

Civil Service Reform in Bangladesh: All Play but Hardly Any Work

Pan Suk Kim (Yonsei University, Korea; pankim@gmail.com)

and

Mobasser Monem (University of Dhaka, Bangladesh; mobasser2000@yahoo.co.uk)

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the Bangladesh civil service for further development. There is widespread recognition that administrative reform is a priority in many countries. There is a long history of administrative reform commissions in Bangladesh and almost every administration in Bangladesh has instituted administrative commissions since its independence. However, the work of these commissions often remains limited to keeping the basic structure unchanged. These commissions do not always delve deeper into the issues. Yet, the cumulative problems of poor administration have now become so apparent in Bangladesh that hardly anyone remains to be convinced that something of more fundamental nature needs to be done. Accordingly, this paper first briefly reviews global public administration trends, followed by a discussion of the structural dimensions of civil service in Bangladesh. After that, civil service reform in Bangladesh will be examined in three dimensions: past efforts, recent initiatives, and a new vision.

Introduction

In an era of globalization and the information society, administrative reform has become one of the core development strategies around the world. Bangladesh is not an exception because the success of Bangladesh's efforts toward economic and social development hinges to a great extent on administrative reform. In many developing countries, the executive branch of the government is relatively more influential than other branches so that reforming the executive branch is one of key development agendas. The concept of "national capability" is an important pre-requisite in order to understand the necessity of

administration reform. Moses Abramovitz, an American economic historian, has popularized the concept of "social capability" as a determinant of economic growth. In recent years, Amartya Sen, a Nobel Laureate Bengali economist, has introduced and used extensively the concept of "individual capability" to discuss equity issues. In addition to these concepts, the concept of "national capability" is helpful in understanding and analyzing a nation's overall performance. One important component of "national capability" is the efficiency and steadfastness with which the national government can defend the national interests in face of domestic, private and international pressures. The political leadership, of course, has a key role in this task. However, the public administration also has a very vital role. In fact, in some situations, public administration can to some extent compensate for political leadership's deficiency in this regard.

There was a view that the necessity for administrative reform will diminish as the role of the private sector increases in the sphere of economic activity and the role of the non-government organizations (NGO) increases in development programs. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s Bangladesh has witnessed considerable increase in the role of both the private sector and civil society. However, experience shows that these processes have not reduced the importance of administrative reform. Besides, Bangladesh needs a civil service of high quality and integrity also for mobilizing and utilizing its domestic resources. This requires innovative ideas, serious effort, dedication, and efficiency. It can be argued that public administration in Bangladesh is rather gradually drifting away from these desired qualities. Urgent reforms are therefore necessary so that these qualities can be restored and fostered.

There is a certain paradox with the situation regarding administrative reform in Bangladesh. On the one hand, there is a widespread recognition that administrative reform is a priority task for the nation. On the other hand, administrative reform is not being carried out earnestly. There is a long history of administrative reform commissions in Bangladesh. Almost every administration instituted administrative commissions. However, work of these commissions often remains limited to keeping the basic structure unchanged. Not always do these commissions go deeper into the issues. Yet, the cumulative problems of poor administration have now become so apparent in Bangladesh

that hardly anyone remains to be convinced that something of more fundamental nature needs to be done. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the Bangladesh civil service for further development.

Evolving Public Administration: Bangladesh Only Maintaining Status Quo?

Traditional public administration has been under attack for many years. The so-called “bureaucratic or administrative paradigm,” seems to have eroded substantially and has been challenged by “a managerial or entrepreneurial paradigm” in many countries around the world. After the publication of Christopher Hood’s article on the nature of the New Public Management (Hood, 1991) as quoted in a variety of literature, the debate on the NPM paradigm has prevailed around the world. Some support his claims, but some decline them. Nonetheless, these debates still continue: there are both advocates and critics of the NPM.

Osborne (2006) proposed three dominant modes of public administration: (1) a longer, pre-eminent one of PA, from the late nineteenth century through to the late 1970s or early 1980s; (2) a second mode: the NPM, through to the start of the twenty-first century; and (3) an emergent third one: the New Public Governance (NPG), since then. Whether or not many experts agree with these claims, one thing is clear: the NPM movement made a significant impact, whether it is positive or negative, to the field of public administration, public policy, and government reform. Currently, however, it seems that the NPM movement is generally declining, while a new perspective rises under the name of “governance” around the world. The title of a newly emerging paradigm varies by its advocates, but the common element among the new perspectives is “governance” (Kim, 2007).

Trends of public administration are evolving around the world. In Table 1, there are three models of public administration: firstly Public Administration, secondly Public Management or NPM and a third type sometimes referred to as “Responsive Governance.” The second NPM mode is now widely recognized around the world, but there is no consensus on the name of the third mode. The United Nations’ report

(UN/DESA, 2005: 7) labelled it as “Responsive Governance,” while others call it differently, such as “New Public Governance (Osborne, 2006). It might take some time to get a consensus on how to label the newly emergent mode of public administration.

So, what does this all mean? These changes brought us a new perspective, but at the same time it escalated a lot of confusion and imposed on us new challenges to cope with in the field. The current trend is gradually moving away from the traditional type of public administration (Ricucci, 2001), even though many doubt claims concerning a new paradigm (Lynn, 2001). Nonetheless, the boundaries between the public and private sectors are blurring. As well, there is more policy networking, governing at a distance; not direct governing, negotiated self-governance (Newman, 2001: 24); in fact new ideas are arising all around the world. For each, new stakeholders are also arising. Where does that leave the position of the central government? What is the position of the core executive? The role of the central government is changing: from coercive command-and-control mechanisms to more collaborative public management. The voices of other counter parts such as civil society and the private sector are becoming critical. The demands of multiple stakeholders are mounting more diverse and complex so that a single governmental agency may not absorb all those demands easily.

In Bangladesh, the paradigm shift is not clear. Existing governmental capacity is not fully capable to take up all the rising demands from diverse multiple stakeholders. Rising demands overflow the given public capacity so that such overflowing becomes a serious challenge to today’s Bangladesh government.

The Structural Dimensions of Civil Service in Bangladesh

The Public Sector in Bangladesh currently numbers around one million people. Around 300,000 are employed in public enterprises whilst approximately 700,000 are employed in various ministries, Departments and other Government Offices. This latter group is

termed the “Civil Service.” These officers staff 41 ministries, 15 administrative divisions and the offices of the President and Prime Minister (DFID: 2004).¹

The Bangladesh Civil Service is structured horizontally into four classes, Class 1 being the professional or officer class and others performing a variety of supporting functions. Class 1 numbers about 40,000 officers, 70% of whom are recruited into cadres, whilst the rest work in functional areas that are not “en-cadre” (i.e. do not belong to a particular cadre). Some non-cadre posts and hierarchies have existed for decades and, for those in this position, their status is a cause for much dissatisfaction and frustration. On average, between 1,200 and 1,800 Class 1 officers are recruited each year. There are 29 cadres each comprising officers with particular skills or qualifications. Most cadres are confined to a single Ministry, for example most, if not all, members of the Nursing, Family Planning and Health cadres work in the Ministry of Health and Family Planning. Cadre arrangements are also complicated by the development of non-cadre posts. These are often funded from development moneys and do not attract the benefits (promotion opportunities, pension, security of employment etc) associated with sanctioned posts in cadres (Jahan: 2006). Although most cadres populate a particular ministry or directorate, the Administrative cadre provides the officers for the Ministry of Establishment, the Civil Field Service, the Secretariats to all Ministries and the Secretariats for the Cabinet Office and the Prime Ministers. Administrative cadre officers are also deputed to key positions to run autonomous and other constitutional organizations such as the Public Service Commission (DFID:2004).

The internal organization structure of a ministry reflects a hierarchical order. The minister is in charge of a ministry and is normally the “political head” of that ministry. A ministry consists of at least one division. The secretary or, in his absence the additional secretary, is considered the “administrative head” of the ministry. He/she conducts and looks after the duties of a division, which includes routine operation, supervision of its

¹ For more details, visit the Government of Bangladesh’s website at <http://www.bangladesh.gov.bd/>. Politics of Bangladesh takes place in a framework of a parliamentary representative democratic republic, whereby the Prime Minister of Bangladesh is the head of government
+. Since January 12, 2007, the Government of Bangladesh is under Chief Advisor of Caretaker Government Fakhruddin Ahmed.

staffing and organizational processes (Jahan: 2006). He/she is also the adviser to the minister regarding policy and administrative issues. A division can further be divided into wings. A joint secretary is the head of a wing and has the power to submit cases directly to the minister for decisions. In practice, such cases are first submitted to a secretary/additional secretary for his consideration before being placed before a minister. A wing is composed of branches. The head of a wing—a joint secretary—supervises the activities of the branches within his wing. Each branch is under the charge of a deputy secretary. Below the branch is the section, which is headed by an assistant secretary, and is the basic working unit of a division. An assistant secretary disposes all cases based on clear precedents. Below the level of assistant secretary, there are a considerable number of office personnel (Zafarullah, 1998: 83-87).

Departments are also attached to each ministry/division. The departments determine the blueprint for implementing various decisions taken by the ministry/division by providing technical information and advice. Who heads these departments or directorates depends on their importance. In some cases, an officer, enjoying the pay grades and benefits of a secretary, heads a department while on the other cases it is headed by an official enjoying the pay grade and benefits of a deputy secretary, joint secretary or an additional secretary (Ahmed, 2002: 329). Whilst the wider civil service comprises nearly a million staff, the Administrative Cadre is a relatively small elite of just over 4,000 officers. The following Table 1 shows the numbers of officers by rank. It also shows senior posts filled by officers who have passed the retirement age of 57 years and have been retained on annual contracts.

Table 1. Administrative Cadre at a glance

| Rank | BCS Officers | | Total | % of Female Officers | Officers on Contract |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------|--------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Male | Female | | | |
| Secretary | 11 | - | 11 | - | 26 |
| Additional Secretary | 102 | - | - | - | 15 |
| Joint Secretary | 269 | 2 | 271 | 00.37% | 5 |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------|-----|------|--------|----|
| Deputy Secretary | 843 | 56 | 899 | 06.64% | |
| Senior Assistant Secretary | 1812 | 264 | 2076 | 14.57% | 1 |
| Assistant Secretary | 665 | 151 | 816 | 22.71% | |
| Total | 3702 | 473 | 4175 | 12.78% | 47 |

Source: DFID, 2004

The Table 2 below shows that nearly 75% of the administrative cadre are deployed in the public administration commonly called the “Field Service”. The remainder provide: the secretariats for the Government’s 42 Ministries; 12 specialist administrative divisions and the offices of the President and Prime Minister.

Table 2. Postings of the Administrative Cadre

| | |
|---|------|
| Public administration- Field Service | 3102 |
| Secretariats of Ministries | 725 |
| Administrative Divisions | 311 |
| Office of the President | 6 |
| Office of the Prime Minister | 31 |
| Total | 4175 |

Source: DFID, 2004

The Secretariats of 37 Ministries have less than 40 officers, of these 13 have fewer than 10. The Ministry of Establishment has the largest Secretariat with 81 officers, then the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (52), Ministry of Home Affairs (42) and the Ministry for Industries (41). Of the Administrative Divisions, the largest is the Finance Division with 91 officers, followed by the Local Government (51), Economic Relations (48), and Planning (21) Divisions. The other 9 divisions all have fewer than 20 officers (Jahan: 2006).

The Ministry of Establishment

The Ministry of Establishment (MoE) is responsible for personnel policy within the Bangladesh Civil Service and also has direct responsibility for a number of key HR and organizational management functions, particularly in relation to officers of the Administrative cadre that comprises the higher-level civil service. The overall purposes of the Ministry of Establishment are to: (1) ensure Ministers are supported by an appropriately trained and experienced secretariat of higher-level civil servants; (2) maintain the extensive public administration of Bangladesh based on a network of District and Divisional Commissioners, known as the “field service”; (3) ensure that civil servants in the Secretariat and Service Directorates are appropriately trained; and (4) to decide and enforce personnel policy, systems, rules and regulations for the Administrative cadre and the wider civil service.

The Secretary, MoE is appointed by, and accountable to, the Prime Minister as she holds the Establishment portfolio. The Secretary is supported by an additional Secretary and five Joint Secretaries with responsibilities for six administrative wings (administration; appointments postings and deputation; career planning and training; discipline and enquiry; regulation; and organization and management).

The Public Service Commission

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is a constitutional body appointed by, and responsible to, the President. It has close links with the Ministry of Establishment. The secretariat for the PSC is provided by officers on deputation from the Bangladesh civil service (BCS). It has two key constitutional functions: recruitment of civil servants; and an advisory/regulatory role with regards to the employment of civil servants. Recruitment – Class 1 Officers (roughly 8% of all civil servants and the key decision makers – all the administrative cadre are Class 1 officers) are recruited directly by the PSC through open competitive examination into 29 cadres and other government services. Numbers to be

recruited are determined by the MoE which gathers the requirements for recruitment from the various ministries and government bodies. It then advises the PSC about how many to recruit for the various cadres. Recruitment follows Bangladesh Civil Service Recruitment Rules. Whilst Bangladesh largely follows a closed entry system, there is provision for 10% so called “lateral” entry into the civil service, which is recruitment directly from outside the service to the more senior grades. In addition, the PSC is required to operate a quota system that reserves appointment to Class 1 posts for specified groups as follows: 30% reserved for the children of freedom fighters; 10% reserved for women; 5% reserved for members of tribal groups; and 10% reserved for those living in “district” areas. This leaves 45% of the total available for recruitment through open competition (merit-based recruitment). This quota system was introduced in March 1997. There are currently about 75,000 vacancies in the civil service that are unfilled. The PSC perceives itself as being blamed, unfairly, for being slow and bureaucratic. The Chairman’s strongly held view is that they do not have the resources or infrastructure to do their job properly. Advisory – There is a constitutional obligation for the PSC to be consulted on a specified range of issues before any action can be taken (Jahan: 2006). These relate to: seniority; regularization (making temporary posts permanent) and serious disciplinary matters (reducing pay, demotion and dismissal). This mandatory consultation is aimed at maintaining the integrity of civil service rules and practice. Now, in recruitment of public officials and staff, Bangladesh follows district and other quota systems which contradict the spirit of the Bangladesh Constitution.²

Civil Service Reform in Bangladesh: Past Efforts

Bangladesh embarked on the administrative reform initiatives shortly after its independence in 1971. But the recent history of Public Administration Reforms has become nothing more than a sequence of reform studies and proposals, with little evidence of real change. Interestingly, since independence the government constituted 17

² Article 29 (1) of the Bangladesh Constitution states, "There Shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens, in respect of employment or office, in the service of the Republic" and Article 28 (1) states "the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth." This quota complicates recruitment in more ways than one besides denying meritorious candidates from entering into the government.

reform Commissions or Committees with a view to reorganize/reform civil service and public sector. More than 20 reports on Public Administration Reform have been prepared by these Commissions and Committees and some of those reports were prepared at the initiative of some of the important development partners, particularly the World Bank, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Department for International Development (DFID), and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

Table 3. Commissions and Committees Formed by the Government of Bangladesh

| | Name of the Commissions and Committees | Year | Main Focus |
|----|--|-------------|--|
| 1 | Administrative Reorganization Committee | 1971 | Organizational Set-up for the Government after emergence of Bangladesh |
| 2 | Administrative and Services Structure Reorganization Committee | 1972 | Service Structure |
| 3 | National Pay Commission | 1972 | Pay Issues |
| 4 | Pay and Services Commission | 1977 | Services Structure and Pay Issues |
| 5 | Martial Law Committee for examining organizational set-up of Ministries/Divisions/Directorates and other Organizations | 1982 | Organization and Rationalization of Manpower in the Public Sector Organizations |
| 6 | Committee for Administrative Reform and Re-organization | 1982 | Reorganization of District (Upazila) and Field Level Administration |
| 7 | National Pay Commission | 1984 | Pay Issues |
| 8 | Secretaries Committee on Administrative Development | 1985 | Promotion Aspects |
| 9 | Special Committee to Review the Structure of Senior Services Pool | 1985 | Structure of Senior Services Pool |
| 10 | Cabinet Sub-Committee | 1987 | Review of SSP and Promotion Aspects |
| 11 | Committee to Re-examine the Necessity of Keeping certain Government Offices in the light of Changed Circumstances | 1989 | Necessity or Otherwise of Keeping certain Government Offices |
| 12 | National Pay Commission | 1989 | Pay Issues |
| 13 | Commission for Review of Structure of the Local Government | 1991 | Structure of Local Government |
| 14 | National Pay Commission | 1996 | Pay Issues |
| 15 | Administrative Re-organization Committee | 1996 | Structure and Rationalization of Manpower Across Ministries/Departments/Directorates |
| 16 | Local Government Commission | 1997 | Strengthening of Local Government Institutions |

| | Name of the Commissions and Committees | Year | Main Focus |
|----|---|-------------|---|
| 17 | Public Administration Reform Commission | 2000 | Improving Transparency, Efficiency, Accountability, Effectiveness of Public Administration and Brining Institutional and Procedural Changes and Improvement of Service Delivery to Ensure Value for Money at all levels of Administration in the light of NPM |

Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Public Administration Reform in Bangladesh, SURF*, 2004, Bangkok, Thailand.

Table 4. Reports Prepared with the Assistance of Development Partners

| | Name of the Report | Year | Agency Involved | Main Focus |
|---|---|-------------|------------------------|--|
| 1 | Public Administration Efficiency Studies | 1989 | USAID | Secretariat System, Relationship between Ministries, Departments and Corporations |
| 2 | Report on Public Administration Sector Study in Bangladesh | 1993 | UNDP | Public Administration Reform in the Government with Emphasis on Certain Specific Areas |
| 3 | Towards Better Government in Bangladesh (Four Secretaries Report) | 1993 | DFID | Administrative |
| 4 | Government That Works: Reforming the Public Sector | 1996 | World Bank | Comprehensive Administrative Reform, Privatization, Reduced Levels of Government |
| 5 | Local Government in Bangladesh-An Agenda for Governance | 1996 | UNDP | Local Government Issues |
| 6 | Taming Leviathan-Reforming Governance in Bangladesh | 2002 | World Bank | |
| 7 | Public Administration Reform in Bangladesh | 2004 | UNDP | Civil Service Reform Issues |

Source: Ali, A.M.M. Shawkat, *Civil Service Management in Bangladesh*. 2007, Dhaka: University Press Limited.

But despite all these efforts, not much was done to ameliorate the situation, leaving a heritage of change-without-change policies which suited the motivations of the large part of bureaucracy that became remarkably skilled in adapting to and imposing its views on various types of political rulers. Lack of political will and bureaucratic resistance to

change continued to frustrate all efforts to break away from a highly centralized administrative system, inherited from the colonial era.

There is general view, even within government, that the Bangladesh civil service system has undergone very few changes since the independence in 1971 and that most reform actions taken, have been merely for cosmetic purposes. The international donors also hardly had any success in convincing the successive governments to implement reforms which were needed to radically change the structure and composition of the public service and the work attitudes of the civil servants.

The past studies including the Public Administration Reform Commission have identified some of the crucial factors and also areas which are directly or indirectly responsible for the inefficiency of the public bureaucracy. The main reasons identified by the past reform initiatives have been outlined by a recent ADB Report (2007) in the following manner: (1) outside interference in administrative decision making; (2) politicization of the civil service; (3) nepotism and favoritism; (4) a lack of delegated authority by mid-level and local level public officials; (5) a lack of public scrutiny of public administration; and (6) a paucity of citizen demand for improvements in public administration

The Asian Development Bank Report (2007) also states “the lack of significant progress in administrative governance is exacerbated by the failure of successive governments and the civil service itself, to pursue the reform agenda.” Public administration in Bangladesh remains largely centralized, excessively reliant on hierarchy and multiple layers of decision-making. Human resource planning is hardly existent and although frequent changes arrive in postings, inter-departmental mobility is rare. There are no incentives currently in place that encourage initiative and award excellence. The performance management system is obsolete and subjective. Training is neither linked to career planning, nor related to other dimensions of personnel management. Career opportunities are generally confined within a cadre and thus dissimilar.

In addition, promotion at the upper levels (ranks of secretary and additional secretary) is generally confined to the generalist cadres (especially the administrative cadre), who continue to resist any reforms that would pose a threat to their privileges and career prospects. Moreover, the devolution of career management functions of certain cadres to the ministry/division level has resulted in the compartmentalization of the higher-level civil service, with each cadre developing their own organizational culture. Also, enforcing ethical standards and performance criteria has proven almost impossible; the system continues to provide unrestrained protection to its members and, because salary levels are very low compared to the private sector, rent seeking is almost considered a necessity for survival.

With regard to training in particular, from the late 1970's onwards, serious emphasis was laid on staff training and several well-equipped training institutions with well-trained staff were established to cater the needs of both general and specialized cadres. However, gradually the importance of staff training has waned, resulting in small budget allocations for training, lack of needs analysis and lack of evaluation of the impact of training on job performance. As a result, civil servants lost interest in being trained and training institutions became the "dumping ground" for various categories of civil servants. Corruption in all its forms is one of the most dominant components of bureaucratic culture in Bangladesh. Over the years, the people perceive that the public service has become synonymous with corruption, waste and inefficiency (DFID: 2004)

In the eyes of the citizenry, who lack effective means of obtaining redress in the case of abuse of power, the civil service is portrayed as inefficient, ineffective, non-transparent, unaccountable and largely insulated from the public, unethical and unfair, non-responsive to societal demands, largely pre-occupied with process, rules and procedures and mainly interested in enhancing their own status, power, prestige, income and sub-system autonomy (UNDP: 2004). Major reasons for the failure of the past reform initiatives are as follows: (1) serious bureaucratic resistance to the implementation of the reforms especially from the senior ranks of the civil service; (2) absence of political will to counter opposition from the civil servants further strengthened the bureaucracy's culture

of “self-preservation and resistance to change”; (3) some of the reform programs, especially those that had been prepared with the support of external technical assistance, were seen to be over-ambitious, ill-conceived or not adapted to the local context and political reality; (4) reforms have been too piece-meal, and lacked vision and coherence; (5) over the past decades, all major reform attempts have been driven by ad hoc commissions and committees, most of them short-lived and often established as a result of external (donor) pressures, and a permanent high-level body in charge of managing and coordinating the implementation of the reform process has been absent; and (6) advice and suggestions from the public and from professionals were rarely sought in the reform implementation process. Most of the Commissions and Committees did not include outside stakeholders (except for retired civil servants). Lack of broader stakeholder involvement significantly contributed to the failure of major administrative reform measures in the civil service in Bangladesh (UNDP: 2004).

Civil Service Reform in Bangladesh: Some Recent Initiatives

In September 2007, UNDP in Bangladesh conducted a study on reform in the civil service of Bangladesh. The major objectives of the study were to identify existing drawbacks within the civil service and to recommend practical measures to restructure/reorganize the civil service within a short span of time. Major issues covered by the report are overall human resource management policies, capacity development of major HR-related government agencies, change management, and some elements of anti-corruption in the civil service. The study team consisting of both local and foreign experts recognized the difficulties and proposed a series of strategic intervention that should, first, break the ‘logjam’ impeding implementation of administrative reform proposals; and, second, offer *implementable* programs for generating immediate improvements and gradual transformation in the civil service. Revitalizing and rewarding productive careers of civil service personnel and attracting, retaining, developing the human competences needed, including monitoring their own performance, are vital cornerstones for the building of good governance and a modern, competitive, effective civil service (UNDP, 2007).

In spite of significant efforts, public administration reform commissions and some successful (partial) modernization projects and/or pilots, the Bangladesh civil service is still largely caught in traditional concepts of public administration and civil service. In order to better serve the citizens and enable appropriate economic and socio-cultural development, the civil service needs to evolve: from being “hierarchical, centralized, and bureaucratic” into being “efficient, empowered, creative and responsive”; and “stakeholder-oriented, transparent and accountable” (UNDP, 2007).

The UNDP study (2007) suggested that various changes should take place in the near future with a clear focus on managing change, human resource management (including individual performance management), human resource development and organizational performance management. The study focused on the following important aspects:

Managing change is known as an overall implementation strategy, supporting and coordinating all initiatives of public administration reform and development in Bangladesh. This approach actively involves all major stakeholders, coordinates the many initiatives and makes best use of the technical expertise available in Bangladesh. Managing change, or change management, supports the extension of ‘change agent’ to all government ministries and departments, resulting in new change agents, networks of change leaders, and a gradually expanding ‘mind-set’ for change throughout the civil service

Human resource management should change : (1) from generalist traditions to specialized generalists, with strengthening of expertise and openness; (2) from seniority-based promotion, to promotion based on performance evaluation and competence, using fair and transparent competition; (3) from inadequate appraisal and merit concepts, to the strengthening of individual performance management through more articulated review systems; (4) from frequent and often unpredictable rotation of posts to new practice strengthening of specialization through the career development programs.

Human resource development paradigms should also be changed in the near future. Traditional provider (training agency)-centered programs should be changed to more customized or tailored programs to meet the needs and demands of customers (government officials and their management) of training institutions. Typical one-way lecture-centered training programs should be changed to more participatory, experiential programs utilizing action learning and blended learning. Theory-dominated programs should be changed to more problem-solving-oriented programs. Furthermore, every training session must be evaluated by participants in terms of quality of training contents, the way of its delivery, and overall effectiveness; and its evaluation results must be taken into consideration for continuation of the program and further curriculum design and development.

While the initiatives for improving and reforming human resources management and development are necessary internal conditions; civil service reform process requires also an explicit focus on “organizational performance” in the civil service. This is crucial for enabling, managing and monitoring the progress of (pilot organizations in) the civil service towards being “stakeholder-oriented”, “responsive”, “empowered”, “creative”, “efficient”, “transparent” and “accountable”.

Civil Service Reform in Bangladesh: A New Vision

The civil service in Bangladesh has contributed a great deal in the development of the nation, but it has weaknesses in various regards. The Bangladesh civil service can be characterized as over centralized, unaccountable, inefficient, underpaid, coercive, and non-transparent. The Bangladesh civil service has the characteristics of a closed system institution which suffers from low expertise and a high level of rigidity. Thus more open and competitive elements should be injected in the civil service. It also has a lack of responsiveness and accountability while the nature of government affairs becomes more complex and interdependent. These are just a few things to list among others.

The country is currently undergoing a series of reform attempts in various public institutions. The present Caretaker Government has taken some significant strides

towards total renewal of governance and bringing about reforms within key government institutions. Reconstitution of the Election Commission and the Public Service Commission, depoliticizing the civil service and a drive against corruption are some of the major reform initiatives that have drawn the attention of all the development community. The current politico-administrative climate is favorable to any development advisory services and technical assistance that facilitates the Nation's efforts towards reforms. This reform oriented environment creates wide opportunity for development partners to provide technical assistance to the change management process in Bangladesh.

In the near future, various changes should take place. Some of the key changes should be: (1) generalist traditions should be changed to specialized generalists strengthening of expertise and openness; (2) from seniority-based promotion, to promotion based on performance evaluation and competition; (4) from inadequate performance management, to strengthening of performance management through more articulated review systems; (5) from frequent rotation of posts to a new practice strengthening of specialization through the career development programs. Table 5, following, demonstrates the current status of Bangladesh's current civil service, alongside this it also presents expected vision for civil service in Bangladesh.

Table 5: Civil Service in Bangladesh: Present and Future

| Where does Bangladesh stand now? (Current Situation) | Where should Bangladesh move to? (Vision for Future) |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At present Bangladesh civil service is overly centralized, unaccountable, inefficient, underpaid, coercive, unethical, rent seeking and non-transparent. While trying to receive public services, people experience unnecessary harassment, discourteous behavior of the civil servants, who keep customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rigid, hierarchical bureaucratic form of civil service which has predominated for last few decades after independence should be changed to a flexible, people and service oriented, market-responsive one. This should not be seen as simply a matter of reform or minor change in management style, but a change in the role of government in society as a whole, the relationship between government, civil service and citizenry Immediate measures must be taken for improving efficiency, accountability, transparency and dynamism in all levels of civil |

| Where does Bangladesh stand now? (Current Situation) | Where should Bangladesh move to? (Vision for Future) |
|--|---|
| <p>waiting for hours before attending to their needs, The members of the civil service are, by and large, unwilling to correct mistakes, and often make unabashed approaches for pecuniary benefits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The civil service seems to be having the characteristics of a closed system institution which suffers from low expertise and high level of rigidity • The civil service is not capable of coping with the changing needs of fast changing domestic and global environment • The civil service is unresponsive to the needs of the citizens as a whole and unfriendly to private sector business • The civil service is highly ineffective because of extreme politicization • The civil service and other public institutions have lost their images of being truly welfare and service oriented • Performance of civil service has dramatically declined over last 15 years • The civil service suffers from all sorts of institutional shortcomings capacities • The civil service is resistant to fundamental changes and seriously lacks clear vision for future | <p>service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restructuring civil service and other public institutions to restore and sustain their images and effectiveness by bringing about fundamental qualitative changes which should be simultaneously supported by necessary regulatory and legal reform measures • Providing services by ensuring cost-effectiveness and value for money • Creating a broad-based constituency of support in and outside the civil service that recognize the need for change in the delivery of service • Making civil servants truly responsive to the needs and demands of the citizen. and change their mind-sets in a way that they serve the citizens-the way citizens want to be served rather than the way the civil servants want to serve them • Decentralizing the civil service so as to take the service to the door-step of the citizens • Treating citizens as customers based on the principle of consumer or user rights. The government, instead of playing an interventionist role in various sectors, is advised to redefine its role and to transform itself into a catalyst of private investors and business institutions • Creating a responsive, pro-active civil service system which will remain free from corruption • Promoting and sustaining a civil service system which will remain free from the clutches of narrow partisan political influence • Bringing about institutional reforms which would include, in addition to public sector policy and structural changes, a strengthening of civil society, private sector and other key governance participants. • Encouraging an environment of pay for performance in the civil service and an appropriate compensation package and a realistic incentive system must be in place • Increasing the efficiency level of the civil service to an ideal |

| Where does Bangladesh stand now? (Current Situation) | Where should Bangladesh move to? (Vision for Future) |
|--|---|
| | <p>standard that is compatible with the requirements of a changing local and global economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a civil service with a clear short and long term vision, which is capable of meeting the needs of the 21st century |

Discussion and Policy Implications

Administrative reform, despite its importance and necessity, is proving hard to carry out because it is indeed a difficult task. There are many factors that contribute to this difficulty. Only a few can be noted here. The first is the sheer scope of the problem. Too many people are likely to be directly affected by such reform. Civil service, as introduced by the British, originally included only the officials in charge of revenue collection and dispensation of justice. With time, however, many ‘development’ ministries were created, and officials of these ministries were included in the civil service. As a result of this expansion process, the civil service in Bangladesh today is comprised of many cadres. In addition to the ‘administration’ cadre, there are cadres of ‘engineers,’ ‘agriculturists,’ ‘economists,’ ‘doctors,’ ‘teachers,’ etc. Another factor that has increased the ‘scope’ is that, over time, service and salary structures of all autonomous and semi-autonomous bodies have been linked to that of the central civil service. This link has now made it impossible to introduce any change into the service and salary structure of the central civil service without creating a ripple effect across the Directorates, Boards, Authorities, Banks, Corporations, Commissions, Universities, Colleges, etc. All this has been aggravated by the general fact that, according to management experts, government offices and government owned enterprises in Bangladesh tend to be overstaffed. Too many people are employed for the amount of work that is actually done. This only multiplies the ‘scope’ problem. The second important reason why administrative reform is proving so difficult is that it involves very vital sections of the society. Administrative reform is not like ‘land tenure reform’ where the target group is dispersed, lives in remote villages, and does not wield much political power. In contrast, the people who are likely

to be affected by administrative reform are situated at the very heart of government's functioning process. If they find something unpalatable in the proposed reform package, they may even paralyze the government. This makes administrative reform a risky proposition. That is why most administrative commissions do not try to stir this hornet's nest and limit their efforts to only cosmetic changes. The third factor that makes administrative reform difficult is that it is a complex and challenging intellectual task too. It involves many fundamental issues such as: (1) the choice between permanent and politically transient civil service; (2) the appropriateness of class divisions within the service; (3) the relationship between administrative and non-administrative (i.e., technical or developmental) services; and (4) the relationship between services related to public and private sectors, etc.

Besides, a number of development partners are helping the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) including the UNDP, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and several others. However, without indigenization, donor-driven reform efforts have not been well received by government employees. Critics say that the areas of reform were seldom wisely chosen and donors were merely content to complete studies on public sector reforms or narrowly segmented civil service reforms and then forget about it (Ali, 2007).

Gargantuan effort is necessary to grapple with these deep issues and find right solutions. It has to be noted that administrative reform in Bangladesh has to be carried out under the democratic conditions of competitive politics. This means that suggesting reform is not enough. It is necessary to mobilize popular support for the proposed reform, so that the reform does not hurt electoral prospects of the party in power. Alternatively, consensus has to be built around the proposed reform. However, given the nature of Bangladesh politics, consensus building is not an easy task. Yet it can be argued that in order to carry out reform measures, a strong political will is a critical factor.

In order to effectively carry out civil service reform, Government of Bangladesh needs well articulated strategy and such change management strategy needs to build on a political process that seeks to legitimize a desired change among the stakeholders and then to build a supportive constituency – a political will to implement – before moving to gather resources and designing or modifying organizations. We argue that a carefully designed, multi-faceted, and extensive development learning program might be useful for infusing the civil service and the government in general with a ‘change management’ mind-set.

Conclusion

The civil service of Bangladesh, nearly one million public servants, has not kept pace with a rapidly changing environment in public administration. Technology advances and administrative practice have progressed at astounding speed throughout the world, including the capacity to serve the public more effectively. But the Bangladesh civil service has faced daunting challenges over the years—a seemingly intractable and unfavourable incentive system beginning with the salary levels, the difficulty of keeping pace with technological advances, the recent incursion of partisan political influence over the past decade and more, the widespread phenomena of corruption at the different levels and sectors of the civil service and an overwhelming sense of slowness in the process of change, among others. Added to these difficulties is an unmistakable history of failures in implementing administrative reforms despite the significant contributions made in commission recommendations. Therefore, capacity building is so very important in Bangladesh. The public sector capacity needs to be strong, productive and healthy. If it is weak then it would be like building a house on shaky foundations.

Administrative reform is a difficult and complicated task. Not everything can be accomplished in one stroke. The reform has to proceed by first tackling simpler tasks and then moving on to deeper issues. The difficulty and complexity of the task of administrative reform in Bangladesh indicates that it has to proceed gradually. Bangladesh has to start with such steps as are relatively easy to carry out. This means that many of the deeper issues have to be postponed for now. For example, under the current

circumstances, it is not opportune to put the issue of permanent vs. transient civil service on the immediate agenda of administrative reform. Whatever its merits or demerits, for quite some time to come, Bangladesh will have to continue with the system of a permanent civil service. Similarly, for quite some time, Bangladesh will have to continue with some of the (class) divisions of officials and employees. It is not realistic to suggest doing away with all these distinctions immediately.

Similarly, it is not realistic to suggest immediate de-linking of the development cadres from the administration cadre. However, this does not mean that these deeper issues should never, or can never, enter into consideration. The challenge is to find initial steps that may prove feasible and effective under the current ground reality and those steps, the gradual implementation of which creates a new reality where more options can be explored, and consideration of deeper issues becomes plausible. There has to be a long-term vision about the whole reform process, and the initial steps have to conform to that vision.

In order to initiate and implement a broad range of reform measures, the strong political will of the Prime Minister (or Chief Advisor in the Caretaker government at present) is, ideally, necessary, but the head of the state is often lacking such commitment. Instead of simply expecting a strong commitment from the head of state, however, alternative action needs to be taken to create or trigger political will of top political leaders. Waiting patiently for politicians to find political will or commitment is not a practical option. A politician might be facing so many competing agendas every day; national economy, poverty, crisis, disaster etc. Thus, unless a large number of citizens, social groups and/or the media strongly demand change for government reform or civil service reform, there is little chance of the politician paying serious attention to these matters.

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