PUBLIC SERVICE REFORMS

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, the global, political, economic and social changes experienced all over the world are having a direct impact on the Commonwealth countries in general and on the Eastern and Southern African countries in particular. Specifically, the impact has been experienced not only on the political processes of establishing or strengthening democratic governments and institutions but also on the economic policies and strategies that have been formulated in the region. The economic structural adjustment programmes which have been implemented in the region are similar in the assumptions, policy, content and purpose, strategy and methodological approach. The strategies, while similar if not the same, have been implemented in different countries with different levels of development. The management strategies which have been instrumental in implementing these broad, similar economic and political processes, philosophies and policies have also been affected, if not reformed to suit the global changes.

There is a realisation that the current globalisation of the market-driven world economy has resulted in the way policies are formulated and managed. The market-driven structural adjustment programmes in the region, for example, have resulted in policy and management strategies of downsizing bureaucracies. The strategies have been seen in some instances as a process of reducing the work-force levels of global enterprise organisations and become leaner and fitter to enhance their competitive advantage in the global market-place. Such managerialist strategies have brought about job lay-offs. The job cuts have negatively affected certain social groups in society and benefited others. The downsizing strategy is a management practice which places the worker at the centre of corporate strategic planning through organisational redesigning and delayering. It can be conceived as a necessary reduction of management layers to realise local responsiveness and accountability and enhance global competitiveness of multinational enterprise. In some countries the strategy is now being implemented without planning or is being treated as given and has therefore become a mindset, the assumptions of which have not been examined by policy analysts. These strategies are a reflection of the intrinsic ways the world economy is structured and how invariably they impinge upon the management systems in the region. An observation has been made which clearly shows that most of the reform strategies have not been subjected to rigorous scrutiny or theoretical examination as to their suitability to the economy and the region. Further, the strategies have not followed the usual format or stages of policy formulation which normally involves many stakeholders. In other words, the process of consulting and co-ordinating with other ministries and departments before the policy is pronounced has not been followed in the current globalisation of the economy and public administration.

The outcomes of some of these strategies are now being experienced a few years after implementation. Because of the nature and type of effects of these outcomes, many policy analysts have been persuaded to question their validity and subject them to theoretical examination.

Globalisation, rapid change and complexity have led to the demand for better services and the pressures for accountability have come with a large dose of uncertainty about the way policy should be formulated and managed. These developments have generated widespread demands for new types of state responses, processes and procedures in the policy analysis.

Many governments are indecisive about the role of the state. Some are torn between pressures for a minimalist role of the state in the social sphere and states involvement in production, distribution and consumption of services. According to the minimalist approach, the state should confine itself to mitigating the temporary maladjustments that occur as the trickle-down effect theory began to work. The minimalist view assumes limited involvement of the state in the economy, preferring the market forces to play a dominant role.

The rethinking or reconstruction of the role of the state has inevitably led to the rethinking and reconstruction of the policy-making paradigms. This entails tackling the following basic questions:

(a) What are the truly strategic policy analysis and management problems that hinder efficiency and implementation of policies?

(b) How can these policy problems be tackled in the light of the advances in policy development and management science?

(c) How can solutions be found that will ultimately ensure that the state improves its role in policy development and policy management?

At the global level, a new policy development and management paradigm is emerging with policy analysis models, tools, hypothesis and technical proposals which are very different from those which predominated for much of the post-colonial state. A transition from administration to management is under way.

The challenge faced by many states in the region is how to accommodate the special problems and characteristics of change in the latest developments in policy analysis, formulation and management. The process does not consist of copying policy analysis tools and methods which are archaic; the challenge is much broader and more complex. It is a matter of seeing whether it is possible to re-examine, rethink and reconstruct policy management approaches, techniques and strategies on the basis of recent innovations in the understanding of the emerging problems. This rethinking of policy analysis and management would be the starting point for designing, on that basis, appropriate technical solutions and approaches. What is being proposed, therefore, is a vast research and development effort, based on experiences, to generate organisational behaviour and the institutionalisation of the new policy process paradigm.

In this context, Rethinking Policy Analysis and Management attempts to answer some of these questions and offer a practical framework within which policy can be conceptualised, formulated, implemented and evaluated. It, therefore, offers a critical review of fundamental questions of the aims, assumptions and effects of the economic reform strategies. In general it attempts to fill in the gaps in the policy development process, which has often omitted the conceptualisation and evaluation stages. For example, it challenges the notion that the determination of government policy is the responsibility of the minister alone within the convention of collective responsibility of the whole government for decisions and actions of every member of it. In determination of policy, a civil servant has no constitutional responsibility, and no role distinct from that of his or her departmental minister[1].

Tradition, therefore, holds that the minister formulates policy and the civil servant implements it. This paper is arguing for a much more broad-based framework which includes the government, civil society, and other stakeholders in all the policy development and management processes.

The need for evaluation of some of these processes is advocated in this paper. This approach is necessitated by the absence of attempts to find out if the objectives of the reform programmes were achieved. If, for example, the purpose of the Civil Service Reform was to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service and to ensure its affordability and accessibility over time, then evaluation should focus on the purposes rather than on strategies. Currently, strategies for reform such as downsizing, become the major focus for evaluation. The extent to which the civil service has been reduced and the extent to which public enterprises have been commercialised seemingly become the success measurement factors instead of efficiency and effectiveness as the main purposes for reform. This is obviously a way of measuring wrong goals with the right instruments.

The following main strategies advocated and practised by many countries in the region, have not been subjected to the full processes and stages of policy development and management. The weaknesses and faults in these strategies have contributed to the need to review the framework within which the policy is designed and implemented.

1. Diagnosis and preparation

Prior to the formulation of the economic reform policy and to the design of the structural adjustment programme, there was no open debate or consultation with the stakeholders for whom the policy was designed. There was no analysis of the constraints to be faced by the stakeholders in order to draw upon knowledge and experience from the citizens. Diagnostic studies which are participative in process are necessary if a consensus on the problems and the required corrective action are to be achieved. Such an approach would contribute to the development of an action plan to which consumers and stakeholders show their commitment and support.

2. Vision and strategy

Very often, visions of government were not in place at the time that governments implemented the economic structural adjustment programmes. There was, therefore, no link between vision and strategy for solution of economic problems. The overall programme objectives, instead of being driven by the intended outcomes, were based on the need to achieve the effects or aims of the globalisation process. Consequently, the expectations and aspirations of the public were not considered. The role of the state and the nature and type of the civil service desired were never debated and were unknown, leading to the build up of resistance to the reform itself, both by the public and by the civil service which was expected to implement the reforms. In such circumstances the civil service could not have developed the capacity to reform itself. Experience now shows that the civil service reform requires a comprehensive strategy which addresses all the main constraints in an integrated way and sets specific objectives with targets or benchmarks against which progress can be judged. These should be linked to the desired final outcomes such as improved service delivery; meeting the needs of the people; and the size, structure and cost of the civil service. The reform strategy also needs to be realistic and to reflect the available implementation capacity of the service.

3. Sequence and time-frame

The sequencing of the economic reform programme has been haphazard and has always been associated with economic crisis. The time-frame for implementation has not taken into account the availability of financial and human resources, managerial capacity and the degree of support for reform among the stakeholders. In some countries, the economic reforms were imposed while the administrative reforms were in the process of being implemented. In other instances, the restructuring of ministries, reduction of the size of the civil service and improving pay levels were not sequenced in a way which would take into account any interdependencies. In general, downsizing or right-sizing should take place after ministerial reviews because these will identify redundant posts and personnel to be retrenched. In some countries, pay reforms have been implemented before retrenchment of staff resulting in resistance for administrative reforms in which citizens have become suspicious of government intentions.

4. Process approach

In most of the reforms, there has been no meaningful participation by stakeholders. Greater use of participatory techniques such as workshops and team-based project preparation methodologies have not been used in many countries of the region before the reform is implemented. Process approach generally requires that the stakeholders adopt a flexible approach to project design so that programmes can be adopted and changed in response to evolving circumstances. Such a participative approach has often not been encouraged at the initial stages of policy design.

5. Strengthening of core functions

In developing civil service reform interventions many governments did not take necessary measures to strengthen their core functions in order to improve resource mobilisation and allocation, policy making capacity and the effectiveness of the state machinery. The strength of these processes depends upon training of civil servants and improving their morale. Strengthening of core functions should take place across the entire civil service while at the same time taking into account sector-specific management and policy needs.

6. Capacity building

The reform programmes have been designed and implemented without regard to the local capacity to execute the programmes. Training policy and programmes that help to develop skills and build capacity in areas related to civil service reforms, were not in place at the initial stages. There has been little support for training managers in the civil service and policy analysis in order to improve performance and productivity. Attention was not given to gender issues to ensure that equal opportunities were promoted and that the impact of redundancy, redeployment and credit facilities would not be adverse. Social dimensions of adjustment programmes were always considered as an afterthought. They were therefore not built in when the programme was conceptualised, thereby revealing a weakness in the current policy analysis framework.

The weaknesses and strengths of the way in which the civil service reforms were introduced and implemented can now be studied by the students of policy analysis and management. In the main, the reforms were hurriedly prepared and implemented, usually following an economic crisis, without regard to the need to involve stakeholders in formulation and evaluation of the policy intervention strategies. The academic institutions such as the Universities that have the resources to provide advice by way of policy studies, were never involved nor utilised. In some instances where institutions were created by government with a specific purpose of providing advisory services, situated in either departments or in the office of the Head of State and therefore employed by government are not utilised and their advice is not taken seriously[2] In other countries, such policy analysis units have been reduced to taking Cabinet minutes or memorandum, which is contrary to their employment conditions as well as to their skills and knowledge.

Amongst some of the problems experienced in managing the reform programmes are the lack of co-ordination and co-operation between and among ministries. The lack of co-operation and consultation signifies the absence of an institutional mechanism which can resolve the problems, being experienced. Among the service delivery systems, there have been no specific studies of delivery standards and the level of involvement, utilisation and access to public service by some social groups in society, for example, women and the poorest of the poor. Such surveys would help to improve both the design of the civil service reform and the monitoring of its impact. Repeat surveys should be made in order to identify the need to take any corrective measures to mitigate any adverse consequences.

The lack of a policy evaluation process is exacerbated by the lack of policy dialogue, on the civil service reform, with relevant organisations, social groups and individuals. The lack of a dialogue, using consultative group or Round Table process, is a reflection of the protection of interests by the dominating social group in society and state.

PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND HISTORY

The purpose of this publication is multifold. In general it is based first on experiences of managing conferences, seminars and workshops on policy formulation, management and evaluation throughout Commonwealth countries. Secondly, it arises from the policy advisory services provided to member states by the Secretariat in which strengths and weaknesses of policy management have been observed. Thirdly it is based on the views, observations, and comments made by senior and top officials who attended a regional workshop in Harare in September 1997 on Policy Analysis. Among these many purposes are:

1. **To attempt to provide a theoretical explanation on why, how, and what policies are conceptualised, formulated, implemented and evaluated. It also explains the rationale of either accepting or rejecting policy options.**

   While policies have a political and administrative content, they have a political base since they constitute a problem-solving mechanism and conflict resolution instrument in the distribution of power and resources. At the base of all the public policies are power relations. The political economy theory is therefore an attempt to understand the way resources are produced, distributed, allocated, consumed and managed in order to achieve a particular goal within society. The theory also explains the relationship between the countries of the region and the world economy which has been undergoing fundamental structural changes. It assists the politicians, policy advisers, senior servants and those who direct public service, who approach policy and strategy formulation and its implementation in a variety of ways. It also provides a broad view of the socio-economic and political environment from which policies are formulated and managed.