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# Improving the productivity of the public sector worker

Productivity within any economy is a direct reflection of the performance of its workforce. In Ghana, the public sector is the largest employer and the primary interface between the government and the citizenry. As such, its performance affects virtually every aspect of national life, from healthcare to education, security to sanitation. However, productivity in the Ghanaian public sector continues to attract criticism due to perceived inefficiencies, bureaucratic inertia, and low morale among workers. These criticisms, while at times exaggerated, often reflect genuine systemic issues. This article presents a detailed, human-centered analysis of the productivity challenges within Ghana's public sector and outlines practical, contextualized solutions.

### The productivity puzzle

Productivity in the public sector is harder to quantify than in the private sector, where profit margins and turnover dominate as success metrics. In the public domain, the yardsticks are efficiency, responsiveness, citizen satisfaction, timeliness of service delivery, and the tangible impact of services rendered.

For example, consider a registration officer at the Births and Deaths Registry in Tamale. On a good day, she might process twenty certificates. However, due to power outages, poor software, or lack of stationery, her productivity could dip to ten. Now multiply this across all district offices nationwide—what appears to be a minor inefficiency at the micro level quickly aggregates into a systemic drag on national

progress.

Or take a records officer at the Ministry of Health who must file daily requisitions for medical supplies to be dispatched to regional hospitals. If he faces delays in approvals due to an absent signatory or outdated approval processes, lives may be at stake.

These examples illuminate the essence of public sector productivity—it's not about clocking hours; it's about making hours count in a manner that serves the collective good.

### Systemic constraints and cultural habits

A significant barrier to productivity in Ghana's public sector is its legacy structure—a structure designed more for control than for creativity. At many MDAs, processes require multiple layers of authorization. While this might aim to reduce corruption, it often breeds delays and evasion.

For instance, consider the experience of a procurement assistant at the Ministry of Works and Housing. Her task is to initiate the purchase of office supplies. She must first draft a request, seek endorsement from her immediate supervisor, forward it to the head of department, and finally obtain financial clearance. This entire process, which could be done digitally in minutes, may take over two weeks.

This kind of institutional bottleneck is not unique. In a district assembly office in the Volta Region, a staff member shared how even a minor expenditure like fuel top-up for a field inspection vehicle could not be made unless the District Chief Executive signed off personally.

Moreover, cultural habits

often reinforce inefficiency. The age-old saying, "let's wait and see what the new government says," embodies the passive work attitude during political transitions. Institutional knowledge stagnates because performance is often subordinate to political loyalty.

### Training, but to what end?

Ghana's public sector does not lack training opportunities. What it lacks is alignment between training and institutional reform. Many public officers attend workshops on procurement ethics, new ICT platforms, or public financial management, yet their work environments remain disconnected from these learnings.

Consider a practical case of a senior typist at the Registrar General's Department. After attending a weeklong course on database management, she returns to an office with no access to a computer, no power backup, and no digital interface. Understandably, the training becomes redundant.

Even when resources are available, resistance to change thwarts progress. A field officer at the Ghana Statistical Service narrated how his colleagues, after training in tablet-based data collection, reverted to paper because "it felt more comfortable."

Furthermore, training is often used as a means to access per diems, not as a strategy for human capital development. This mentality must shift. Training programs should incorporate on-the-job coaching, measurable post-training evaluations and structured feedback loops that allow institutions to track implementation.

### Motivation beyond salaries

While compensation is critical, it is not the only driver of public sector performance. Many public sector workers remain unmotivated not because of low salaries but due to the absence of recognition, a lack of career progression, and the monotony of routines.

Consider a sanitation inspector at a metropolitan assembly in Greater Accra. She ensures compliance in food safety across markets. Despite her diligence, she receives no public acknowledgment, bonus, or promotion after five years. Her peers in less demanding roles progress because they have better political connections.

Contrast this with the energy sector's Productivity-Based Incentive System (PBIS) used at the Volta River Authority, where field engineers earn quarterly bonuses based on reliability and downtime metrics. This fosters a performance culture, turning passive roles into proactive ones.

Motivation is also about dignity. A receptionist at a major ministry shared how she lacked basic office supplies—a working phone, notepad, or even a clean desk. Such neglect signals to the worker that her role is irrelevant, impacting her enthusiasm.

### Technology: The unused equalizer

Despite Ghana's strides in e-governance policy, many departments still operate as analog entities. This is not always due to a lack of technology, but rather underutilization, resistance, or poor implementation.

Take the Ghana Immigration Service. Their passport application system now permits online submission, but many applicants are still required to come in person multiple times due to system glitches, server downtimes, or lack of interdepartmental integration.

In contrast, the Controller and Accountant General's Department's E-Pay slip portal has significantly improved transparency and reduced human error. Employees can now access their pay slips online without delays or bribery.

Practical investments in open-source platforms, mobile integration, cloud storage, and real-time dashboards can revolutionize workflow. If a district health directorate adopted a digital health reporting system accessible via tablet, monitoring maternal health interventions could be done in real time, not monthly reports lost in transit.

### Towards a performance-based culture

A performance-based culture must replace the entitlement mindset pervasive in Ghana's public sector. This means a decisive break from years-of-service promotion systems toward meritocratic progressions.

Consider a mid-level officer at the Environmental Protection Agency. She consistently submits quality reports, innovates on air quality assessments, and trains interns. However, her promotion stalls because someone with more years—but less contribution—is ahead of her in the queue.

By contrast, a few innovative agencies like the Ghana Revenue Authority (GRA) have implemented annual appraisal systems with measurable outputs. Revenue officers are assessed on tax mobilization targets, fraud reduction, and taxpayer engagement. High performers earn recognition, training opportunities, or special projects.

Instituting such appraisal systems across the service, especially linked with HRMIS (Human Resource Management Information Systems), would reinforce

accountability. Additionally, departments must integrate 360-degree feedback, peer review mechanisms, and citizen evaluations.

### Leadership Matters

Without effective leadership, productivity policies will remain paper tigers. The public sector needs leaders who inspire, not intimidate; who build teams, not cults; and who act, not just talk.

A regional director at the Ministry of Education once initiated a "15-minute Morning Briefing"—a standing meeting where team members share their day's objectives. This not only synchronized workflow but increased team cohesion.

Contrast this with departments where the boss is a figurehead, showing up at 11 AM, unreachable via email, and disengaged from the institution's vision. Such leaders demoralize teams, sabotage innovation, and reinforce cynicism.

Ghana needs a leadership pipeline. Middle managers should be trained in conflict resolution, data-driven decision-making, and servant leadership. Rotational leadership programs, peer-to-peer mentorships, and succession planning must become the norm.

### Productivity is a National Duty

To draw down the curtain on this article, Public sector productivity is not just an administrative issue—it is a national imperative. Every inefficiency delays development. Every unmotivated worker reduces impact. Every missed training opportunity squanders potential.

Citizens must demand more. Workers must aspire to more. Leaders must deliver more. Productivity is not about working harder; it is about working smarter, ethically, and purposefully.

Let every birth certificate issued swiftly, every passport processed transparently, every classroom supported effectively be a symbol of a Ghanaian public sector that works—not for itself, but for all of us.

The time to act is not tomorrow. It is now.

## The Big Push: A roadmap of opportunities

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and railways, the program would make it easier to transport raw materials and finished goods, which is a key requirement for industrial expansion. Similarly, the construction of dams and irrigation systems would support year-round agriculture, helping to ensure food security and create a more resilient agricultural sector.

His Excellency John Mahama is definitely on a new paradigm for public works. His tone at the top is palatable, and Ghanaians are in love of it. The Big Push is meant to set a new

standard for how large-scale government projects are managed and funded in Ghana. The program's prioritization of Ghanaian contractors and engineers is designed to build local capacity and ensure that the economic benefits stay within the country. If successful, this could create a new class of highly-skilled professionals and a more robust domestic construction industry.

Ghanaians are also witnessing demonstrable fiscal responsibility. By funding the program primarily with petroleum revenues and mineral royalties, the government is attempting to

move away from over-reliance on external debt. If this model proves effective, it could provide a sustainable and self-reliant funding mechanism for future infrastructure needs.

Nonetheless, government is holding itself to accountability and timeliness. The government's promise of timely payments to contractors and the emphasis on rigorous timelines for project completion are meant to address a long-standing issue of abandoned projects. A successful "Big Push" would be a testament to what is achievable with strong political will and effective project

management, restoring public trust in government-led initiatives.

The program is also being implemented with a strong monitoring system, including a special secretariat under the Office of the President, to ensure projects are completed within their timelines and budgets.

Ghanaian can now give meaning to the much emphasized technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Beyond the physical infrastructure, the program's legacy would be its impact on employment and human capital. The massive

scale of the projects is expected to create thousands of jobs, particularly for the youth. The focus on technical and vocational training (TVET) as part of the program would also equip young Ghanaians with practical skills, empowering them for future opportunities.

In essence, the Big Push is being positioned as a transformative initiative that goes beyond a mere construction program. Let Ghanaians, for once, eschew the extreme partisanship, and foster unity in support for the Big Push that has the potential to create a legacy of national self-reliance, economic modernization, and equitable development, demonstrating a new way forward for Ghana's long-term progress.

Government is also

actively pursuing private sector involvement and partnerships with international financial institutions to ensure the successful and timely implementation of the program.

A core principle of the program is the commitment to local content, with the government aiming to prioritize Ghanaian contractors and engineers to build local capacity and keep the economic benefits within the country. The program is self-sustaining as there is dedicated funding arrangements in place.

Small businesses and entrepreneurs must therefore take advantage of opportunities being created under the program.