

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of basic services to the population in Zimbabwe since independence has been rapid and remarkably well administered. A young and inexperienced cadre of civil servants has, in a matter of years, managed to deliver services which earlier had been denied to large sections of the population, particularly in education, health care and agricultural services.

But the public administration of Zimbabwe is now in need of reform and modernisation because its processes and procedures were designed for a service with different objectives and more limited responsibilities. The decision-making structures were designed to implement more modest government policies than those now in force. These structures are no longer compatible with the requirements of a modern administration, nor with the efficient delivery of services to the larger population. This is clearly reflected in the evidence we have collected from the general public, local authorities and the private sector all of which have expressed dissatisfaction with the services delivered and with the attitudes and behaviour of some public servants. The lengthy delays recorded in resolving issues in ministries bear testimony to the justification for the complaints.

Report of the Public Service Review Commission of Zimbabwe, May 1989

Prior to independence in 1980, the Zimbabwe public service was a relatively small service concerned mainly with revenue collecting and regulation enforcement. Few services were provided for the majority black population, particularly outside the main urban centres. The minimal services that were provided in the rural areas were seriously affected by the liberation struggle in the years leading up to independence. Unlike most other former colonies in Africa, Zimbabwe inherited a public service which was dominated by resident white officers who had served the former regime. The first Zimbabwean Government therefore had to rely almost entirely in the initial stages on senior civil servants, some of whose interests and loyalties were suspect.

At the time of independence, there was a total of 10,570 established posts in the public service, of which only 3,368 (31.9%) were occupied by blacks, most of whom were at levels lower than senior administrative officer.

They were not in the policy planning and decision-making positions and so could not play a significant role in the crucial transition period that was to follow. In addition, they did not have experience in policy formulation and implementation necessary to achieve results in senior management positions. In consequence, newly

appointed ministers had to rely heavily on white permanent secretaries for advice and information.

To redress this racial imbalance, a Presidential Directive was issued in 1980 which introduced a strategy to facilitate the employment of blacks who had the required qualifications but who lacked managerial skills and experience. The imbalance was corrected within a relatively short period by a combination of the departure of large numbers of white officers under a scheme for early retirement and the repatriation of black Zimbabweans who had acquired a wide variety of academic qualifications, particularly in Britain and the United States. The result was a highly qualified public service with limited experience which was saddled with a system of public administration which was tied to the colonial past.

The new government immediately sought to design policies and programmes to meet the aspirations of the majority population, thereby extending social services to previously neglected rural and urban residential areas where the majority of blacks lived. Substantial achievements were recorded in expanding education, health and small-scale agriculture services. This extension of social services inevitably resulted in an increase in public expenditure and an increase in the number of public servants required to provide the additional services.

Within a relatively short period the service was trapped between dwindling resources, a continuing increase in the demand for services, and an out-dated system of public administration. It was against this background that, in 1987, the Public Service Review Commission was tasked to undertake an in-depth study of the public service of Zimbabwe.

Reporting in 1989, the picture painted by the Commission was of a public service which was:

- over-sized, cumbersome and heavily centralised;
- managed by inexperienced senior staff;
- characterised by overlap and duplication of functions;
- secretive, lacking in transparency, and with poor communication of decisions and problems;
- inaccessible to the general public; and
- suffering from over-complicated rules and elaborate procedures.

The Commission noted that these characteristics led to delays in service delivery and a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the general public, which resulted in a widening gap between the population and the public service.

Within the service itself, the Review Commission found that the heads of ministries were often overloaded in a management system that had become more complex. Resources allocated were inadequate and often inefficiently utilised due to poor allocation of both human and material resources.

The Review Commission recommended a reform and modernisation of the public service the structures of which were "no longer compatible with the requirements of a modern administration nor with efficient delivery of services to the population."

The reform of public sector management also became an integral part of the five-year Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) introduced in 1991 with the long-term objective of improving the living conditions of the people through the improvement of economic performance. This objective was to be achieved by, among other measures, the reduction of the central government budget deficit which implied a reduction in the size of the public service and an increase in capacity and performance levels.

Economic Structural Adjustment and Public Service Reform are inter-linked. It is essential, therefore, that the public service should assist in achieving the goals of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and also act as an instrument of development itself. The objectives of ESAP are unlikely to be fully achieved and sustained unless the public service plays an active and facilitating role.

Based on the Review Commission report and subsequent studies, the following broad objectives underpin the current public service reform programme:

- improve the mechanisms for policy formulation and co-ordination;
- introduce performance management to ensure better service delivery;
- improve conditions of service, to retain competent skills and enhance morale and motivation;
- improve resource management (both human and material) through intensive reviews of management in all departments and agencies;
- upgrade basic management systems through training and staff development;

- restructure public expenditure through a rational process of labour deployment, structural reviews and decentralisation;
- reduce the size of the public service;
- set up and strengthen monitoring and support systems; and
- introduce computerised Human Resource Information Systems and a government-wide Management Information System.

To achieve these objectives, the Public Service Commission, which is the key player in designing, implementing and monitoring the reform programme, has implemented or is in the process of implementing changes which are designed to overcome the deficiencies highlighted by the Review Commission. The key elements of this movement towards a more efficient and effective public service are:

(i) To move away from an emphasis on rules and regulations towards a concern for performance and delivery of service to the public

Performance management is in the process of being introduced into all the ministries by encouraging managers to shed their old operating styles and to shift their focus from mere compliance with rules and other controls to seeking ways of achieving the best possible results. In effect, managers are being required to do more with less resources and are being held accountable for results.

All ministries have drafted mission statements and training in the concept of Performance Management has already been provided at the top three management levels in ministries. Institutional arrangements to sustain the system are already being expanded and National Training Institutes are being strengthened to enable them to provide performance management training to middle and lower-level managers throughout the service.

A Management Information System (MIS) will be introduced and designed to measure the performance of ministries and individuals against set goals and objectives or key result areas. The Management Information System (MIS) will form a basis for reward, sanction and identification of training and development needs.

(ii) To improve job definition and reward

A review and evaluation of job structures has been an important step in the reform. Re-organisation has enabled the service to streamline operations,

introduce parallel progression, and rationalise the numerous allowances introduced as a way to retain staff.

To implement the job evaluation exercise, a compensation survey was conducted aimed at improving conditions of service to provide enhanced rewards to experienced staff in those occupations which have presented problems in staffing.

(iii) To appraise personal performance

A performance appraisal system has been introduced to replace the previous procedures which were primarily related to personnel functions and focused on promotability assessments. Consistent with an increased emphasis on rewarding achievement, the new system is focusing more on objective setting, measurable outcomes, training needs and continuous dialogue between managers and staff. The development of competence profiles and frameworks to assess outcomes, development needs and potential will certainly have an impact on how the appraisal system will work.

The emphasis on performance – both institutional and individual – is being accompanied by efforts to develop meaningful indicators which can measure the quality of results and thus guide assessments of effectiveness and efficiency in the public service.

(iv) To review personnel policies and procedures

A personnel management manual is being produced which outlines all changes to policies, systems and procedures in response to the strategies of the reform programme and performance management guidelines.

(v) To improve personnel management information systems

To support the employee performance management system, a computerised Human Resource Information and Planning Programme is in the process of being established.

(vi) To decentralise decision-making

As a means of improving efficiency and enhancing accountability, the Public Service Commission has already decentralised to ministries a substantial amount of operational activities. Ministry head offices, in turn, are expected to decentralise a substantial amount of their functions to the provincial and regional levels.

This decentralisation should improve and contribute to faster decision-making and participation at local level.

(vii) To value and develop staff

The key to effecting reforms rests with the most important resource in the public service – its people. A highly trained, motivated, flexible and committed workforce is essential for transforming and achieving the cultural shift necessary for changing the way the public service is managed.

To facilitate and guide human resource development in the public service, a National Training Policy has been developed. The policy will be accompanied with a training procedures manual. Already ministries are required to have systematic training plans for improvement of skills and performance of staff.

(viii) To commercialise where possible

The public service is currently actively considering use of "market-type mechanisms" such as internal markets, sub-contracting, commercialising and user charges, in a number of areas, with a view to improving competition and choice. This will increase government capacity to re-allocate resources in line with changing priorities as well as allowing it to reduce public expenditure.

(ix) To develop further improvement programmes

Work is in hand to develop programmes which will:

- introduce entrance and promotion examinations;
- assist in career development;
- strengthen financial accounting and management;
- decentralise budgetary control;
- facilitate the exchange of staff between the private, parastatal and public service sectors;
- improve long-term human resource planning; and
- improve procurement and supplies management.

The outline provided above gives an indication of the policies which have been adopted and the procedures which have been introduced, are in the process of introduction or are being contemplated to ensure that Zimbabwe has an efficient and effective public service responsive to the needs of all its citizens. A dramatic

change to public servants' attitude to the work they do has been initiated and the impact has already been felt throughout the service.

Civil Servants at all levels now realise that they will be held accountable for the targets and objectives which they will have agreed to achieve. Those who advance the objectives of their ministries and departments will be rewarded and those who are not prepared to change or impede progress will have to move out to make way for those with the right attitude.

The Government, through the Public Service Commission, is fully committed to the Reform Programme and the Commission members have taken a direct interest in supervising and monitoring the performance of public servants to complement the efforts of Heads of Ministries. The Commission is confident that the reforms now being implemented will ensure that the public service, together with the private sector, can facilitate and foster economic growth as envisaged in the phase II of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, to bring about a brighter future for all Zimbabwe's citizens.