allocate public resources, control expenditure, and ensure financial accountability. Rule of law concerns the enforcement of laws, protection of property rights, contract enforcement, and legal predictability. Corruption control refers to the ability of institutions to prevent the misuse of public office for private gain. Political stability refers to the ability of the state to maintain order, reduce violence, and provide a predictable environment for economic activity.

Economic performance refers to the ability of an economy to achieve growth, productivity improvement, income expansion, investment growth, and macroeconomic stability. In the empirical studies reviewed in this paper, economic performance is mainly examined through GDP growth, GDP per capita, and related macroeconomic indicators. Although economic performance may also include employment, poverty reduction, human development, and welfare improvement, this paper focuses on growth related outcomes because the selected empirical studies are mainly concerned with economic growth.

Public administration capacity influences economic performance because it determines how effectively economic policies are implemented. Economic growth requires more than policy design. It requires institutions that can execute policies, enforce rules, manage resources, and sustain public confidence. Strong public administration supports investment, reduces transaction costs, improves public expenditure efficiency, strengthens service delivery, and creates a predictable environment for private sector activity. Weak public administration produces policy failure, waste, corruption, uncertainty, and low confidence in government.



Theoretical Review

The study anchored on State Capacity Theory, propounded by Max Weber (1922); and expanded by modern thinker, Francis Fukuyama (2004). The theory explains the ability of the state to perform the core functions required for development. These functions include maintaining order, enforcing laws, raising revenue, managing public resources, delivering public goods, and implementing policies. A capable state is not merely a state with formal authority. It is a state that can translate authority into effective action.

State Capacity Theory is the most relevant to this study, because public administration capacity is essentially about the practical ability of the state to act effectively. Economic performance depends not only on the existence of economic policies, but also on whether the state has the administrative, fiscal, legal, and security capacity to implement those policies. Where state capacity is strong, public institutions are more likely to deliver services, maintain accountability, enforce rules, and support productive economic activity. Where state capacity is weak, development policies may fail because of poor implementation, corruption, weak fiscal systems, and limited institutional credibility.

The theory also explains why similar policies may produce different economic outcomes across countries. Two countries may adopt similar fiscal reforms, investment policies, or public sector reforms, but the results may differ because their state capacity differs. A country with stronger public institutions may implement policy more efficiently, while a country with weaker institutions may experience leakage, delay, policy inconsistency, and poor outcomes. Besley and Persson's state capacity argument is particularly useful because it links prosperity with fiscal capacity, legal capacity, and peace. This structure aligns with the present paper because fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, government effectiveness, and political stability are treated as core dimensions of public administration capacity. In Sub Saharan Africa, these dimensions are crucial because economic performance is often constrained by weak implementation systems, low fiscal effectiveness, insecurity, and institutional fragility.

Empirical Review

Adaïd et al. (2025) examine state capacity and growth in Sub Saharan Africa using a dynamic panel approach. Their study is directly relevant because it treats state capacity as a multidimensional concept involving peace, fiscal capability, and administration of justice. These dimensions are important to public administration because they reflect the ability of the state to maintain order, mobilise and manage resources, and enforce legal rules. The study supports the argument that economic growth requires capable public institutions, not only economic reforms.

Simba and Nyadera (2024) assess the relationship between good governance and economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa. Their study focuses on the connection between governance indicators and GDP per capita. The study is important because it shows that governance quality is not merely a political issue but also an economic development factor. The implication is that countries with stronger governance institutions are better positioned to improve economic outcomes because their public institutions create a more predictable and credible environment for economic activity.

Şit et al. (2024) investigate government institutions and governance quality indicators in relation to economic growth and government consumption in Sub Saharan African countries. Their study focuses on indicators such as government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, political stability, and control of corruption. This is relevant because these indicators correspond closely to the dimensions of public administration capacity examined in this paper.



The study shows that governance quality matters in explaining economic growth and the effectiveness of government activity.

Sori et al. (2024) examine the effect of government effectiveness on economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa. Their study is especially important because government effectiveness is one of the clearest proxies for public administration capacity. It captures the quality of public services, the competence of the civil service, the quality of policy formulation, and the credibility of government commitment. Their finding that government effectiveness positively and significantly influences economic growth supports the argument that administrative effectiveness is a growth enhancing factor.

Ayana et al. (2023) examine fiscal policy and economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa, with specific attention to whether governance indicators matter. Their study is useful because it shows that fiscal policy does not operate in isolation from governance conditions. Public spending and taxation policies are more likely to support growth when public institutions are effective, transparent, and accountable. This supports the central argument of this paper that fiscal policy and public expenditure require administrative capacity to generate sustainable economic benefits.

The reviewed studies show that public administration capacity influences economic performance through several connected channels. These include government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule enforcement, corruption control, political stability, and institutional quality. Although the studies use different econometric methods and variables, they converge around the view that administrative and governance capacity matter for economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopts qualitative content analysis. The method is appropriate because the study is based on the systematic interpretation of selected empirical articles rather than primary data collection or new econometric estimation.

Recent empirical studies were purposively selected because they focus on Sub Saharan Africa and address public administration capacity, governance quality, state capacity, fiscal policy, government effectiveness, and economic growth. The selected studies are Adaid et al. (2025), Simba and Nyadera (2024), Şit et al. (2024), Sori et al. (2024), and Ayana et al. (2023).

The analysis followed three steps. First, each article was reviewed to identify its objective, method, variables, and major findings. Second, relevant findings were coded under themes related to public administration capacity. Third, the coded themes were compared across the studies to identify recurring patterns and implications for economic performance.

The main themes used for the analysis are government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, political stability, and economic performance. This approach allows the paper to provide a grounded synthesis of recent empirical evidence on how public administration capacity shapes economic outcomes in Sub Saharan Africa.

Content Analysis Matrix

S/ N	Author(s) and Year	Focus of the Study	Method Used	Public Administration Dimension	Main Finding Relevant to Economic Performance
1	Adaid et al. (2025)	State capacity and economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa	Dynamic panel analysis	Security capacity, fiscal capacity, and legal capacity	State capacity supports economic growth by improving peace, revenue capability, and administration of justice.



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2	Simba and Nyadera (2024)	Good governance and economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa	Dynamic panel data analysis	Governance quality	Good governance contributes to improved GDP per capita performance by strengthening public sector credibility and policy stability.
3	Şit et al. (2024)	Government institutions, governance quality indicators, and economic growth	GMM and Driscoll Kraay regression	Government effectiveness, rule of law, regulatory quality, control of corruption, and political stability	Governance quality influences economic growth by improving the effectiveness of government institutions and public sector activity.
4	Sori et al. (2024)	Government effectiveness and economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa	Fixed effects regression	Government effectiveness	Government effectiveness positively influences economic growth by improving policy implementation, public service delivery, and administrative credibility.
5	Ayana et al. (2023)	Fiscal policy, governance indicators, and economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa	Two step system GMM	Fiscal policy and governance indicators	Governance quality strengthens the growth effect of fiscal policy by improving accountability, transparency, and public resource management.

The matrix shows that the selected studies share a common concern with the institutional and administrative foundations of economic growth. Although the studies differ in scope and method, they collectively show that economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa is shaped by the capacity of public institutions to maintain order, manage public resources, enforce rules, control corruption, and implement policies effectively.

4.0 RESULTS

Government Effectiveness and Economic Performance

Government effectiveness is a core dimension of public administration capacity. Government effectiveness reflects the ability of the state to deliver public services, formulate policies, implement programmes, and sustain credible commitments. Sori et al. (2024) provide direct evidence that government effectiveness positively influences economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa.

This finding is significant because economic policy cannot produce results without effective implementation. Public policies require competent ministries, departments, agencies, civil servants, data systems, monitoring systems, and accountability structures. Where these systems are weak, policies may remain on paper without producing practical outcomes.

Government effectiveness affects economic performance through several channels. It improves public service delivery, strengthens infrastructure implementation, supports investor confidence, reduces administrative delays, and improves coordination between



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government agencies. In Sub Saharan Africa, weak government effectiveness often appears in poor project implementation, delays in public service delivery, low bureaucratic professionalism, weak monitoring, and poor institutional coordination. These problems reduce the economic returns from public expenditure and development planning.

The reviewed evidence therefore suggests that administrative effectiveness should be treated as an economic growth factor rather than a purely bureaucratic concern. A country may have sound economic plans, but without effective public administration, such plans may not produce meaningful economic outcomes.

Fiscal Capacity and the Quality of Public Spending

Fiscal capacity is central to economic performance. Fiscal capacity refers to the ability of the state to raise revenue, allocate resources, manage expenditure, monitor spending, and ensure fiscal accountability. Adaid et al. (2025) identify fiscal capability as a core dimension of state capacity, while Ayana et al. (2023) show that governance indicators influence the relationship between fiscal policy and economic growth.

This finding is important because fiscal policy does not automatically produce growth. Public expenditure can support growth when it is efficiently managed and directed towards productive sectors such as infrastructure, education, health, energy, and industrial development. However, public expenditure can also fail to support growth when it is affected by waste, corruption, poor procurement, weak project monitoring, and unsustainable debt.

In many Sub Saharan African countries, fiscal systems face pressure from narrow tax bases, large informal sectors, debt servicing obligations, subsidy costs, and revenue volatility. These challenges make fiscal capacity essential. A state that cannot mobilise adequate revenue or manage expenditure efficiently will struggle to finance development and maintain macroeconomic stability.

The reviewed literature suggests that the quality of fiscal administration matters more than the size of public expenditure alone. Fiscal policy is more likely to support economic performance where public financial management systems are credible, transparent, and accountable.

Rule of Law and Institutional Credibility

Rule of law is central to economic performance. Rule of law refers to the ability of institutions to enforce laws, protect property rights, uphold contracts, and apply rules predictably. In the context of public administration capacity, rule of law reflects the legal capacity of the state.

Rule of law matters because economic activity depends on certainty and trust. Investors need confidence that contracts will be enforced. Businesses need assurance that regulations will be applied fairly. Citizens need confidence that public institutions will act within the law. When rule of law is weak, uncertainty increases and economic activity becomes more costly.

Şit et al. (2024) include rule of law among the governance indicators relevant to economic growth in Sub Saharan African countries. Adaid et al. (2025) also emphasise the administration of justice as a dimension of state capacity. These studies support the view that legal institutional strength is an economic development issue.

Weak rule of law affects economic performance by discouraging long term investment, increasing the cost of doing business, weakening property rights, reducing trust in public institutions, and encouraging informal arrangements. In some cases, weak legal enforcement also allows corruption and rent seeking to continue without serious consequences. This reduces the productivity of public and private investment.



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Corruption Control and Resource Efficiency

Corruption control is essential for improving economic performance. Corruption weakens public administration by diverting resources, distorting priorities, increasing project costs, and reducing public trust. It also undermines the credibility of government and discourages investment.

The reviewed studies consistently show that governance quality is relevant to growth. Şit et al. (2024) include control of corruption among governance quality indicators, while Ayana et al. (2023) show that governance indicators matter in the relationship between fiscal policy and economic growth. These findings indicate that corruption control is directly connected to economic performance.

Corruption affects economic performance through public expenditure inefficiency. When public contracts are awarded based on political connection or bribery, project quality suffers. When public funds are diverted, infrastructure delivery becomes weak. When firms are forced to pay informal charges, production costs rise. When citizens lose trust in government, tax compliance may decline. These effects weaken the ability of the state to support growth.

In Sub Saharan Africa, anti corruption reform must therefore go beyond official statements. It requires stronger audit institutions, transparent procurement systems, digital public finance platforms, independent anti corruption agencies, credible courts, and protection for whistleblowers. Corruption control must be institutionalised within the daily operations of government.

Political Stability, Security, and Growth Confidence

Political stability and security are necessary for economic performance. Adaid et al. (2025) identify peace as an important pillar of state capacity. This is highly relevant to Sub Saharan Africa because insecurity, political violence, terrorism, communal conflict, and electoral instability have affected economic activity in several countries.

Political stability matters because economic actors require predictability. Investors need confidence that policies will remain stable. Businesses need secure operating environments. Citizens need safety to participate in productive activity. Governments need stability to implement long term development programmes. Without political stability, even good economic policies may fail.

Insecurity affects economic performance by damaging infrastructure, disrupting trade, discouraging investment, increasing government security expenditure, reducing productivity, and weakening state legitimacy. It also diverts resources from development spending to emergency security responses.

Political stability should therefore be treated as part of public administration capacity. A state that cannot maintain order or provide basic security cannot fully support economic development. Security governance, conflict prevention, justice delivery, and inclusive administration are therefore essential to improving economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa.

Policy Implications

The findings have two major policy implications for Sub Saharan Africa.

Governments should strengthen public administration capacity through professional, merit based, and accountable institutions. This requires improving bureaucratic competence, reducing political interference in administrative appointments, strengthening policy implementation systems, and building effective monitoring mechanisms. A capable public administration system is necessary for translating development plans, fiscal policies, and public expenditure into measurable economic outcomes.



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Governments should improve institutional accountability and public financial management. This requires stronger tax administration, transparent budgeting, credible procurement systems, effective audit institutions, corruption control, rule of law, and expenditure tracking. Economic performance will improve only when public resources are protected from misuse and directed towards productive development priorities such as infrastructure, education, health, security, and private sector support.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The study examined public administration capacity and economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa through qualitative content analysis of five recent empirical studies. The paper was anchored on State Capacity Theory, which explains the ability of the state to maintain order, raise revenue, enforce rules, manage resources, and implement policy.

The findings show that public administration capacity affects economic performance through government effectiveness, fiscal capacity, rule of law, corruption control, and political stability. These dimensions determine whether economic policies can be effectively implemented and whether public resources can be converted into productive outcomes.

The study concludes that weak economic performance in Sub Saharan Africa cannot be fully explained by resource limitations or macroeconomic policy weaknesses alone. Administrative and institutional weaknesses are central to the problem. Public policies are unlikely to produce sustainable economic growth where implementation systems are weak, corruption is high, fiscal management is poor, and legal institutions lack credibility.

The central argument of the study is that public administration capacity should be treated as a core economic development strategy. Growth in Sub Saharan Africa depends not only on what governments spend or plan, but on how effectively public institutions govern, implement, regulate, and account for public resources.

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