
Reinventing Service Delivery in Namibia

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The main purpose of any public service globally, is to promote the general welfare of the citizens of that specific country. The assumption can therefore be made that in order to promote the general welfare of the citizens; the public sector should be managed effectively, efficiently and economically. Therefore, if the public sector did not perform according to these principles, the public sector should reform itself to meet the needs and expectations of its citizens. Over the last few years we have seen significant changes taken place in public administration and management in transitional countries.

The main factors leading to public sector reform can be traced back to the following criteria, namely, the redefinition of the role of the state within society and the emphasis of governments to adhere to the principles of good governance through increased transparency, openness, accountability and increasing citizen participation and the rooting out of corruption. The purpose of this article is to briefly explain what measures the Namibian Government has undertaken to improve service delivery.

Introduction

The main purpose of any public service globally is to promote the general welfare of the citizens of that specific country. The involvement of a government in the provision of services and products stems from two main reasons, namely, firstly governments are of the opinion that their social and developmental objectives can best be served by government rather than other institutions such as the private sector. Ezzamel and Wilmot (1993:39) observe that:

"... it is evident that, historically public sector organisations have been established to provide a level of quality of goods and services for which there was (deemed to be) a public demand but which had not been satisfied by the market mechanism. Put at its simplest working to provide these goods and services have been understood to serve a public need in a way that was directly geared to the accumulation of public wealth."

The second reason why governments are involved in the delivery of goods and services to their citizens, is that governments control those sectors of the economy that are considered to be of significant strategic importance. For example, electricity, like other energy forms such as gas and oil, has always been viewed as a strategic resource too important to be left to the market (Hunt & Shuttleworth, 1996).

Once governments get involved in the provision of goods and services, taxpayers/citizens of a country expect the government to operate according to the principles of effectiveness, efficiency and economics. However, governments' involvement in the provision of goods and services over the last twenty years has generally been characterized by inefficiency, poor performance and a lack of delivery of basic services (Perotti, 2003:10). Due to this development, governments were forced to find new solutions for these problems. This implies that governments need to reform the public sector and ensure that they operate according to international best practices.

According to Van der Westhuizen (2005:143) public sector reform has gained different names, for example, it has been called "new public management" (Hood, 1991), "market-based public administration" (Lan, Zhiyong and Rosenbloom 1992), "the post-bureaucratic paradigm" (Barzelay, 1992), "entrepreneurial government" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) or "managerialism" (Pollit, 1993). Despite the different names given to public sector reform, all these different descriptions are mostly patterned around the principles of "New Public Management" (NPM) and "Reinventing Government" (RIG) (Van der Westhuizen, 2005: 143). The main goal of both NPM and RIG is to transfer private sector management practices and the introduction of market forces to the establishment of democratic principles within the

state machinery in its broadest sense (Hughes, 1998:2). This paper will address the factors that have contributed towards public sector reform in transitional countries and specifically what measures the Namibian government has taken to enhance public service delivery.

Factors that Contribute towards Public Sector Reform in Transitional Countries

The main factors leading to public sector reform can be traced back to two criteria. The first criteria relates to the redefinition of the role of the state within society and thereby contributing to the general welfare of the society. The second criteria request governments to adhere to the principles of good corporate governance through increased transparency, openness, accountability and increased citizen participation and prevent corrupt practices.

Redefinition of the Role of the State

In many countries the government is not able to satisfy all the needs and expectations of the population. It is often difficult to satisfy the basic needs of the citizens of the country such as ensuring sufficient food supply, good health, basic education, a sense of security and even protecting the environment for future generations to come. If the money, the institutions or the necessary policies are not in place, then alternatives such as private commercial or a non-commercial private sector role-player can be sought. This implies that in these circumstances, governments can limit itself to creating the conditions for private sector development. Furthermore, the role of the government would be to create a regulatory framework for the private sector and to see that the private sector respects the rules, regulations and policies formulated for the different activities to be undertaken, for example, within the water or electricity sectors. The World Bank (2002) refers to these activities as building institutions for markets. If this approach is to be used there are two different management issues that need to be addressed. The first issue deals with the question on how to run a government department/ministry and the other on how to run a government company/enterprise. In the case of a government department/ministry public administration techniques are required, while private sector approaches and practices can be applied to the running of a government company/enterprise. A second option is to involve the private sector in the management of a government utility.

The reasons for getting the private sector involved may be related to the limited efficiency of the government organisation, but the reasons may also be of a financial nature. In some countries State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) run huge budget deficits and are still not able to deliver the goods and services they would like to deliver, for example, inefficient water or electricity companies might produce services at a too high price for the customer. The challenge however, for governments is to find the optimal mix of public and private supply in rendering of basic services and infrastructure, or a division of responsibilities. In such a case the government would set the rules and see to it that they are respected and the private sector does a lot of the actual work.

Corporate Governance

The catalyst of economic growth, and particularly in developing countries, includes foreign direct investment and the creation and maintenance of an effective and efficient private sector. Foreign investor's decision to invest within developing countries depends on the fiscal and tax policies of the countries, the institutional framework for trade and investments and good corporate governance. Governance in its broadest sense includes credible and democratic government. Governments therefore have a critical role to play in establishing the economic and political fundamentals that underpin economic growth and in facilitating the practice of good governance (Khoza & Adam, 2005:14).

Due to globalisation the world has become a smaller place and competition for capital has intensified as traditional barriers to the movement of capital, people and information have broken down. The result therefore is the development of new markets and new sources of

the products and services required, for example, India has become a leading centre in software development. The developing world eagerly looks at the developed world to stimulate local economic growth. However, international investors require more uniform standards of good governance, because they are accountable to their shareholders whose concerns extend not to just a meaningful return, but also increasingly to the manner in which that return is generated. In Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has provided a much-needed impetus for the charge towards better governance across the continent. There is a growing recognition that initiatives like NEPAD are important, both from a national perspective, to make countries attractive to investors and to achieve effective regional integration (Khoza & Adam, 2005:20). In order to ensure effective, efficient and economically service delivery, governments need to implement the principles of good corporate governance within all machinery of government. Within the African context, President Thabo Mbeki (1998) of South Africa has observed that:

"the world investor community has understandably asked that as Africans we must establish the conditions to enable them to take rational business decisions to make long term investment in Africa."

This statement implies that governments must create a conducive environment to attract foreign investment, encourage and promote the condition for employment, infrastructure development, the delivery of basic service, the creation of an entrepreneurial spirit when it comes to service delivery and adhering to the principles of corporate governance. According to the Cadbury Report of 1992, corporate governance is defined as "the system by which organisations are directed and controlled" (Corporate Governance, 1992). Ultimately, good corporate governance is about effective leadership. Good corporate governance is not a "nice-to-have". However, it is absolutely vital for the survival and future growth of any country. This can only be achieved if citizens of a country are informed and they feel that they are free to speak out. Only if governments allow for a transparent and open society can innovation flourish. Innovation is the prerequisite for economic growth, change and development within any country (Rukoro, 2004).

Public Service Delivery in Namibia

The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, 1990 (Act 1 of 1990) sets the statutory framework for service delivery in Namibia. At the highest level is the national government. At the regional level thirteen regional authorities have been established. Each of these regional authorities has its own jurisdiction over a specific area of the country. Closer to the inhabitants of the country are a large number of local authorities that provide service to the local inhabitants under their jurisdiction. Although the Namibian Constitution determines the physical structure of the three levels of government, it is important to notice that the statutory framework is more comprehensive than just the physical structural framework. Other legislation also contributes towards the statutory framework for service delivery.

The efficiency of the Namibian public service is integral to the country's economic, social and ecological progress. Equal participation by all Namibian citizens, economic stability, effective fighting against poverty, an independent and just judicial system, and excellent performance in the educational and health sectors can only become a reality if all public officials on all levels of government fulfill their duties and responsibilities according to the principles of good governance.

The Namibian Constitution of 1990 made an important contribution to a new attitude amongst public officials and citizens regarding service delivery. The intention of certain sections in the constitution is to emphasise the importance of the narrative guidelines according to which public officials must deal with their clients. The origins of these narrative guidelines are the body politics, societal value systems and legal rules. Besides the Namibian Constitution the principles of good governance have been laid down in the Public Service Charter of the Republic of Namibia, the Customers Service Charter for each government office, agency or ministry and the public service code of conduct.

Measures to Enhance Service Delivery within the Namibian Public Sector

Redefinition of the Role of the State

Article 98 of the Namibian Constitution prescribes the economic order of Namibia which shall be based on the principles of a mixed economy. This type of economic order has as its main objectives securing of economic growth, prosperity and human dignity of all Namibians. In terms of the Namibian Gross Domestic Product the state and SOEs are the biggest single actors because of other significant buying and spending power. Such is the importance of this sector to the Namibian economy, that it must be managed in the most professional and efficient manner. These SOEs have reduced the workload of the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) in terms of diversified responsibilities which are now the responsibility of different SOEs on behalf of the GRN. The increased complexity of the sector has not been matched by a parallel development of governance policies. Currently, there only existed a fragmented policy approach and widespread uncertainty among the various stakeholders over governance procedures and mechanisms.

In order to address these problems the GRN has put in place some measures to reform and restructure SOEs. In this regard the Prime Minister has been tasked to put in place effective legislative measures necessary for the efficient and proper management of SOEs. Currently, the GRN has promulgated the State-Owned Enterprises Governance Act, Act 6 of 2006. The act makes provision for the establishment of a State Owned Enterprise Governance Council which will hopefully ensure that SOEs will be managed and operated in an effective and efficient manner.

The Boards of SOEs will in future consist of not only diligent and dedicated individuals but people with technical know-how and professional acumen. They must also be people who have distinguished themselves in areas connected with the activities of the SOE of which they are board members. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and top management cadres of SOEs must be individuals who have attained the requisite technical and professional knowledge and experience. The CEOs who do not possess the requisite academic qualification and who have little or no experience in the activities of the SOE in question will be unable to lead, control, supervise and direct their subordinates to achieve the goals of the SOE.

Redefining the role of the state also implies the transfer of various forms of power and authority to sub national governments. In this regard decentralization has become a popular way of transferring authority and responsibility for public functions from the central government to sub national governments. The main reason why the GRN has implemented the decentralization policy is to enhance local governance processes, improve the delivery of services to the local population and in this way contribute towards poverty reduction.

The last issue to be addressed as part of the redefinition of the role of the state deals with the downsizing of the public sector. The main reason for downsizing the public sector is to reduce huge budget deficits experienced. The ultimate goal of downsizing is to reduce the public sector staff numbers and the wage bill. Although downsizing is considered a valuable option, studies have indicated that although some governments retrenched staff without achieving any significant reduction in the wage bill, only a few achieved both a wage bill reduction and staff retrenchment, for example, Ghana and Uganda (Adadmolekun & Kiragu 2002:163). Within the Namibian context the emphasis over the last 17 years was on "right sizing" the public service rather than downsizing.

With reference to financial management a new approach is been implemented by countries like Ghana, Malawi, South Africa and Namibia. In this regard these countries have opted for the introduction of a linkage of functional reviews to the implementation of a medium-term expenditure framework. The objective of the medium-term expenditure framework is to produce a system that allows for better decision-making about public expenditure.

Other public service management reform measures that have been implemented by the GRN to improve the performance of its public sector are the modernization of the human resources management system, as well as the improvement of skills within the public sector.

In this regard the GRN has developed a Performance Management System (PMS) for the Namibian Public Service. The PMS is an approach to achieve a shared vision of the purpose and aims of the organization, helping each employee to understand and recognize his/her contribution to the mission and thus to manage and enhance performance of the organization. It is also an approach to managing people that entails planning employee performance, facilitating the achievement of work related goals and reviewing performance as a way of motivating employees to achieve their full potential in line with the organizations goals. Namibia who has experienced racial/ethnic diversity has implemented policies to rectify the illnesses of the past, such as the affirmative action policy and strategies. Namibia has also introduced strategies to ensure proper gender representation within the public sector.

Dealing with Corruption and Corporate Governance

President Hifikepunye Pohamba in his address at the opening of Cabinet on 28 March 2006 indicated that the GRN is fully committed to addressing corruption with a sledgehammer (Republic of Namibia, 2006). In this regard the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) which is provided for by the Anti-Corruption Act, 2003, (Act 8 of 2003) has been established and became functional. In liaison with existing structures, such as the Namibian Police, the courts, the Ombudsman and the Parliament, the anti-corruption machinery will in future forcefully deal with corruption with a view to root out corruption within the Namibian society.

One of the concerns raised regarding the rooting out of corruption within Namibia is the absence of legislation that provides for the protection of whistle-blowers – so that when people come and report they will come with confidence. Another concern raised is that currently there is no legislation regarding the access to information. When there is no legislation on the access to information it might lead to unethical and corrupt practices within the public sector.

Namibians have become accustomed to the concept of "Commissions of Enquiry". In this regard newspapers on a regular basis reported about commissions of enquiries that has been established to investigate some or other corporate entity. Most often these enquiries show that the disgraceful state of these institutions can be linked to the direct collapse of corporate governance in these institutions. One of the main reasons for such a state of affairs is because board members simply do not seem to be up to their tasks and appointees very often do not have what it takes to lead the business to success with a set of commercial principles. Millions of Namibian dollars are lost due to mismanagement, while millions more are needed to lift the institution/company out of its debts on an annual basis. Due to a lack of good corporate governance, investment opportunities often pass Namibia and go to other countries. In order to address this problem institutions within the public and private institutions are encouraged to adhere to the principles of good corporate governance and set up a code of conduct regarding service delivery.

On 5 February 2001, Ministers of Civil Services throughout Africa held their Third Biennial Pan African Conference in Windhoek, Namibia. At that conference the Ministers agreed that as part of the unity of African countries, all public services in Africa should work in harmony with a special charter. In this regard the conference adopted the Charter for the Public Service in Africa, which serves as a framework within which all the Public Services on the continent would work towards the same goals of service excellence. Namibia was a signatory of the charter.

Conclusion

In this article the author has analysed only two factors of reform and trust that it will generate further research into public sector reform in transitional countries. The purpose of public sector reform is to ensure effective, efficient and economically sound service delivery to the citizens of a country and thereby contribute towards the promotion of the general welfare of the society. It is generally accepted that successful and sustainable economic reform cannot take place without a competent public sector. Only the future will tell whether these measures will ensure that proper service rendering can be achieved.

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