

Study Framework and Methodology

This chapter discusses the methodology and framework of analysis used for the study. The study was undertaken with mainly qualitative methods. The chapter explains the methodology used in the study, in that it indicates the data sources and methods of data gathering. The second half of the chapter sets out the framework for analysis employed for the study. The chapter discusses the theoretical framework based on the new public management concepts as well as the historical background within which the public sector reforms in Africa were located. The chapter also specifically highlights the case of the contract systems pertaining to the employment of permanent secretaries in four Commonwealth African countries – Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. The chapter starts with the theoretical framework, public sector reform in Africa, followed by paragraphs related to the conceptualisation of the delivery of the study, research questions and the fieldwork.

Theoretical framework and background

Public sector reform in Africa

Public sector reform in Africa has been a piecemeal process – it evolved over time as in other regions of the world. In general, three waves of public sector reform have been highlighted in the region. Though the different waves overlap, scholars have made these distinctions for analytical convenience. Hence, within some countries there are still elements of, for instance, the first and/or second wave while moving into the third wave in their reform endeavours (Kithinji, 2002). The first wave of contemporary reforms covered the decade of the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s and was inspired by the global revolution in public management, which is also referred to as new public management (NPM). The distinctiveness of this wave of reforms is determined by its focus on ‘restructuring’ of the public service. As such, it has been described as the structural reform wave. These NPM reforms have been driven by a combination of economic, social, political and technological factors. As such, countries experiencing economic and financial crises, including Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, and to some degree Botswana, adopted the NPM principles as a means of achieving efficiency and cutting costs in the delivery of public services. In Ghana, Uganda and Zambia, some of the specific measures that were adopted included deregulation of export sector marketing boards and privatisation of state-owned enterprises, retrench-

ment of over-bloated bureaucracies, assessing government payrolls and clearing them of ghost names and putting in place effective measures for dealing with corruption.

Similarly, in the context of these developing countries, reforms in public administration and management have resulted more so from exogenous factors through, for example, the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) as stipulated by the Bretton Woods Institutions in the 1980s. Larbi (1998) has contended that other drivers of NPM-type reforms include the ascendancy of neoliberal ideals, the development of information technology, and the growth and use of international management consultants as advisers of reforms.

Essentially, by the 1990s NPM was identified as the main paradigm underpinning public sector reforms as traditional public sector services proved to be inefficient and ineffective. Advocates of this managerialist perspective believed that the organisation and management of the public and private sectors need not be different, but that the organisation and management of the public sector should mirror that of the private sector. Hence, as highlighted by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the focus of the NPM movement in Africa was on creating institutional and organisational contexts in order to mirror what are seen as critical aspects of private sector modes of organising and managing. The second wave of reform in Africa from the latter part of the 1990s was therefore predominantly concerned with capacity building, and the third wave of reform, with 2000 as the watershed year, built on the achievements of the previous decades and placed an emphasis on improved service delivery and customer service (www.uneca.org).

In conceptualising some of these reforms, African countries (sharing in the common administrative traditions and common law culture bequeathed by British colonial experience) drew inspiration and ideas from Commonwealth developed countries including Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, and at times from the United States of America's governmental systems and from the multilateral development banks and agencies such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations system. There was also South-South learning through Commonwealth networks of public administration such as the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management (CAPAM), the Commonwealth Secretariat (through the Legal Division and Governance and Institutional Development Division), and from Singapore and Malaysia, which are known for their advances in public administration reform.

There are other systemic and complementary means of communication such as the Commonwealth Schools of Administration network, workshops, conferences, use of international management consultants and country visits by relevant public officials. From the interviews and conversations during fieldwork, these are the general routes through which diffusion takes place. Time constraints to the study, however, prevented a detailed investigation of the density of flow of such exchanges and the quality and extent of learning. But the adoption of lessons, ideas and models could

be gleaned from characteristics of real policies and programmes that have been pursued in the case study countries of Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia.

The New Zealand experience, in particular, has offered food for thought and lesson drawing. What is now called the New Zealand model had at its foundations a corporatisation of the public service (that is, reform to run along business lines): the transformation of government departments into agencies and headed by chief executive officers who were paid competitive salaries. In fulfilling this corporate philosophy, New Zealand chose strategic management as an operational model. A broad consensus was reached which allowed government officials to reduce red tape, minimise impositions and let improved information determine how efficiently the new system will run. Thus, there was recognition of the need to promote an environment, including facilitative budgeting approaches, where chief executives were 'free to manage'. The key elements of the design were:

- 'A selective set of generalised, cross-portfolio policy objectives set by Cabinet (known as strategic result areas – SRAs),
- A process for co-ordinating departmental contributions to those objectives and making related resourcing decisions (strategic dialogue),
- A set of critical medium-term commitments (key result areas – KRAs), which anchor departments' strategic contributions to the policy objectives, through incorporation in the chief executive [permanent secretary]'s performance agreement,
- A requirement that chief executives regularly report on progress being made on those commitments to their minister and to the State Service Commission, and
- An expectation that chief executives will take responsibility for making and taking care of the connections between their commitments and those of other chief executives, while also ensuring that their own commitments flow down through their departments' management chain' (IMCS, 2004: 43).

The SRAs and KRAs were not seen as performance checkpoints, but as beacons or luminous transmitters of information which guide behaviour and focus attention in a management situation. It is also important to note that SRAs and KRAs were not the same, but different, as the latter were seen more as medium term, and therefore within influence of the public service and formed within the assumptions of the budget policy statement. Even though New Zealand could be regarded as relatively affluent, resources were recognised to be limited and trade-offs necessary (IMCS, 2004, *ibid*).

From the 1980s, the chief executives (permanent secretaries) were made accountable to their responsible minister through a written performance agreement. The State Services Commission was retained and strengthened as part of the reform, and the State Services Commissioner was the employer and performance manager of chief

executives. The Commissioner assessed the performance of the chief executive on an annual basis, taking into consideration the following parameters:

1. 'The performance agreement between the minister and the chief executive,
2. The relevant corporate plan approved by the minister,
3. The objectives of the department approved by the minister and the priority accorded them by the minister, and
4. Any other arrangements between the minister and the chief executive' (IMCS, 2004: 40).

It was from this international context that qualitative change processes were sought to boost the managerial competency and policy oversight of senior public service officials in Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. An emergent trend in that endeavour was the introduction of contract-like management and various shades of contract employment measures in the appointment and retention of permanent secretaries and senior public service managers in these countries.

Conceptualising the delivery of the study

The study took a holistic approach to systems analysis and learning, and adopted as its point of departure the public sector reform programmes of recent times, beginning from the mid-1990s. It was thought that it would be propitious to examine the sources of influence (internal and external) of reforms in each of the four countries. The researcher also looked at the structure of reform management – i.e. how the reform was initiated, from which office the macro reform was directed and managed, how policies geared at initiating 'contracts of service for the permanent secretary' were adopted, the nature of these contracts, the conditions of service of the permanent secretary, the nature of conflict mediation, the champions of the policy, institutional/legal measures put in place to manage, monitor, evaluate and institutionalise the contracts systems. Review of documentary evidence as a technique of information gathering and analysis was used to good effect.

In view of the quest for detailed answers to these research questions, the original seven parameters that were provided in the terms of reference (TOR, below) were elaborated and amplified in order to approximate a holistic framework. At least five working days were spent in each case study country. The experience of the Caribbean leg of this research encouraged withdrawal of the online survey questionnaire that was developed to facilitate simultaneous access by the permanent secretaries in the four case study countries. The reason for the withdrawal was that the online survey was not a popular mode of participation for permanent secretaries. The method for information gathering was therefore heavily focused on elite interviews using semi-structured questions. This was to help achieve rapid assessment of the views of about 125 permanent secretaries.

There were other difficulties, however, in terms of reaching the permanent secretaries because of their heavy schedules and pre-arranged events before the researcher's arrival in the countries. As a result of this, a sample of key functionaries in each country's public service reform was targeted for elite interviews using semi-structured questions. This sample included the cabinet secretary, head of the Civil/Public Service, chair of the Public Service Commission, chief personnel officers, chief technical officers and consultants in charge of the reform unit in each country and a number of serving permanent secretaries (PS)/chief directors (CD) who were available for interview, and where possible a senior representative from the public service union.

This study was conducted under the auspices of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, and fieldwork was done in the case study countries in July and August 2008. The study sought to answer the following questions posed about the reforms by the Commonwealth Secretariat. In particular, it sought to understand more broadly the experience of the contract systems for senior public servants (permanent secretaries) in the four African countries that have adopted the New Zealand model.

1. What are the management approaches used by ministries/public officials when operating the contract system of employment?
2. How is performance measured and rewarded under the contract system?
3. What is the scope of and potential for expression of leadership by senior public servants under contract?
4. How does the contract system impinge on the independence and influence of senior public servants?
5. What is the nature of conflict mediation relationships in this new system?
6. What is the return on the high investments made by government in implementing the contract system?
7. What are the lessons to be learned from these contract systems? (TOR)

The following research questions were pursued:

1. Could you give me a brief synopsis of how the recent public sector reform has affected your ministry or public administration system?
2. What is the total number of people who are employed (in established and non-established posts) by this ministry?
3. Are you under any form of contract to your government for performance?
4. Who are you directly and indirectly accountable to?
5. What management frameworks informed the type of contract system under which you are now employed? For example, management by objectives, results-based management, etc.

6. What models of management have been adopted and institutionalised as part of the reform of your ministry?
7. Has this management model been adhered to or your ministry has changed it for other models?
8. If the management model has been changed, what is the name and nature of the new model?
9. In carrying out your mandate as PS/CD and manager of your ministry what management styles have you used, e.g.
 - Delegation to unit/division managers?
 - A centralised management approach with more hands-on management by you?
 - Decentralisation with strong co-ordination?
10. How has this management style helped you to achieve your key performance indicators (KPIs)? What have been the challenges?
11. What kinds of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems were put in place by the PS to achieve the results demanded by their approved corporate plans?
12. How has your contractual arrangement affected the way you engage in inter-sectoral collaboration with other ministries? Do you think that the performance requirement/responsibility enhances or hampers the way you work with other ministries?
13. How has your contractual status affected your role as policy adviser to the minister? Has this role been enhanced or reduced and to what effect?
14. How has the government reckoned value for money for the performance systems they put in place for the PS? Has the value of this investment been commensurate with the cost?
15. How is the PS's performance measured and rewarded?
16. How is non-performance or lack of performance treated by the relevant overseeing authority?
17. What is the nature of the decision space created by delegation through the new contracts system? What powers have been given to the PS/CD to facilitate the achievement of his/her mandate?
18. How has the PS used his/her autonomy in the control of the following: human resource management, financial management and operational decision-making?

<i>Category of space</i>	<i>Innovations by PS/CD</i>	<i>Directed change by cabinet, minister, Parliamentary Committee</i>	<i>No change</i>	<i>Change in performance</i>
Human resource management				
Financial management				
Operational policy decision-making				

19. Under the new performance contract/agreement or improved system, how is conflict between the responsible minister and the PS/CD handled?
20. (a) What mechanisms exist for solving problems and conflicts between the PS/CD and the performance-oversight institutions? (b) How have actual conflicts been resolved?
21. What lessons can be learned from the reform of the role of the permanent secretary in terms of the following:
 - management of change?
 - the performance management system in the public service?
 - strategic management?

Fieldwork

To answer these questions, field visits were undertaken to Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia in July and August 2008, spending at least one working week in each country (see schedule in appendix). The Office of the Head of the Public Service was the first office visited in each country, where the researcher submitted the introductory letter from the Commonwealth Secretariat and in turn got audience with the relevant senior state official immediately or on the following day. The experience with each Head of Public Service was unique as meetings were arranged with the permanent secretaries personally, or a list of key public officers who had knowledge of the key reform issues was made available, and this increased the accessibility of information.

