THE ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE CHARTER IN NAMIBIA

SITUATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE IN NAMIBIA
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Windhoek
28 November 2001
INTRODUCTION

My assigned task, here today, is to provide you with a brief overview of the situation in the Public Service of Africa. However, you will agree with me that this is an enormous task. Giving details on such a topic needs intensive research that may eventually lead to a PHD qualification. It is with this in mind that my approach to this topic is that of giving general statements first about African civil service, and thereafter giving specific Namibian examples where applicable.

Many African governments today work towards modernizing their public services. However, a lot of our problems in modernizing our Public Service has to do with the failure of the Public Service to deliver desired services to the public. For us to be able to do this, change in the following areas is seen as imperative.

1. STRUCTURE

It is evident that the structures of most Public Service Organisations tends to be huge. The consensus is that this deficiency denies the workers the benefit of clear focus on the one part while on the other, it creates confusion for the people for whom the services are intended to be directed. While not proposing water-tight compartmentalization, it imperative that each category of service should be well defined by specific tasks so that the employees have a clear focus of what is expected of them and members of the public know where to go for a specific service.

To align ourselves with the modern management structures, in 1992, the Public Service of Namibia, introduced the process of rationalization, which was aimed at reviewing the activities of the various government ministries, eliminating the duplications that had crept in as a result of the amalgamating eleven ethnic authorities into one national public service, and the reallocation of staff within Offices, Ministries and Agencies.

2. ATTITUDES OR PERCEPTIONS

The current attitude of workers negates the achievement of the desired goals of rendering value for money service to the people. Workers see themselves as masters of the people rather than servants. There is also the negative propensity to look at the employment or job merely as a means to earn a living rather than to render services.

3. PROCEDURES

The Public Service tends to preoccupy itself with procedures thereby loosing sight of the intended results. This results either in delays or total failures in delivering the services. An effective employee must understand that procedure is a means rather than an end. Granted that the concept of bureaucracy itself is about rules and procedures it is nonetheless necessary to recognize that bureaucracy is a vehicle for conveying desired programmes and projects to a destination. Its performance must be judged therefore on effective delivery.

The observance of rules and regulations should not unnecessarily be allowed to hinder the timely delivery of service to the public. That is why currently in the Namibian Public Service there is a debate on whether governments should adopt many rules or fewer rules. The best way
we have found on dealing with it is through consultation. For example, the new Staff Rules on Travel & Subsistence Allowances seems to have succeeded primarily due to extensive consultations held with Offices/Ministries/Agencies.

A second area that is creating problems is the high level of centralization in the staffing of the public service. Efforts to slowly let go are aimed at the revision of delegations such as those of the Prime Minister’s from Department of Public Service Management to Offices/Ministries/Agencies approval. Another example is the revision of the recruitment model which is allowing the whole recruitment process from advertising itself to the style of advertisement etc. to be dealt with by Offices/Ministries/Agencies with a post-audit done by the Public Service Commission.

4. ETHICS

Corruption has been identified as a major stumbling block to the attainment of organizational goals and objectives. This does not allow service to be rendered promptly and equitably. Services are denied or delayed where expected gratifications are not given. Value for money is totally lost as a result of over-pricing of contracts. Nepotism also constitutes another stumbling block to equitable service delivery. Thus, ethical values are necessary for efficient and effective service delivery.

In Namibia, we have introduced the Code of Conduct for the Public Service. This Code of Conduct provides guidance to staff members on the behaviour expected of them, both in their individual conduct and in their relationship with others. Compliance with the Code will help to enhance professionalism and maintain confidence in the Public Service. If the provisions of this Code of Conduct are not met, the question of misconduct may arise and staff members could be liable to disciplinary action under the Public Service Act.

Furthermore, the Anti Corruption Bill is now being debated in the National Council and we hope that it will soon become law to remedy corrupt activities in the country.

5. HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

For the employee to render quality services to the public, he or she must be qualified and proficient. The dynamics of the world environment requires constant training of the employee to enable him or her to meet with the challenges of the public expectations. Better results are achievable where continuous staff training is emphasized.

To achieve the above, the government of Namibia established the Center for Public Service Training (CPST) in 1993 mainly to cater for senior public service managers. The CPST offers and conducts short courses like Leadership Training, Advanced Communication Skills, Industrial Relations, Finance for Non Financial Managers, Project Management, Managing Human Resources, Motivation and Performance Management, Negotiation Skills, etc.

6. PROMOTION OF INITIATIVE (RISK MANAGEMENT)

The practice whereby decision-making is restricted and fixed at very high levels of Management is counter productive to the use of initiative. The implication is that an officer who makes a decision on a matter outside his level of competence tends to be personally liable. This has injected fears into most Public Servants and therefore even when cases of
emergency arise, they abstain from taking action thereby resulting in very unpleasant consequences. Furthermore, buck-passing is usually resorted to as a means of avoiding liability.

7. PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Traditional planning and budgeting which are still being used in most public services. Most of us do not set clear goals, define clear targets, programmes and tasks. The plans themselves are not usually based on verified statistics. The resultant budgets also do not set achievable and sustainable targets. Post execution programmes are virtually absent. The result is that implementation in some cases is based not on clear tasks and programmes but on the perceptions of the implementers. Monitoring, even where it exists, is rendered ineffective since there are no measurable parameters on which performance may be assessed.

In order to ensure that the new budgetary process meets expectations, the Namibian Government introduced a Performance and Effective Management Program (PEMP) to contribute to the development of the new budgetary process. PEMP frameworks are already in place and formally agreed to by all stakeholders. In developing the new budgetary arrangement, we want to move towards a position where the starting point is the longer-term developmental objectives of Namibia. As a result, Government introduced a three-year rolling budget with the hope that it will provide for a more realistic planning horizon and better service delivery to the public.

8. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Another problem observed is that monitoring and evaluation are not usually effectively carried out. Monitoring and evaluation are essential if plans are to be attained with the specifications of quality, quantity and time. In the course of monitoring, observed flaws are remedied while successes are built upon. The result is that appropriate measures are continually applied to facilitate proper and timely completion of the project. This is in line with the idea of value for money and best practice. Deficiencies in project completion as well as project abandonment could be attributed to improper monitoring and evaluation.

9. FUNDING

A critical factor for successful project execution involves funding. Inadequate and untimely release of funds could be a major constraint to successful programme completion. The dynamics of market forces dictates that prices alter with time. Therefore, even where contingent provisions are made for inflation, undue delay in the release of funds will result in a situation where it will still be impossible to complete the project even when the full amount is eventually released. Inadequate release of funds on the other hand results in poor quality of work. In such situations, the desired services are not effectively delivered. It must be stated however, that in most developing countries, the problem is not merely the poor management of funds but rather of non-availability and unbudgeted mandates.

10. CO-ORDINATION AND THE DOCTRINE OF JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT
It is established that co-ordination is an imperative to effective service delivery. For purposes of administrative convenience, the Public Service is usually constituted into Ministries, Departments and Agencies with specific functions. In federal democracies there also exist various tiers of Governments with their respective Public Services. In the case of Nigeria for example, there are Federal, States and Local Governments. The citizens to whom services are intended to be delivered are however the same. This means that for effectiveness there must be both horizontal and vertical co-ordination, as well as complimentarily rather than unhealthy competition. Where this is absent duplication of efforts and waste of resources result. Partisan political consideration may also be responsible for lack of co-ordination and unhealthy competition just like poor management. In extreme cases, the various tiers of government may be involved in rivalry to proportions of antagonism. Examples exist of situations where lower tires of governments obstructed projects in their territories on mere grounds of partisanship. This denies the citizens the benefits that would normally accrue from such projects and also lead to uneven development.

11. PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

The growing demands on the Public Sector for goods and Services, makes it impossible for the sector to meet these demands in the desired quantities and qualities within a given time, in view of limited resources. Besides, certain competences that are available in the private sector places it in a better position to run certain services. For better and faster service delivery, we ought to be resort to the concept of Public Private Partnership. This may be by way of privatization or commercialization.

In this case, Government is able to deliver services quicker and cheaper by-passing the constraint of fund. This is apart from the fact that it enhances the growth of the private sector, which is a good partner in development.

To meet these demands the Government of Namibia looked at commercializing and outsourcing various services. As a result of this process, the following was achieved:

- Commercialisation of Telecommunications and Postal functions of the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communication;
- Commercialisation of the government media institutions – NAMPA and New Era

More recently, during the year 2000, the Management of Tourism Resorts, the Management of Airports and Aerodromes, and the Construction and Maintenance of roads have been transferred to commercial entities.

12. POSITIVE DOWN-SIZING

One of the problems identified with public sector organisations is the bloated work force. This does not only constitute a drain on the resources available as more than 70% of total revenue are usually channeled to payment of wages, but also unduly elongates the bureaucratic red tape thereby delaying decision making. It is a fact, however, that in most developing countries with an under-developed private sector, the Government continues to be a major employer of labour and this is seen as a public responsibility. The common approach usually employed in downsizing such bloated services is the sacking of worker. This worsens unemployment situations in such countries and increases the rate of crime and other social
vices. A better way of down-sizing will be through a process of commercialisation where the workforce is transferred, retrained and retained by such Agencies. The objective of reducing public expenditure on wages is thereby achieved without the unpleasant consequences of unemployment.

Similarly, in Namibia, while attempting to address the problem of civil service reduction we realized that reducing the size of the civil service would not be easy because of the level of unemployment in the country. For example, we were faced with the reality of former freedom fighters that needed jobs. As a result of that predicament, the government had to consider various options. The result was what is known as the Peace Project where government had to attend to the plight of the ex-fighters and provide them with productive employment. Needless to say, this situation resulted in an increase in the size of the civil service.

13. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

For effective service delivery and sustenance the input of the beneficiaries of such services is important. Experience has shown that where the services rendered are not desired by the people, there may be resistance from the communities, misuse as well as vandalisation. In most Public Services, including those of developed countries, little or no consultation is made with the end users of the service. This results in wastage, as the objects which the Government sets out to achieve are in the end not appreciated.

In Namibia the President economic advisory council was establish to facilitate the process of public consultation before major policy issues are made. Many other similar forums have been established. Similarly the process of re-writing staff rules to comply with the provisions of the New Public Service Act is a consultative one with the Unions and many other Stake Holders.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have attempted to provide you with an overview of the situation of the Public Service in Africa with specific references to what Namibia has up to now achieved, including the problems encountered during the process. We realize that there is still a lot more to be done.