

SECTION 7 IMPROVING POLICY ANALYSIS AND CO-ORDINATION

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7.1 A particular initiative in improving policy analysis and co-ordination: establishing Standing Committees

Cabinet has established four Standing Committees of Energy, Agriculture, Tourism and Industry, and Services to advise on sectoral policies and to oversee and co-ordinate the development of major projects on these sectors. These Committees are chaired by the Prime Minister and comprise a mix of ministers, senior public servants and private sector personnel with expertise and interest in these areas. The Standing Committee on Energy was the first to be established, consequently the Terms of Reference of the other three were patterned on this Committee. The specific Terms of Reference of the Energy Committee are as follows:

- (i) to draft, for the consideration of the Cabinet, a 'National Energy Policy';
- (ii) to review the status of designated projects in the energy sector and advise the Cabinet on appropriate action;
- (iii) to advise on new investments and review the need for incentives that could lead to the further development of approved projects;
- (iv) to advise on the harmonisation of major projects in the energy sector and to monitor the development of approved projects;
- (v) to advise the Cabinet on strategies and measures to bring greater co-ordination and cohesion to the entire energy sector;
- (vi) to advise government on any matter referred to it that relates to policy direction, management and operations of the energy companies, including the divestment within the state energy sector; and
- (vii) to monitor the implementation of such measures as are included in the National Energy Policy and policy decisions taken by the Cabinet.

The relevant ministries function as the Secretariat for these Committees.

The Government, in its Medium-Term Policy Framework, identified increased investment, both local and foreign, as a major objective for the period 1994-1996. The ability to attract such investment will impact on foreign exchange earnings and employment. The sectors for which Standing Committees were identified are priority areas. The private sector/public sector combination on these Committees is intended to facilitate the exchange of ideas between the two sectors; enhance

co-operation with respect to policy development and improve implementation of major projects.

Another Committee established to enhance policy analysis and co-ordination was the Public Sector Negotiating Committee. The specific mandate of this Committee is to oversee public sector negotiations. The Chief Personnel Officer provides technical advice to the Committee and the Personnel Department support secretarial services.

7.2 Improving policy presentation

After the first two years of attempting to communicate the message relevant to Public Service Reform, the Government has come to the realisation that certain formal structures have to be put in place to communicate with the public. These structures have been crystallised into a Communication Strategy. The dissemination of information on government plans and policies critically influences their reception and acceptance by the general public, and their sustainability and ownership by the public servant. The main objectives of the Communication Strategy are:

- to bring co-ordination and focus to the Government's communication activities;
- to provide a standard against which achievements may be measured;
- to ensure that all members of the public are reached.

The Strategy uses all forms of communication and media, including:

- the *print* media
 - reform bulletins which are published by the Office of the Prime Minister and highlight, on a quarterly basis, reform activities within the public service;
 - newspapers articles on specific activities/plans in ministries/ departments;
 - pamphlets, bookmarks, and flyers which provide information on the vision, goals, and objectives of the reform effort in the public service.
- the *electronic* media
 - videos which portray public servants in the process of change: used for both information and training;
 - television programmes which are aired nationally and which outline the developments and progress made in Public Service Reform, as well as day-to-day government activities of interest, e.g. Inside Parliament;

- radio programmes which do the same.
- *Advertisements*
 - there has been some discussion on the use of strip advertisements, posters, etc. which keep "Reform" in the minds of the public at all times;
 - specially printed T-shirts, pens and key rings presented to participants of training courses and similar events which become prized possessions in the public service.
- *Expositions*
 - one exposition of the business of the public service has already taken place in Tobago and the success of that venture has led to requests for a similar event in Trinidad.
- *Establishment of a communication presence in ministries*
 - decentralisation of the Press/Public Relations section of the Information Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and the situating of the officers in ministries to work directly with the ministers and Permanent Secretaries.

The context for change

Reliance on the national media for effective, unbiased reporting of plans, policies and programmes generally has not been consistently productive.

In addition, the centralised nature of the operations of the Media Unit of the Division, which is responsible for the dissemination of all government information, did not lend itself to the timely presentation and airing of specific issues as they pertain to ministries and departments.

There was also no mechanism for the internal sharing of information within the public service, nor was there any assurance that the general public or even other public servants either knew or understood how to access properly the services provided.

Implementing change

In Trinidad and Tobago it was recognised that the first step towards co-ordinating and improving policy presentation was the definition of a Communication Strategy which outlines objectives, targets and means. Co-ordination and monitoring of implementation from the centre is important and there must be an appreciation and acceptance of the need for each ministry to communicate, on an on-going basis, issues and information which affect its various publics, both internal and external.

The Trinidad and Tobago Communication Strategy focuses on three particular areas:

- (i) the circulation of information to the relevant sections of the public, whether through bulletins, newsletters, expositions, notices, or manuals;
- (ii) in a hostile media environment, the development of an "alternative system" of information dissemination, i.e. alternative to the national media;
- (iii) the institution of mechanisms to receive specific feedback from the relevant sections of the public.

In most cases, immediate responses may be measured from the receipt of feedback questionnaires and public reactions to the measures instituted and publicised through the publication of internal bulletins and newsletters, and the production and airing of programmes on the national media. Open communication requires that the public servant relinquish the age-old perception of the total anonymity and confidentiality of the service and begin subscribing to the need for information and openness when providing service to the public.

Supporting material

A range of publicity material has been produced by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, including published bulletins on public service reform and pamphlets outlining the vision and the reform measures.

7.3 Public consultation on policy development

Policy issues which intimately affect the citizenry and which may benefit from public discussion, particularly if controversial, are usually put out for public consultation. Consultation may take several forms. Formal consultation takes place through the following:

- *Tripartite Committee* – a standing committee which is chaired by the Minister of Labour and comprises representatives of government, private enterprise and labour. It meets regularly to discuss issues pertaining to labour.
- *Green Paper* – which is a document issued for public comment on a specific subject area.
- *Community/stakeholder meetings*, i.e. taking the issues to the various communities and interest groups.

Informal consultation takes place through the following:

- Quarterly meetings of Permanent Secretaries and their private sector counterparts.
- Seminars on topical issues organised by both public and private sector organisations to which they invite each other.

Such consultation initiatives are undertaken to sensitise the citizenry about issues which will affect them intimately and to obtain the benefit of discussion with key stakeholders of specific issues. Public consultation allows for the safe venting of controversial issues and permits the development of an appreciation of other views and standpoints.

When formal consultation is used, the choice of measure adopted depends on the issue and the stakeholders involved. The choice is generally made by the Cabinet.

Very often, the Green Paper is used in tandem with community and stakeholder meetings which allow interest groups to be heard. Sometimes the community or stakeholder meetings are used as instruments in themselves to provide information to or have discussions with members of the public or specific interest groups.

Informal consultation takes place on a regular basis through quarterly meetings between the Permanent Secretaries and the Chief Executive Officers of the major

conglomerates in the private sector. At these meetings the needs and objectives of both groups, in terms of policy and policy regulation, are discussed. The seminars are organised around policy areas which may need clarification or which may be contentious.

Informal consultation leads to increased understanding of each sector's point of view and therefore to greater sensitivity as to the effect of the policies and measures.

Formal consultation leads to greater understanding and acceptance of government policies.