

## Public Sector Reform

The public services in all Commonwealth countries are under pressure as never before. Each is faced with new tasks – and yet many are organised to meet outdated priorities. Pressure from taxpayers, from politicians determined to reduce government debt and from international funds is forcing budget cuts. At the same time, citizens are demanding higher quality service at lower cost.

Governments realise that the response must be to improve services, not to abolish them – and that a reshaped public service is necessary to ensure that the infrastructure, services and regulatory structure necessary for a country to be economically competitive are in place. The Commonwealth Initiative for Public Service Reform, 'Towards a New Public Administration', endorsed by Heads of Government in 1995, enables member governments to pool knowledge and expertise in order to improve public service performance.

The Secretariat's role is to provide assistance in the key phases of change. Integrated packages of assistance, incorporating advice, training and policy analysis, have been delivered through the provision of experts, consultancy services, workshops and specialised programmes, professional collaboration and project management for other agencies. The objective has been to enhance key skills and institutional capacity in priority areas including public policy management, the strategic framework for reform, management of public sector reform, management of economic policy reform, and democratic and governance structures.

### Strengthening Public Policy Management

The main thrust of assistance to member governments in this area is improving their ability to formulate public policy reform. This is done through a combination of seminars and workshops, policy advice, consultancy missions and publications which illustrate the various options for reform, provide good examples and discuss the implications of reform strategies.

Thus, in June 1997, 24 ministers, permanent secretaries and other senior officials from Commonwealth developing countries discussed policy development and related topics at a seminar organised by the Secretariat in Ottawa in collaboration with the Public Policy Forum of Canada. The month before, a similar regional seminar was held in Nairobi, Kenya, through the Development Policy Management Forum.

### Enhancing the Strategic Framework for Reform

Member governments have recognised that national competitiveness is increasingly shaped by a dynamic public service which provides quality services to the public and manages the economic and regulatory frameworks with skill.

#### STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Practical help continues to be offered at the request of member governments to strengthen the capacity of key institutions which sustain democracy and civil society – especially those concerning accountability, improved customer services, and empowering the public, for example through citizens' charters.

The Roundtable on Democracy and Good Governance in Africa, in Gaborone, Botswana, in February 1997 (*see page 17*), was one such initiative. Another was the meeting on 'Serving the Public – Consumer Protection and Citizens' Charters', held in Ahmedabad, India, in March 1997, which brought together leading government and non-governmental organisations to review current consumer protection strategies, including problems and prospects of establishing citizens' charter programmes.

In Pretoria, South Africa, in April 1997, a seminar on democratic structures in public service improvement focused in particular on the management of oversight bodies and their impact on the administrative reform process. A related seminar was organised in June in Calcutta, India, on managing human rights institutions in Asia (*see page 21*).



*Singapore provides training for the management of public enterprise reform and privatisation in a programme co-funded by the CFTC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*

To this end, workshops on strategic planning in the public sector and advice on strategic planning and reform have been held or given – for example, more than 160 ministers and top civil servants from Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Lucia have benefited from such workshops since 1995.

Advice on various aspects of reform was given to the then civilian government of Sierra Leone, and to the governments of Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Recently, advice has focused on needs analysis and the formulation and design of performance management appraisal instruments in Barbados and St Kitts and Nevis. Countries that had deficient systems for keeping records have been provided with assistance in the design of an effective Records Management System.

### **Capacity-building for Managing Reform**

In the early stages of formulation and team-building where the public sector is preparing for change, bringing together ministers and civil servants has helped smooth the process of reform. In this area, the Secretariat has continued to work closely with the South African Government on the restructuring of the central civil service and local and provincial government (in collaboration with UNDP). Seminars to assess and redirect reform efforts have been held in Belize, Botswana and Guyana.

Commonwealth specialists have also helped with review and training for new salary structures in Zimbabwe, and with advising on the reform of key areas of the civil service in India, to support these countries' economic reforms. Training in quality and productivity management in the civil service is provided in a joint programme with the Government of Singapore.

To support government efforts to restructure and commercialise government departments and state enterprises, workshops and special

training programmes have been held and advisory missions mounted. The Secretariat also helps develop and support management development and training institutes (see page 64).

Through various communications and networking means, such as the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development, the Secretariat fosters the exchange of information and experience in reform.

The Secretariat's integrated portfolio of technical assistance includes researching and publishing cases of Commonwealth best practice and experience of public sector reform, policy workshops and seminars, skills training, and short-term policy and management advisory services to provide member countries with specialist resources. Special projects have also been introduced to include gender policy and programme development.

### **Strengthening the Management of Economic Policy Reform**

In order to help develop national and institutional capacity to formulate and implement economic policy reform, the Secretariat has offered assistance in the following areas: the management of growth-oriented economic structural adjustment programmes; the transition to market-based economies; the reform and privatisation of state-owned enterprises and the promotion of the role of the private sector; and the management of national and international capital flows. This assistance has been implemented through an integrated programme which combines specialised training programmes, professional exchange arrangements, publications and policy advice.

Specialised training for the management of economic policy reform is provided through the International Programme on the Management of Economic Policy Reforms, carried out at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, through the Commonwealth Programme on Economic Analysis for Strategic Planning at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan, and through the Regional Programme on Economic Reform and Management at the University of Nairobi, Kenya. Assistance was also given to these institutions so as to

*Private sector development in Botswana ... a policy seminar on competition, productivity and privatisation was held to consider options for enhancing competition and productivity as part of an overall reform package*



prepare them to offer this training. Since 1995, more than 200 senior economic policy-makers and technocrats, about 30 per cent of whom were women, have been trained through these programmes.

Training for the management of public enterprise reform and privatisation was provided through the Commonwealth Top Management Programme in Singapore (co-funded by the CFTC and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Singapore), the Commonwealth Programme on Corporate Planning and Strategic Management offered by Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan, and the Regional Training Programme on Public Enterprise Restructuring and Privatisation offered by the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute, Tanzania. A total of 250 chief and senior executives of state-owned and privatised enterprises and established private companies have benefited from this training since 1995. Of these, 35 per cent were women.

The highlight of specialised training for the management of national competitiveness and private capital flows was the Policy Seminar on Competition, Productivity and Privatisation: Applications of Commonwealth Experiences and Lessons for Botswana, in April 1997. The seminar focused on the promotion of competitiveness and productivity throughout the Botswana economy and explored alternative forms of privatisation. Other training activities in this area included a policy workshop on competitiveness strategies in Mauritius and a policy workshop on strategies for the promotion of foreign direct investment in Singapore. The former was attended by 30 senior government officials and corporate executives; the latter by 25 senior investment promotion executives.