

## PUBLIC SECTOR AND CIVIL SERVICE REFORM

The past decade has seen an unparalleled debate on the size and role of the public sector. This debate has been fuelled by a growing public demand for more efficient government, changing views on the relationship between the citizen and government, and increased pressure on budgets. At its core are growing doubts about the ability of the public sector to drive development by big spending and large-scale projects and recognition that the private sector must have a greater role to play in development.

This debate has been strengthened by the recent emergence of managerial and political ideas which emphasise the significance of distinguishing between policy-makers and implementers. Combined with the renewed conviction that market competition will improve efficiency, the managerial and organisational consequences for the public sector of these ideas have been vast, particularly as in many countries the government remains the chief machinery for implementing national development strategies.

Against this background, member governments are increasingly turning to the Secretariat for assistance in many areas of public sector reform, especially in improving their ability to improve their services. The common administrative tradition that runs throughout the Commonwealth has enabled the Secretariat to continuously draw on an extensive resource of experience and goodwill to provide professional advice and technical support in key areas.

Requests are frequently made for advice or assistance in specific managerial areas of public sector reform programmes, in developing the national capacity to design, develop and sustain these programmes, and in strengthening management development institutions and supporting professional networks.

In responding to requests, the Secretariat is able to provide a comprehensive package of CFTC-funded services, providing consultancy assistance from its in-house resources and from international experts, supporting policy workshops at national, regional



*Training in information technologies and management systems makes for greater efficiency*

and pan-Commonwealth levels, developing strong professional networks, and providing education and training services.

## **Performance-oriented Public Services**

Many governments have particularly requested for help in introducing performance management which is the means by which individual performance is linked to organisational goals. A major annual seminar on quality and productivity improvement in the public service, co-sponsored by the Singapore Government and in collaboration with the Civil Service Institute of that country, has to date helped equip about 50 senior officials and government ministers with better skills in this vital area of service delivery.

In Southern Africa, Secretariat advisory assistance, coupled with strategic training for senior officials and the strengthening of key national management development institutions, is contributing towards improvements in public service performance. In Mauritius, advisers from the Secretariat have helped develop and install a performance management system for the public service and in Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe, advisers are assisting in the introduction of performance review mechanisms.

In West Africa, workshops for senior public service officials have built on managerial innovations identified across the Commonwealth, and in the Caribbean, the Secretariat placed an adviser with the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (Caricad) for three months in 1994 to help with a high-level seminar on civil service reform aimed at developing a regional programme of public service improvements.

## **Restructuring for Flexibility**

The structure of public services is changing under the demand for more flexibility to meet the expectations of the public as customer and the opportunities provided by information technology. Fewer layers, clearer objectives, and a continuous

focus on the public as customer, are the hallmarks of the new approach.

With assistance from the Secretariat, the Government of South Africa is examining possibilities for establishing a Department of Public Service and Administration, which will contribute towards the establishment of a goal-driven public service. New structures have been devised for key components of the public service in Mauritius and in Lesotho.

Such concerns are not limited to the public service alone. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Secretariat has assisted in the restructuring necessary to maximise the benefits from the merger of two large public enterprises in the energy sector. At Caricad, an adviser in public enterprise management concluded her two-year assignment in late 1994 after strengthening the organisation's capacity to undertake effective management development training programmes aimed at improving the managerial efficiency of public enterprises in the Caribbean.

Lack of skills to undertake the complex elements of a privatisation and commercialisation programme is a major obstacle to sustainable public enterprise reform. Working therefore with the Foundation for International Training in Canada and the Eastern and Southern African Management Institute (ESAMI), through a series of workshops, the Secretariat has assisted Ghana, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe to identify the steps necessary at national and regional levels to acquire the relevant skills to implement privatisation programmes.

Further support and assistance in improving the performance of public enterprises and helping them commercialise and privatise their operations have been discussed in a previous chapter.

## **Strategic Skills**

Managing change is the central challenge for senior officials in the public sector. Leading edge training programmes have been provided through recognised centres of excellence across the

Commonwealth to equip managers with the skills to manage the changes required to support improvements across the public sector.

Training has therefore been organised for senior managers, specialists and in information management. The Commonwealth Advanced Management Programme, run by ESAMI, has to date trained more than 80 senior officials from 15 countries in strategic management skills for the public sector; and the Commonwealth Top Management Programme for Public Enterprises, which since 1993 has been held at the National University of Singapore, was specifically designed for the senior executives of state-owned enterprises.

Training has also been conducted in economic policy analysis for strategic management at the Lahore University of Management Sciences, Pakistan, and in advanced financial management, through the Institute for Financial Management and Research in Madras, India. To help civil servants understand and manage the complex process of economic structural adjustment reforms, the Secretariat commissions annual training programmes on the Management of Economic Policy Reforms at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. This programme was extended to a joint programme with the University of Nairobi for the Africa region in 1994 and 1995, and a further joint programme with the Jamaica Institute of Public Administration is planned for the Caribbean region in 1996.

Support for the introduction of information technologies in public services has also been extended through training of information analysts,

and in information systems management and systems development. A regional training programme on information systems management has been conducted through the Malaysian National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) where more than 40 senior managers and executives have to date acquired skills in information systems development and planning, and in utilising decision-support systems.

Training is integrated with technical assistance and advisory services to support the effective implementation of change. Experts are sometimes assigned, at government request, to assist countries in various areas of public service management or reform. For example, experts have provided training advice to middle and higher level civil service managers in areas such as taxation (Botswana and Cyprus) and accountancy (Tanzania). In the Maldives, an expert in financial management is attached to the Centre for Management and Administration, designing and delivering training programmes in various aspects of financial management, and in the Caribbean, experts have been assigned to key managerial and financial posts in utility services in Dominica and in a public enterprise in St Kitts and Nevis.

The Secretariat provides technical assistance in the development of management information systems and the utilisation of information technology. In the British Virgin Islands, a land management information specialist is assisting with a comprehensive review of land management requirements, including the incorporation of land administrative and registration processes into a computerised land information system. In Bangladesh, a long-term expert has commenced an assignment at the Public Administration Computer Centre to assist with curriculum development and computer training for public sector officials.

## **Networking and Institution-building**

The Secretariat continues to support the development of professional networks oriented towards practical change. Through its support for regional



*The Commonwealth assists in management development for the public sector*

management associations, the Secretariat is positioning managers to learn from emerging best practices and to strengthen professional values within the public sector. Practical management publications and policy guides are produced to support this development.

The establishment of the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM) marks a milestone in the move towards greater sharing of practical strategies for improvement between senior managers and officials. CAPAM is providing the opportunity for practitioners to assess concrete opportunities for progress through national, regional and pan-Commonwealth conferences. The Secretariat itself continues to support various regional associations in South Asia, Eastern and Southern Africa, West Africa and the Caribbean.

The Secretariat also assists management development institutions at all levels. It provides professional input into curriculum design, helps staff enhance their skills through academic exchanges and professional training, and contributes to materials development. Recent Secretariat assistance has enabled the development of a Masters Programme in Public Sector Management focusing on small states at the University of the West Indies and the development of a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) course in public administration at the Africa University, Zimbabwe.

With assistance from the Secretariat and the CFTC, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum is improving performance at local government level.

## A Network of Best Practice

Information technology is fundamental to public sector performance improvements in two ways. Re-engineering public sector institutions rests on the ability of those institutions to take advantage of current developments in information technology for greater efficiency; but equally, electronic networking enables senior public sector officials from all over the Commonwealth to quickly share concerns and achievements and learn lessons from each other.

In 1990, the Commonwealth Network of Information Technology for Development (COMNET-IT) was established to use computer networking for the exchange of information and expertise. After five years of development by the Secretariat, in 1995 it was transferred into an independent network organisation with its own Board of Directors in Malta.

The COMNET-IT experience has led to a number of initiatives being explored for regional and global collaboration, including the UNDP sponsored sustainable development network initiative for small island states, SIDS/NET.

COMNET-IT is also developing GOVERNET, which is building networks of management development institutions and of key policy-makers with responsibility for public sector performance improvements. In collaboration with the National Centre for Software Technology in India and SangoNet in South Africa, GOVERNET has already equipped more than 40 professionals to utilise the opportunities provided by electronic networking to collaborate in all aspects of public sector strategy.

Together with CAPAM, COMNET-IT is preparing a public sector reform database, accessible via the Internet, containing details of current developments and emerging best practices. It is also establishing bulletin boards and other discussion facilities for use by CAPAM.