Workshop on Management of Human Resources in Africa
Challenges for the Third Millennium

Public Service of Zimbabwe
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1. **Introduction**

This paper focuses on efforts the Zimbabwe Public Service Commission has made in managing its employees in this performance management era. These efforts centre around implementation of reforms for the period 1998-2000 which were set out in the Framework for the Second Phase of the Public Service Reform Programme. In addition, the paper highlights achievements to date, problems met and challenges the Commission will face in the third millennium.

2. **The Structure and functions of the Public Service Commission in Zimbabwe**

The Public Service Commission was established by an Act of Parliament (Public Service Act 1995) in accordance with Sections 73, 74 and 75 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwe Public Service Commission is made up of:
- a Chairman;
- at least two and not more than seven Commissioners.

The Commission is appointed by the President from men and women of ability and experience in administration who have held senior posts in the Public Service. On appointment, the Commissioners cease to be Public Servants.

The functions of the Public Service Commission include the following:
- to appoint persons to the Public Service, to assign and promote them and set their conditions of service;
- to appoint persons from approved services to offices, posts and grades in the Public Service;
- to conduct examinations for candidates for entry and promotions within the Public Service;
- to inquire into and deal with complaints from members; and
- to exercise disciplinary powers over members of the service.

The Commission appoints a Secretary to the Commission in consultation with the Minister. The Secretary is the one who controls and supervises the Commission secretariat staff. Under the Secretary are the following directorates, conditions of service, human resources, training, inspectorate and salary services bureau. All staff of the Secretariat are Public Servants. Considerations are being made to move the Secretariat out of the Public Service, due to the unique nature of the Commission's functions as well as to ensure impartiality and avoid conflict of interest. The Public Service Act 1995 stipulates that the Public Service consists of all personnel in the service of the State except specified groups like the Police, Defence Forces, Prisons and the Judiciary. Section 15 of the Act specifies that posts, offices, appointments, promotions, transfers, secondments and supervision of staff in any government Ministry or department are the responsibility of the Commission. Thus the 1995 Act establishes the Public
Service Commission as the employer for all Public Servants. Currently the size of the Public Service is about 165,000.

In order to efficiently carry out the above functions, the Commission has allocated Commissioners to supervise specific Ministries on issues pertaining to human resources management. This system ensures urgent attention, discussion and/or solution of human resource problems of any ministry and also capacitates commissioners to be fully conversant with operations of their specific Ministries.

However, to ensure speedy processing of issues and in addition to the above supervisory system, the Public Service Commission has delegated the following functions, for levels below the under secretary, to heads of Ministries:

- lateral transfers and promotions;
- processing of local study leave up to masters level;
- raising of appointment forms for all posts;
- extension of supernumerary appointments up to six months;
- discharge in cases of misconduct;
- recovery of suspension allowances in cases of dismissal; and
- discharge of teachers for improper conduct relating to students.

To assist the Commission in monitoring implementation of these delegated/decentralized functions in Ministries, the Commission has created an Inspectorate Division within its Secretariat. Note should be taken that although the above functions are delegated, standard procedures and guidelines are still made by the Public Service Commission, in consultation with Ministries and Staff Associations.

3. Background to a Performance-Oriented Public Service

Problems of the system

The Public Service experienced tremendous growth at independence (1980) as a result of the need to respond to the aspirations and expectations of a young and independent state. This increase coincided with the exodus of many of the whites who had previously held a monopoly of power and experience in the public service. The new government therefore had not alternative but to recruit a young and inexperienced cadre into the service.

In 1987, the Public Service Review Commission was tasked to do an in-depth study of the Zimbabwe Public Service. Findings of this Review Commission reported in 1989, gave the picture of a public service which was:

- oversized, cumbersome and heavily centralized;
- managed by inexperienced senior staff;
- characterized by overlap and duplication of functions;
- secretive, lacking in transparency and with poor communication of decisions;
- accessible to the general public; and
• suffering from over-complicated rules and elaborate procedures.

These characteristics led to delays in service delivery and lack of responsiveness to the needs of the general public. The Review Commission recommended a process of reform and modernization of the Public Service.

**Initial efforts to address the identified problems**

The Public Service Commission implemented a first phase of the Public Service Reforms (1991-1997) which had the following achievements:

• introduced performance management to the top three levels in fifteen ministries;
• conducted a job evaluation throughout the service which reduced job grades from over 3,500 to only eighteen;
• reduction of the public service by over 23,500 posts;
• development of mission statements, corporate plans and clients charters by all ministries;
• commercialization of and cost recovery measures for some departments; and
• conducted a service delivery survey to get verified data and information on the state of public service.

**The Vision for the Public Service Reform Programme**

The Framework for the Second Phase of the Public Service Reform Programme (1998-2000), which provides an instrument through which all reforms relating to the public service will be articulated, was developed through extensive consultations with Ministries, staff associations and other stakeholders and builds on the lessons learnt during the First Phase. Implementation of the second phase reforms has the acceptance and commitment of all stakeholders. The Framework document was approved by Cabinet.

The vision for the Second Phase of the Public Service Reform Programme is for a public service that is:

• small, concentrates on its core functions and executes these efficiently and effectively;
• puts its citizens first;
• is open, transparent, accountable and responsive;
• utilizes modern technologies and is at ease with the technologically rich new millennium;
• recognizes the significant role of the private sector in national development and plays its part as a facilitator;
• is performance management oriented and well motivated; and
• has high integrity and is esteemed by the public.

The vision seeks to redefine the role of the public service and requires commitment, overcoming and managing change, ownership and internalization of the changes by all levels.
Promoting Efficiency and Effectiveness

In order to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the service, the Public Service Commission is introducing tight screening and evaluation mechanisms to determine who should or should not be appointed and retained in the service through entrance and promotion examination, and who should remain in the service, be promoted or rewarded through performance management and the accompanying performance appraisal system. Promoting efficiency, effectiveness and focusing on core business with limited resources also require capacity building so that the public servants are re-tooled and equipped with the necessary Skills to perform the duties expected of them.

Training is thus an essential component of the public service reforms. Curricula for the Public Service Training Centres is being revamped to incorporate reform related training components.

Coordination of reforms

To coordinate public service reforms, a Strategic Change Management Unit headed by a full time National Coordinator (a non public servant), was set up within the Public Service Commission. Members in the Unit work in task force teams, membership of which can include other officers in the Commission Secretariat or other Ministries, provided they have requisite skills.

The task forces work on areas of reform which include information technology, sub-contracting, commercialization, restructuring, training, performance management, discipline and corruption, labour relations, examinations, communications, gender and HIV/AIDS issues. There is a requirement for all Ministries to establish Change Management Units which will be focal points for the Public Service reform programme and will spearhead implementation of the various aspects of the reform, in close liaison with the Strategic Change Management Unit in the Commission. In addition, the Public Service Commissioners conduct regular visits to Ministries to get a feel, on the ground, of the progress being achieved in implementing the reforms, including performance management systems.

4. Achievements

Focus on Core Business

Focus on Government's core business has resulted in such services as maintenance of grounds, equipment and buildings, security, laundry, cleaning, catering as well as construction of roads and dams being sub-contracted. Public servants who performed these non core functions have been urged to form companies. To date over 200 employee owned companies have taken over the provision of such services. Furthermore, certain departments within Government that used to offer free services (e.g. Departments of National Parks and Wildlife, and Agriculture and Extension Services) have been identified for commercialization or are operating under measures. cost recovery

For the remaining core functions, the Public Service Commission has restructured government ministries and rationalized manning levels in an effort to remove or reduce
duplications and streamline functions. It is hoped that the size of the service will be further reduced by another 33,000 posts through retrenchments or abolition of office, compression of grades and sub-contracting.


In a performance oriented environment, many of the existing human resource management policies have become inappropriate (e.g. seniority and supersession for promotion, automatic annual increments and bonus, cumbersome procedures of getting rid of non-performers and lack of rewarding for those who excel). To provide an enabling environment, all human resource management policies in the public service have been reviewed and adjusted to suit the new performance management systems. These policies include recruitment, conditions of service, advancement and promotion, code of conduct, discipline and grievance handling. To provide a legal framework for implementing the above policies and procedures, a new statutory instrument, Public Service Regulations 2000 was promulgated.

Introduction of Performance Management, Performance Appraisal and Performance related awards

Within the first phase of the Public Service Reforms, at least the top 3 levels of Government were sensitized to performance management and related systems. By 1997 all Ministries had developed their visions, mission statements, organizational goals, corporate plans and clients charters, the overall goal being to get better results from the organization, teams and individuals by understanding and managing performance within an agreed framework. Ministries did in-house training of their senior management and staff on the new concepts and as preparation for the implementation of performance appraisals and related concepts.

For the fiscal year 1996/1997, the Public Service Commission introduced a new standard performance appraisal form for all public servants. The focus of the appraisal form was to do away with the previous subjective assessments and encourage openness of administration, enabling the employee and the supervisor to meet frequently, discuss the work to be done and review performance. The form was a mechanism for quantifying and measuring the work being done with a view to improving efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

The Public Service Commission wanted to see an immediate change in the public servants' ways of doing business, that is, a complete change of the working culture. However, the appraisal system in 1996/1997 was hastily introduced without adequate training of all the public servants, without adequate consultation of and commitment by stakeholders and hence no ownership of the system by the affected parties. In addition the appraisal form tied performance ratings to salary advancements and up to three notchings on salary scales for the performers. The appraisal form thus lost focus from being a performance measurement and performance improvement tool to a financial advancement tool and this was not well received by the public servants. There were some reports of misuse of the appraisal form and process, whereby some supervisors used the appraisal form to settle old scores. The major problems cited were that:

- public servants were not yet ready for the new appraisal system, since they were not involved or consulted in its development;
- public servants were not trained in the implementation of the performance appraisal system;
• tampering with the subordinates' conditions of service by delegating to various levels in the system, authority to determine changes to the subordinates' potential earnings rather than leaving this as the sole responsibility for the employer, that is the Public Service Commission; and
• policies and procedures in line with performance management were not yet in place.

Results of the 1996/1997 appraisals were thus used as a learning experience and corrective measures were implemented. The Public Service Commission conducted study tours to learn from countries that were implementing performance appraisal systems. Workshops and consultations were done with Permanent Secretaries, Directors in Government, consultants, staff associations, representatives of the private sector and other stakeholders to inform them of lessons learnt, get their input on the way forward and get their commitment to the system being introduced as well as the revised performance appraisal form.

In addition to the above, performance appraisal training manuals, including a training video, were developed with the involvement of consultants, Ministries and staff associations. A core team of 200 officers from across the service were trained as trainers on performance appraisal and these conducted training for all public servants throughout the country and at missions in 1998.

The appraisal form was reviewed to remove the linkage of performance ratings to pay, as well as to take into account comments made at various workshops and within ministries which include:

• the use of committees, where necessary, to enhance transparency and objectivity throughout the performance appraisal process. Membership of such a committee should be agreeable to both the supervisor and the subordinate;
• continuous performance appraisal with intermediate reviews and adjustments to work plans where necessary.

The new performance appraisal form was approved by Cabinet for implementation with effect from the year 2000. The new performance appraisal marks the end of an era of automatic annual increments and bonuses. Staff movement and progression is new dependant on performance.

The Commission is in the process of setting up entrance and promotion examinations, in an effort to recruit, retain, advance and promote the right people in the service. Initially, the examinations will be for the open administrative, financial and clerical staff since the professional and technical groups have their own trade specific examinations.

**Implementation of a Computerised Human Resource Information System (HRIS)**

Key to the implementation of the Public Service reforms is an accurate, computerized personnel data base. In order to make strategic decisions relating to the planning, management and development of human resources, the Public Service Commission undertook an evaluation of its current manually driven support services. The main problem identified is the lack of readily available and accurate personnel information. This often leads to significant delays in obtaining employee information which is at three separate cites at the PSC, the Salary Service Bureau and the employee's Ministry and in varying degrees of detail. This present situation
impedes informed decision making by management and limits the Government's ability to manage the Public Service effectively and efficiently.

Zimbabwe is now developing a computerized HRIS which shall be linked to the payroll system. To ensure the efficient operation of the system, much investment has been made in the training of personnel.

The HRIS system is currently being piloted in three ministries and this will be rolled out to all Ministries within the coming two years. The HRIS should provide Government with a world-class Human Resource system that will empower managers to manage Civil Servants more efficiently and through the use of modern technology rather than paper based filing system. Human resource information will be stored on the computer system and information will be accessed within seconds rather the hours or days currently being experienced. This should significantly enhance Government's ability to co-ordinate its various human resource functions and employees should also benefit from faster response times to their queries.

5. Challenges

The following issues are challenges that the Public Service Commission has to address:

- the size and nature of performance related awards. If the awards are in terms of salary notches, can the budget sustain them and how will this be budgeted for? If they are non-financial, what forms should they take so that the awards serve to motivate people to work for greater achievement?
- the HIV/AIDS menace which is taking its toll on public servants. While a task force is in place to work on strategies to combat this, statistics is not available on HIV/AIDS related illnesses and deaths among public servants. The affected employees are not bound to give information about their illness. The challenge for the Commission is how to plan for appropriate manning levels and human resources development in the face of this endemic disease. The Commission needs to train and educate its workforce on the effects of the disease and put up counselling mechanisms for the affected;
- the need to improve salaries of public servants, in an era of limited resources;
- setting up an examination system that focuses on key competences, attitudes and behaviours of personnel joining the service;
- cautiously embracing opportunities offered by globalisation, despite known pitfalls;
- continuous development and retention of skills.
- influencing outcomes in all spheres of public management despite change fatigue;
- fostering a culture built on sound ethical behaviour.

6. Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the structure of the Public Service Commission, its functions and the way it is reforming the management of human resources in the service, in line with performance management culture already introduced and as embodied in the Regulations 2000.
Implementation of the reforms is still in its infancy and as such not much success has been recorded except to say that resistance to change has been reduced and ownership and commitment enhanced. It is hoped that this workshop will help address some of the challenges that still face the Zimbabwe Public Service.