Wielding the Bureaucracy for Results:
Reorienting the Nepalese Civil Service

CHUDA RAJ UPRETY, Tribhuvan University
Nepal

Introduction

This paper is mainly concerned with analyzing the issues accompanying the reorganization of the Nepalese bureaucracy and recommending appropriate measures to facilitate its successful implementation.

The need to restructure its public administration is a concern which came to the forefront only after a major political change in 1951. Though the country was run from 1951-1959 on an ad hoc basis, some significant developments in public administration occurred (Poudyai, 1981). The formation of an ‘Administrative Reorganisation Planning Commission’ (ARPC) under the chairmanship of then Prime Minister T.P. Acharya in 1957 can be considered an important step. The establishment of an O and M office under the then Ministry of Finance in 1957 and the Public Administration Training Institute under the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1958 were clear indications of the recognition of the need for effective administration and the promotion of work efficiency among civil servants. The Institute of Public Administration was created as an in-service training institute for all levels of public employees, but after the royal takeover in December 1960, the Institute of Public Administration not only lost its separate identity but was closed down (Agrawal, 1976: 290).

Nepal’s first Civil Service Act was enacted in 1956 as an important achievement of ARPC. Civil Service Regulations formed under the Act were amended several times particularly during the country’s shift to the partyless Panchayat system (1960-1990) as the mode of governance. But such amendments merely introduced pathological elements in administration such as arbitrariness in recruitment and promotion. The so-called process of Panchayatization of development and bureaucracy ultimately resulted in ‘Panchayati administration’ which left no room for qualified and capable public administrators. After the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990, efforts were initiated to rid the bureaucracy of the ill effects of 30 years of Centralized Panchayat rule. How the Nepalese government has fared by way of administrative reform may be deduced from the writings of various scholars/experts, whose works are referred to in the following section.

Administrative Reforms: Problems Perceived

Suvedi noted that administration in democratic nations should act as an instrument for welfare and service to the citizen. Public bureaucracy or the civil service not only affects but also shapes economic, social and political or civil life. Suvedi also noted that effective administrative machinery is vital to realize the goals of democratic government, and sees that the new democratic government has adopted a policy of administrative and management reform. Some of the recommendations made by the high level Administrative Reforms
Commission (ARC) appointed by the first elected multi-party government in 1991 has been partially implemented and some still remain on paper. The people had expected some real changes from the ARC, but it has been said and heard that the ARC report contained nothing to make public management system more accountable, prompt, economic, efficient and effective (Suvide, 1992).

The new Civil Service Act of 1992 enacted under the democratic Constitution of 1990 can only gain strength through its fair and impartial implementation. Unfortunately, while the size of the civil service has steadily risen, its individual overall performance has been less than desired (Dhungel and Joshi, 1991).

Administrative reform is largely concerned with the following theoretical issues (Joshi, 1992):

- Bringing about a tradition of impartiality in the civil service;
- Instituting a sense of accountability and responsiveness;
- Achieving optimization in the service in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency; and
- Improving the morale of the civil servants.

That theoretical issues as noted above loom larger in real life is suggested by these views expressed by critical observers:

- In the Public’s image, Nepalese public sector administration is bedevilled by overstaffing, inefficiency, red tapism, rigidity in adherence to rules on the one hand, and arbitrariness, procrastination, arrogance and corruption on the other. Attention is focused on processes and inputs (e.g. money expended) and sometimes on outputs but seldom on effects and impacts (Malhotra, 1995).

- Lack of an effective system for monitoring progress in implementation of programs/projects and evaluation of results obtained plus results oriented performance evaluation of public servants entrusted with the responsibility to formulate and implement programs, remains a big hurdle in His Majesty’s Government (Malhotra, 1995).

- Nepalese Civil Service is overstaffed with large crowds of unskilled, unproductive staff at the lower levels. Peons alone are estimated to number 27,000 out of a total of 97,000 Civil Servants (Nti, 1991). Highly qualified and talented candidates are not attracted to the civil service (Joshi, 1989).

- The major implementing hands have been much depressed because of unnecessary political intervention. Frequent purges and haphazard decisions regarding the civil servants could not build up employees’ morale and motivation (Uprety and Dhakal, 1994).

- Due to defective recruitment and placements system, the right man has not been placed in the right job in many cases, which has been exacerbated by frequent transfers from one job to another totally unrelated to each other (Tiwari, 1989).
• Frequent transfers have not allowed the civil servants to utilize the knowledge and skills achieved during the training (Joshi, 1989).

• Although a large number of training institutes are handling different training programs inside the country, their effectiveness is often questioned. Most of the big training institutes run directly by the central government are considered ‘white elephants’. Lack of central personnel policy, lack of government support, open training methodology and absence of proper evaluation criteria and allied matters, the return of scarce rupee invested on training programs is questioned again and again (Bhatta, 1995).

• The state of public accountability and public service effectiveness in Nepal is not good even after the completion of three years of restoration of multi-party democracy. The retroactive and reactive forces are still active, the public bureaucracy which still has the Panchayat legacy is ineffective and lacking in accountability (Suvedi, 1992).

• Low pay scale of civil servants has been the cause of low morale of civil servants, limited promotional opportunities and pervasive sense of insecurity which exists in the civil service are other causes for the same (Manandhar and Dikshit, 1993).

• There has been decentralization in decision-making with very little effective delegation of authority that must accompany delegation of responsibility (NASC, 1989).

Administrative Reforms: Prospects and Recommendations

Administrative reform for developing bureaucratic competence should be seen from a broad perspective. The following considerations should be taken into account in introducing and sustaining reforms in the Nepalese civil service:

• Administrative reform should be equated with overall reform in the sense that it must include central, regional and local administrative levels not in isolation but as parts of a systemic whole affecting other aspects of state-and-society.

• The Administrators’ willingness to accept changes and innovations is an important factor in reform. This indicates the need to consider whether administrative culture is conducive to change. Similarly, the prevailing political environment should show a great commitment and dedication to administrative reforms. In these days of the call and search for all party consensus on issues of national interest, reform and strengthening of the civil service as a critical instrument for national development certainly qualifies as a priority national issue for such consensus (Malhotra, 1996).
• Administrative reform should be taken as a planned effort with specified objectives and operational strategies for their achievement within a definite time period under the framework of the national development plan.

• Orienting public administration towards a professional and responsible management, strengthening the concept of fair competition, greater discipline and use of new management techniques and practices should form priorities in reforming the bureaucracy for results. Related to this, three conditions that seem essential for good management of the civil service should be considered (Malhotra, 1996):

  • Continuity or stability in the civil service tenure of civil servants and fair opportunities for career advancement in the civil service on the basis of performance.

  • Fair play, i.e., objectivity and impartiality in recruitment and career development on the basis of unambiguous rules and regulations and their strict application, both in letter and spirit without fear or favor.

  • A system of ‘reward and punishment’ based on an objectives – or results – oriented system of evaluation of performance of civil servants.

Complementary to Malhotra’s conditions cited above, more specific measures to transform the Nepalese Civil Service are suggested below:

• Systematic critique and recognition of performance of civil servants;
• Preparation of job descriptions for all civil servants and relating it with the training and staff development;
• Putting in place strong measures to combat corruption and disciplinary actions in case of corruption and misconduct;
• Exercising greater transparency in the operation of bureaucracy; and
• Above all, efforts should focus on developing a professional cadre in the bureaucracy.

REFERENCES


NASC, A Study on the State of Morale in the Nepal Civil Service, Nepal Administrative Staff College, Lilitpur.


## Annex – I

### Growth of Civil Service Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Positions</th>
<th>% Increase over Previous Decade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950/51</td>
<td>2,700</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960/61</td>
<td>27,272</td>
<td>910.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970/71</td>
<td>45,123</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980/81</td>
<td>71,232</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988/89</td>
<td>96,357</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990/91</td>
<td>102,744</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>