

Living a life of purpose and influence

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One of the most frequent points people make when they think about a career change is the pull they feel to do work that makes a difference. And that's exactly what Bruce Vivian did.



Bruce Vivian

Six years after starting his career at PwC in 2004, Bruce Vivian felt the need for a job that would make an impact on people and communities while bringing greater meaning and fulfilment to his own life. That's what prompted him to forgo the most common career routes for CAs(SA) in favour of something completely different.

"Although I recognised the importance of the work I was doing at PwC, I needed to make a difference," Vivian says. "I had run many training programmes at PwC and an industrial psychologist suggested I would do well in front of people, but the opportunities were limited. I had always been involved in church work, so I took the leap and became a youth pastor."

The three years he spent working with young people, guiding and mentoring them, were rewarding but not financially sustainable. Deciding that it was time to return to the profession, he went to a number of interviews, but no one could understand why he had taken a three-year gap.

"When I saw that the Auditor-General South Africa (AGSA) had an opening for a technical learning and training manager, I applied and got the job," Vivian recalls. "The AGSA liked the fact that I had a passion for working with people and saw it as a positive attribute. That was how I found myself in the public sector."

It was a move that would shift the course of his career. Not only was the role in education, but it was also for a body that made a real difference to the lives of citizens by enabling oversight, accountability and governance in the public sector.

"My role was to equip people in the organisation to do their jobs effectively, and I truly felt like I was part of something bigger," says Vivian. "It allowed me to contribute to improving the lives of people in the country and to add value to society. I felt that I had purpose and influence."

During his time at the AGSA, Bruce developed learning content for accountants and designed and presented courses, while also becoming involved in strategic projects with the leadership team. These initiatives fuelled his desire to see more CAs(SA) serving in the public sector.

By chance, in 2016 he met a consultant who was conducting research on behalf of the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC), the global umbrella organisation for the accountancy profession. The consultant had also worked on a project for the African Organisation of English-speaking Supreme Audit Institutions (AFROSAI-E), where they developed a visionary strategy to professionalise accounting and auditing in the African public sector. It just so happened that AFROSAI-E was hiring a senior manager to implement the strategy.

"It felt like the job description had been written just for me. I applied for the position and was successful. My role was to establish a multi-stakeholder initiative to grow the capacity of professional accountants and auditors in the African public sector."

The role exposed Bruce to the international development space, liaising with donors who wanted to support the development of the profession and public financial management reforms. Out of this came the [African Professionalisation Initiative](#) (API), a pan-African collaboration to grow the capacity of accounting and auditing professionals in the public sector.

"This was an incredible opportunity for me to work with accountants general, supreme audit institutions and the accounting profession across the continent, as well as other stakeholders across the globe," says Vivian. "It was a whole new world and one where I could apply the skills and talents I had learnt in my previous role. I was grateful that my work in the public sector had ultimately led me to this organisation."

The role was not only exciting but also challenging. One public sector accountant said to Vivian, "In our country, accountants who try to do the right thing in government 'go missing'."

□□ "I got to learn so much about things we are not taught in the classroom," Vivian recalls. "Multilateral organisations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and developed countries around the world, want to support development in Africa. The magic lay in linking their funding with sustainable, impactful initiatives that were supported by the right experts and leaders while maintaining local ownership. As we always said at the API: By Africa, For Africa."

On his role at AFROSAI-E, Vivian says it was satisfying to see high-level stakeholders begin to advocate for the API's vision and to witness people on the ground take ownership and make change happen in their constituencies. International donor funding made it possible to provide high-quality, learning programmes at low cost to equip people working in public sector organisations throughout the continent.

In his first week on the job at AFROSAI-E, Vivian was asked to present the strategy he had been tasked to implement to IFAC's Professional Accountancy Organisation Development and Advisory Group (PAO). Understandably nervous, he was welcomed by an audience keenly interested in what he had to say. This was the first of many presentations to IFAC, where he soon became a familiar face. His passion for the sector was evident and he was offered a role at IFAC in July 2021 as Principal for Quality and Development.

"My role is diverse. I'm responsible for engagement with our members in Western Europe and the UK, and with IFAC's network partners. I support and advise on capacity-building work in the accounting profession globally and strengthening public financial management. □□

Every year IFAC [calls on the G20](#) to urge political leaders to champion high-quality public financial management and to accelerate sustainability and inclusiveness. I get to support such calls by influencing the adoption and implementation of international auditing, accounting, education and ethics standards, including the eagerly anticipated international sustainability standards. It's about getting countries and their professional accountancy organisations to adopt standards that we take for granted in South Africa but which help to make SAICA one of the world's leading accountancy institutes."

Vivian emphasises that it is critically important for more CAs(SA) to work in the public sector as they ensure that funds for public services such as education, healthcare, and sanitation are managed and accounted for. "By taking on a career in the public sector, you have the chance to do top-quality work for your fellow citizens and communities in line with codes of professional ethics. Given the level of fraud and corruption on our continent, chartered accountants have a vital role to play in ensuring that public funds are used for their intended purposes."

He encourages CAs(SA) to dedicate a portion of their careers to the public sector. "You don't have to do it forever. Think of it as a three-to-five-year service to your country. You will learn more than you ever thought possible, and you may find that you never want to leave."

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