Public Sector Reform Initiatives in Saint Lucia

The new administration which came into office in Saint Lucia in 1997 pronounced a commitment to reforming the public sector to ensure that the service was capable of fulfilling its role in meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. In adherence to this commitment the Government, two years ago, established an Office of Public Sector Reform and appointed a Public Sector Reform Commission to give direction to the process.

The critical objectives of the reform process includes:

- the establishment of transparent and accountable public service;
- the cultivation of a management style that conduces to efficiency and a results oriented environment; and
- the improvement of its capacity to deliver quality services in a timely fashion to the public.

During 1999 the Commission completed and presented to Cabinet a Green Paper on public sector reform and later that year, the paper was made available for public comment and discussion. The results of the public consultation on the Green Paper facilitated the drafting of a White Paper which was completed in the second quarter of 2000. This White paper has since been discussed by Cabinet, approvingly, and further discussion is scheduled for December 11, 2000 at which time a strategy for implementation will be considered.

Five major areas of focus are identified in the White Paper, viz,

- **Planning, Monitoring, Budgeting and Evaluation**: this encompasses strategic planning, financial management, improved budgeting systems and, as well, improving programme and policy implementation.
- **Organisational Review**: included in this area of focus are issues related to productivity, organisational structure, standard setting and quality.
- **Human Resource Management**: performance management, human resource development and utilisation and issues related to compensation benefits and rewards are included here.
- **Climate and Cultural Change**: this theme will address issues of organisational culture, accountability and participation by citizens in the affairs of the State.
- **Supporting Processes**: the legislative framework to support effective reforms, the role of information technology and efficient and effective communication systems are matters of concern under this area of focus.

The White Paper envisages that action planning will take place at two levels, viz, at the Ministry/Department level and across the service (service-wide). At both levels the
appropriate mechanisms for implementation of the process of change will have to be created and a functional relationship developed and maintained, under the guidance and direction of a central reform unit.

At both levels, well articulated action plans will be critical to success of activities in all the five areas of focus. The elaboration of these action plans will be undertaken by change management terms within the individual ministries as well as at the service-wide level.

In anticipation of Cabinet’s consideration of the White Paper, and recognising that the change process had in fact commenced in certain ministries but without an effective implementation mechanism, the OPSR, with the assistance of the Department of International Development (DFID) of the British Government, commenced a pilot project at the Post Office.

The pilot activity was designed to test the relevance and appropriateness of the planned approach within the context of the Saint Lucia service. A set of criteria for selection of the pilot area was agreed to by the Government of Saint Lucia and DFID, and these were:

- the staff of the ministry/department must express a desire for and a commitment to change and improvement;
- the ministry/department must be delivering an important service directly to the public; and
- there must be a clear recognition of the need for significant improvement in the operations of that ministry/department.

The Post Office met these criteria and a programme of activities commenced. The activities included meetings with managers and senior staff of the Post Office and its parent Ministry, full staff meetings and a series of staff workshops.

A change team was established to managed the process under the guidance of the OPSR and the DFID consultant and produced the following results:

.1 a diagnostic workshop focussing on Counter Services and Mail Delivery Services for all staff;
.2 the development of action plans relating to the following areas:
   (1) human resource development;
   (2) improvements in the provision of Counter Services;
   (3) improvements in the delivery of domestic mail.

The initiative has thus been successful so far and important lessons have been learnt from this experience. These include:

- the need for change teams to have critical support from a knowledgeable and experienced facilitator;
- the need to engage in comprehensive and far-reaching reflection on the critical issues and challenges affecting the Ministry/department to ensure that action plans are accurately focussed.
- the value of early success to cement commitment and encourage support for the process by all stakeholders.
It is anticipated that after some minor adjustments to the action plans implementation will commence in the new year.

The OPSR has also developed a comprehensive communications strategy to ensure that information about the process is disseminated widely and effectively. This will serve to generate support for the process among public officers and members of the wider public and, as well, provide opportunities for critical feedback on aspects of the process.

It is anticipated that a budget to support the plan will be discussed with the Office of Budget shortly so that a full public launch of the implementation phase of the reform process can begin.

The Department of International Development (DFID) has supported the work of the Government of Saint Lucia in this endeavour through the funding of consultants to work with the OPSR. To date this initiative has resulted in the preparation of a draft set of guidelines on approaches to the implementation of the reforms. It is expected that this collaboration will continue throughout the full implementation phase.

Next steps include:

- approval by Cabinet for the structure and composition of reconfigured OPSR;
- agreement on budget allocations for the activities of the OPSR, including the communication strategy;
- launching of the implementation phase. This will take the form of a high level consultation to involve Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries, Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments, Civil Service Association and other important stakeholders;

The Government of Saint Lucia is committed to continuing the process of reform to a successful conclusion as this Government is convinced that an efficient and focussed public service is a sine qua non for proper democratic governance, economic development and social progress in Saint Lucia.

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