

## Public Sector Management and Public Service Reform

The Commonwealth recognises that an efficient, effective, transparent and dedicated public administration is one of the main foundations of national development. The Secretariat therefore assists member countries to build their national administrative capacities (in the forms of government and civil institutions, knowledge and skills) to manage the policies which are essential for good governance in the 21st century.

This programme in public sector reform sprang from the 1995 initiative 'Towards a New Public Administration', which in turn was built on previous work, also undertaken by the CFTC, on public sector management.

While the long-term direction of the Secretariat's work continues

to be reform for good governance, the medium-term focus is adjusted in accordance with the requirements of successive CHOGMs and Commonwealth ministerial meetings. Thus the development co-operation activities for 1997-99 were adjusted slightly to concentrate on the new themes arising from the Edinburgh Economic Declaration of 1997: trade, investment and economic issues in public sector reform and policy management.

In this two-year period, therefore, the Secretariat moved to assist member governments develop public sectors capable of promoting a competitive national economy in the global market, while safeguarding the essential duties of maintaining democratic governance, social cohesion and environmental sustainability.

Government on the move ... towards efficiency, effectiveness, transparency and dedication



## Delivering Reform

In many cases, the most critical factor in good governance lies in the linkages between different parts of the public sector. By developing a holistic and structural approach to assisting in public sector reform, the Secretariat covers not only the core civil service and public administration, but also the public goods, services and responsibilities of the private sector, especially in the context of current moves to reduce the role of government.

The Secretariat seeks to provide an integrated range of services, consisting of support for policy initiatives, applied research on best practice, advisory services and institutional capacity-building. They are geared to member countries' public sector priorities, and cover emerging issues as well as the immediate challenges facing countries. The services are also designed to include concerns for gender equality, the needs of small states, institutional capacity and human resource development.

A special feature is the fostering and the use of Commonwealth professional associations. Many were established by the Secretariat, together with interested groups in member countries, for the specific purpose of continuing and extending various public sector reform activities after these had been launched by the Secretariat. Examples are the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) established in 1994, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development (COMNET-IT) in 1995, the Commonwealth Business Council in 1997 (covering the private sector

responsibilities in the delivery of public goods and services – see Chapter 4) and the Commonwealth Association for Corporate Governance in 1998.

These associations have become substantial and independently financed organisations in their own right. They provide external human resources, administrative capacities and fundraising abilities, and, together with the Secretariat, form a Commonwealth group structure for development co-operation, which greatly extends the reach of Commonwealth activities in this area.

As a first step when designing the projects in this programme, policy roundtables are used to

Delivery of services to the public is one of the yardsticks by which government is measured



review research into best practice and as launch platforms for initiatives. Second, a series of national policy projects are arranged to 'cascade' the initiatives among member countries. Third, a range of technical assistance and training projects are organised to support the implementation of the new policies among member countries. Many of the projects are organised with and co-funded by other international organisations and donor agencies.

More than 100 public sector reform assignments in 36 member countries have been completed and 18 publications produced over the two-year period since mid-1997. They were concentrated in three



Old systems and structures are slowly giving way to new ideas

broad areas: good governance, improving quality and efficiency in the public sector, and assisting the public sector in understanding and meeting the challenges of globalisation.

### Good Governance

The main projects in this area covered the administrative structures, systems and relationships which are essential for good governance. In December 1998, the relationship and system of linkages between parliament and the executive were examined at a meeting in South Africa organised jointly with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. Publications on this subject have been developed.

Cabinet decision-making and policy management was also a special focus. The Cabinet Decision-Making Improvement Scheme was initiated in 1998 to run workshops and retreats for Cabinet ministers and their senior officials, to clarify their roles and

### Changing Roles

The role of government is changing – and with it, that of the civil service. With governments turning to stewardship, orienting themselves to facilitating and refereeing rather than leading with large projects, the people at the centre of this reform are Permanent Secretaries. Whether they are known by this or any other post-titles, they are the top civil servants in a ministry.

The changing role of this echelon of civil servant was highlighted in a 1998 international seminar in Ottawa, Canada, which was co-sponsored by Canada's Public Policy Forum and funded by the CFTC.

Participants and speakers agreed that the Permanent Secretary was now expected to advise not just on policy, but also on policy areas covered by a wide range of organisations in the



Where once civil servants used to run large projects, now they facilitate and referee

Minister's portfolio. These could include service delivery agencies, citizens' charter bodies, and quasi-judicial tribunals.

Participants also discussed the dual loyalty – to the departments they lead and the ministers they serve. They felt that a balance had to be reached between the political environment and departmental concerns.

relationships, and to help them improve the way they address strategy, policy co-ordination and budgetary control. The programme has been run in six countries so far, as well as a regional and national seminar for central agency officials.

Under the same goal, there is a project specifically on the changing role of the Permanent Secretary. A pan-Commonwealth roundtable in Canada in 1998 was linked with seven regional and national projects to re-examine the importance of increased transparency, accountability and efficiency in relations with ministers and other officials, thereby leading to better governance.

In the African region, a successful project has been launched for the training of senior officials in modern budget policy and financial management.

The Oversight Institutions Project deals with the function agencies, such as the ombudsman and national audit offices, and has set up five national initiatives and two regional organisations.

### **Quality and Efficiency in the Public Sector**

Projects on public records management, to reduce the extensive administrative bottlenecks caused by lack of proper systems, were completed in 11 countries. Management and training projects to deal with civil service performance improvements, covering appraisal, job classification and pay review systems, began in six countries, and quality management training programmes, covering total quality management, benchmarking and ISO standards, were held.

A large project on improving provincial administration was organised in South Africa, and one on industrial and urban sector administration in India. Both were jointly administered with the UNDP.

### **Challenges of Globalisation for the Public Sector**

A Commonwealth Corporate Governance Initiative has been launched. A generic Commonwealth Code on

Corporate Governance was initiated and 14 regional and national projects designed to develop capacities in corporate governance as an essential element for the public responsibilities of the private sector in privatisation and in global financial markets.

Other activities included a series of policy, training and policy review workshops focusing on the issues of commercialisation, post-privatisation and regulation of public services and utilities. Courses were also held on international economic diplomacy and negotiation for government officers. Special training programmes were also designed to develop cadres of public enterprise managers with essential knowledge and skills to deal with the economic challenges and social impacts of globalisation in their respective sectors.