

STRATEGY 1 IMPROVING POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND CO-ORDINATION

The ability to deliver sound and achievable policy is a key indicator of the health of the public service. Two key components of strategies for improving policy development and co-ordination emerged from Commonwealth Roundtables and advisory services. First, the need concentrate on strengthening the institutional mechanisms required for sound policy development, implementation and review and, second, the higher order need for policy frameworks for the reform process itself.

ENHANCING POLICY CO-ORDINATION AND ANALYSIS

Policy development, with its cycle of policy appraisal, through identification of options, decisions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, is being given greater emphasis and more systematic attention within Commonwealth governments as a part of their public service reform.

If government is to make well-informed decisions on matters of public policy, it requires high quality policy advice. Policy advice is now explicitly identified as an output of many core agencies in New Zealand. In July 1991, the Minister of State Services directed the State Services Commission of New Zealand to review the provision of policy advice by government departments to identify ways of improving its cost effectiveness. The direct cost of providing policy advice in New Zealand is around \$400,000,000 annually and there are approximately 1,000 Policy Analysts working in the New Zealand Public Service.

The lack of policy analysis skills has been identified as a key weakness within the public service in many developing countries. In some countries this has been addressed by strengthening the offices of the President or Prime Minister, and the Cabinet Office machinery, through the development of policy units (Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Zambia). In other countries inter-ministerial committees have been set up for special policy issues and national forums involving private and public sectors have been established. The National Renewal Programme in Ghana, and Malaysia Inc, are two examples. Independent policy institutions, special committees of secretaries and task forces are some of the other mechanisms which have been set up (Zambia, Malaysia).

In 1991 the New Zealand Government instigated a Policy Advice Review in response to concerns regarding the quality, relevance and coherence of the advice it was receiving from public service departments. One outcome of that Review was a Policy Advice Initiative – a series of ideas and actions focused on the production of policy advice within departments. Steps within the Initiative included:

- The promotion of exchange of policy staff within the public service;
- The adoption of a 'benchmark' approach to assessing the trade-off between price and quality in the purchase of policy advice. The Treasury developed costing standards for policy based on analysis of the costs of all policy units. The objective of this was to give ministers and chief executives comparative price information to guide choices on the quality and quantity of policy advice purchased;
- The development of a policy analysis framework for use as an analytical tool by the ministry staff. Introduction to the policy framework is part of the induction process for new staff and, in addition, a training video has been produced;
- The development by departments of their own quality indicators for their policy advice outputs. The Treasury, for example, has a set of detailed quality parameters under the headings of: completeness, relevance, communicability, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, reliability and assessment of quality;
- Specialist training in methods and techniques used in policy analysis for many policy analysts. Some staff were involved in exchanges and secondments to overseas policy agencies or policy units within departments;
- Short and tertiary level courses covering the qualitative and quantitative aspects of policy analysis by private training organisations and Victoria University, Wellington.

- In Malaysia, national-level policy analysis and evaluation is done by the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department. The Implementation and Co-ordination Unit monitors the implementation of programme components. This unit is the secretariat to the National Development Council (NDC) whose functions are:
 - to ensure that the implementation of government policies and strategies is in line with the objectives of the National Development Policy and the Sixth Malaysia Plan;
 - to monitor and evaluate the implementation strategies of programmes and projects under both the Policy and Plan.

STRENGTHENING CABINET OFFICES

While there are examples of successful improvements in policy analysis and co-ordination, experiences throughout the Commonwealth have been varied and results sometimes patchy. In many countries there is a considerable need for strengthening and enhancing policy analysis skills within the Cabinet Office given their central role in national policy making processes.

Most Commonwealth countries have retained a model of Cabinet Government in which Cabinet committees are responsible for making major decisions on policy issues. Traditionally, all ministers are collectively bound by decisions of Cabinet which meets in private. The Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister's Department or President's Department functions as a Secretariat to the Cabinet. New policies are initiated and proposed to Cabinet by the respective Ministers, with a Cabinet Paper containing the rationale for policy change prepared by the Ministry.

In Jamaica, a priority of the Civil Service reform was to establish the necessary capability under the Prime Minister's personal authority to command and control the formation of strategy and the policies for development of resources, money and people to implement it. The Prime Minister's Office has full responsibility for bringing together issues which impact on government strategy and presenting them to Ministers. It also takes a lead role in corporate planning for the Government as a whole, and monitors and directs the implementation of policy.

- In the U.K., Cabinet Office instructions on preparation of Papers for submission to Cabinet say that all proposed policy changes should make clear what is to be achieved, by when, and at what cost and how this achievement is to be monitored. Departments are also required, where there are public expenditure implications, to clear these with the Treasury before submitting to Cabinet.
- A major priority for the Government of Australia was to have a Cabinet system that enabled government ministers collectively to make strategic policy decisions but not have to worry about too many matters of detail. As a result the Australian Government clarified and focused the roles of standing Cabinet committees.
- In New Zealand, a single Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, combining the policy advice role of the Prime Minister Office and the Cabinet servicing role of the Cabinet Office, was created in 1990 to improve policy co-ordination.

IMPROVING POLICY PRESENTATION

In line with moves towards a customer orientation, governments have an increasing duty to inform the public about new policy measures.

Improving policy presentation has a number of objectives. These include creating and maintaining an informed opinion about the business of government; using publicity to help the government achieve its purpose; helping and advising in all matters bearing on relations between the government and the public; and advising the government of the public's reaction to particular policies or actions.

- In Malaysia, the Ministry of Information is generally responsible for policy presentation. Public Relations Officers from the Department of Information under the Ministry are stationed in various ministries and departments to ensure that official news and information are released through:
 - press releases
 - press conferences
 - ministerial interviews
 - senior officers' interviews
 - special launchings.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has developed a Communication Strategy to disseminate information on government plans and policies. The intention is to critically influence their reception and acceptance by the general public, and their sustainability and ownership by public servants. The main objectives of the Communication Strategy are:

- to bring co-ordination and focus to the Government's communication activities;
- to provide a standard against which achievements may be measured;
- to ensure that all members of the public are reached.

The Strategy uses all forms of communication and media, including:

Print Media

- reform bulletins which are published by the Office of the Prime Minister and highlight, on a quarterly basis, reform activities within the public sector;
- newspaper articles on specific activities/plans in ministries/departments;
- pamphlets, bookmarks, and flyers which provide information on the vision, goals, and objectives of the reform effort in the public service.

Electronic Media

- videos which portray public servants in the process of change: used for both information and training;
- television programmes which are aired nationally and which outline the developments and progress made in Public Service Reform, as well as day-to-day government activities of interest, e.g. inside Parliament;
- radio programmes

Advertisements

- there has been some discussion on the use of strip advertisement, posters, etc. which keep 'reform' in the minds of the public at all times;
- specially printed T-shirts, pens and key rings presented to participants of training courses and similar events which become prized possessions in the public service.

Expositions

- one exposition of the business of the public service has already taken place in Tobago and the success of that venture has led to requests for a similar event in Trinidad.

Establishment of a communication presence in ministries

- decentralisation of the Press/Public Relations section of the Information Division of the Office of the Prime Minister and the siting of the officers in ministries to work directly with the ministries and Permanent Secretaries.

EXTERNAL POLICY ADVICE

External management advisory capacity available to governments is also being strengthened to provide a market of contestable policy advice available to government by purchase or through presentations as lobbying platforms. This allows the testing of strategic options and increases both the planning capacity and the policy development transparency of government.

- In Malaysia the importance of ministries receiving public views on policy formulation is highlighted under the Malaysian Incorporated policy. In the process of making a policy proposal ministries solicit views from certain sections of public. For example the Ministry of International Trade and Industry, through its annual trade and industry dialogue with trade associations, gets feedback on the effectiveness of government policies on trade and industry.
- In Trinidad and Tobago formal consultations with the public take place through tripartite committees, such as the standing committee, which is chaired by the Ministry of Labour and comprises representatives of government, private and public enterprises and labour. Additionally, Green Papers are issued for public comment and through communities' stakeholder meetings.
- In the U.K. there are suggestions that the provision of policy advice should be put on the same contractual basis that now applies to service delivery mechanisms for other departments. The Treasury and Civil Service Committee of the House of Commons recently examined this topic and heard suggestions from some quarters that senior officials should be employed on fixed term contracts with a clear remit related to producing answers on policy issues. Under the present system however, most policy proposals still originate from ministers and civil servants who are designated to produce policy advice. Political advisers play a part in this process and the Prime Minister's Office has its own advisers in the form of the central policy unit. This unit is headed by an officer of Deputy-Secretary level who is in charge of a team of eight people producing ideas on domestic, economic and foreign affairs for the Prime Minister.
- In Botswana the Government is in the process of setting up an independent institute for development of policy analysis.

Canada has placed growing emphasis on consultation and public-private partnerships to reflect the recognition that shared problem solving leads to policies which are both better and seen to be better. The result is more effective and credible government. A wide range of consultative committees have been developed and include:

- **National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy:** An independent, multi-sectoral forum which promotes the principles and practices of sustainable development in all regions of Canada.
- **Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre:** An innovative approach in which the private sector sets the agenda and plays a significant role in the development and implementation of public policy.
- **International Trade Advisory Committee/Sectoral Advisory Groups on Industry and Trade:** Formal mechanisms for consulting business, labour, consumer, academic and environmental experts on international and domestic trade policy.
- **Pre-Budget Consultations:** The new Minister of Finance has recently fulfilled a commitment to "open up" the federal budget process. A Round Table discussion with economists from across the country, as well as a series of four national conferences, has been designed to acquire both expert and public input.