

# Civil Service Reforms – the move from hype-to-hope

Dr. Sania Nishtar

Civil service reforms need to be an integral part of social sector reform processes if sustainable solutions to currently existing issues within the ambit social sector service delivery are envisaged. Within this context, there seems to be some justification for the perception that civil service reforms may finally be part of a mainstream agenda in Pakistan. This is evidenced by the initiation of processes such as the creation of a Committee for Civil Service reforms, the establishment of a Civil Service Reform Unit in the Establishment Division, launching of the Professional Development Agenda and the more recent announcement of the reform package for introducing good governance in the country by the Ministry of Law and signaling the importance of this area of reform by soliciting help from the multilateral development agencies. However, given that this is not the first time efforts are underway in this area, tipping the balance from the hope-to-hype equation will depend on the manner in which a strategic approach prevails – both in intent and in actions. Within this context, five points are worthy of consideration.

**1. Bridging the colonial-contemporary lag:** modeled on the colonial system, the core functions of Pakistan's civil services are administrative control, collection of revenue, exercising control through regulatory checks and in the case of its expanded definition to public services, active engagement in service delivery. Exceptions notwithstanding, this model has little relevance to the problems of the public sector today which relate to harnessing the entire resources of the economy towards the goal of development. The public sector's limitations – owing to lack of resources and management issues – therefore underscore the need to develop interface arrangements, with organizations that could facilitate achieving this goal. Such interface arrangements, which have to do with establishing partnerships with the private sector for providing sustainable outcomes warrant a paradigm shift in reconfiguring the role of the public sector. This would entail 'exercising administrative control' through participatory decision-making in evidence-based frameworks, 'enforcing regulation' through setting of standards, an unbiased approach to ensuring compliance with these standards and assurance through strengthening peer organizations as we move to new models of financing and delivering services and implementing frameworks for public-private partnerships. This would require major institutional changes in the present arrangement of civil service operations. Reconfiguring to meet this goal is the first challenge that the civil service reforms will have to address.

**2. The incentives-accountability-performance nexus:** many a times, civil service reforms are considered as being synonymous with incentive building. Clearly incentives – albeit linked to performance – must be a priority to

## The NEWS International: Sunday, April 09, 2006

Justice delayed 1

civil service reforms part of agenda in Pakistan? After much hype here is hope



Colonial structure: Civil Services Academy in Lahore.

## Government, long term

Civil service reforms need to be an integral part of social sector reform processes if sustainable solutions to currently existing issues within the ambit of social sector service delivery are envisaged. Within this context, there seems to be some justification for the perception that civil service reforms may finally be part of a mainstream agenda in Pakistan. This is evidenced by the initiation of processes such as the creation of a Committee for Civil Service reforms, the establishment of a Civil Service Reform Unit in the Establishment Division, launching of the Professional Development Agenda and the more recent announcement of the reform package for introducing good governance in the country by the Ministry of Law and signalling the importance of this area of reform by soliciting help from the multilateral development agencies. However, given that this is not the first time efforts are underway in this area, tipping the balance from the hope-to-hype equation will depend on the manner in which a strategic approach prevails – both in intent and in actions. Within this context, five points are worthy of consideration.

1. Bridging the colonial-contemporary lag: Modeled on the colonial system, the core functions of Pakistan's civil services are administrative control, collection of revenue, exercising control through regulatory checks and in the case of its expanded definition to public services, active engagement in service delivery. Exceptions notwithstanding, this model has little relevance to the problems of the public sector today which relate to harnessing the entire resources of the economy towards the goal of development. The public sector's limitations – owing to lack of resources and management issues – therefore underscore the need to develop interface arrangements, with organizations that could facilitate achieving this goal. Such interface arrangements, which have to do with establishing partnerships with the private sector for providing sustainable outcomes warrant a paradigm shift in reconfiguring the role of the public sector. This would entail 'exercising administrative control' through participatory decision-making in evidence-based frameworks, 'enforcing regulation' through setting of standards, an unbiased approach to ensuring compliance with these standards and assurance through strengthening peer organizations as we move to new models of financing and delivering services and implementing frameworks for public-private partnerships. This would require major institutional changes in the present arrangement of civil service operations. Reconfiguring to meet this goal is the first challenge that the civil service reforms will have to address.

2. The incentives-accountability-performance nexus: Many a time, civil service reforms are considered as being synonymous with incentive building. Clearly incentives – albeit linked to performance – must be a priority to tipping the balance from the hope-to-hype equation will depend on the manner in which a strategic approach prevails – both in intent and in actions. Within this context, five points are worthy of consideration.

3. Civil service reforms to re-orient institutional culture: Civil service reforms should not just be about incentives for performance, about reforming a line for service or about compensating bureaucrats. The reform process must focus on governance in its broader context and enhancing efficiency in the delivery of public services in a conducive institutional culture geared in the outcomes-efficiency context rather than being focused on short term gains. Therefore, in addition to personal management reforms which go beyond personal action and incentives – albeit linked to performance – must be a priority to bridging the current disparity between the current public-sector salaries and market-rate for professionals, which is evidenced by what consultants 'within' the public sector are offered. It must be recognized though that lack of incentives is clearly a constraint on the ability to act on these incentives. This highlights the need for instituting appropriate tailored capacity-building programmes in tandem with recruitment, Promotion and Pay and Pension Reforms currently on their way to being implemented. Capacity building must be needs-based and targeted. The current three-pronged capacity building initiatives inclusive of the Professional Development Program, the Executive Development Program and retraining of the existing training institutions must pay careful attention to the local context of capacity building at the strategic and operational levels. Building capacity for performance must be approached in tandem with creating a milieu to enhance performance and the incentive-performance link completed by factoring in accountability into the equation. This highlights the need for institutionalising transparent managerial audit within public sector organisations at various levels. Careful attention should also be paid to developing appropriate instruments for assessing performance.

4. From civil service to public services reforms: The current focus on 'civil services' within the context of 'service reforms' is understandable given that it is seen as an instrument for mainstreaming second generation macro-economic reforms. But if this is to translate into improved social services delivery, other cadre and ex-cadre categories of public servants must be brought within its ambit. One of the challenges posed to service delivery in the area of health and education relates to human resource – low numbers for distribution of workforce, staff absenteeism, dual job holding, lack of motivation to perform and the proverbial brain drain are manifestations of the lack of economic opportunities and incentives often complicated by other factors. These must be at the heart of a strategic re-orientation rather than ad hoc measures.

5. Devolution vis-a-vis decentralization: Civil service reforms to improve governance must also have an added context given that social service delivery is now devolved to hundred district governments which have little experience of such responsibilities. This underscores the need for the reform efforts to pay close attention to two processes in the first place, granting district autonomy and authority should proceed on a sliding scale with capacity as a first consideration. In the second place, it is important to build appropriate safeguards against several issues which have been brought to attention during the initial years of implementation of the Local Government Ordinance of 2001. For example, provincial governments still retain influence over establishment decisions and considerable de facto control over recruitments, career management, transfers and promotion. It has also been shown that political and 'decentralisation' has also paradoxically created 'centralisation' of some functions within the district itself as the DCO now has centralized control over all the staffing decisions vis-a-vis EDOs. In addition to discrepancies in reporting relationships are also worthy of note in the context of the need to address them.

6. Many reform measures are presently on their way to being structured and implemented in many sectors – of these the police reforms, judicial reforms, and reforms introduced by the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority and the National Anti Corruption Strategy have been announced and there may be others in the pipeline. A reform agenda in the health sector has also been tabled by the Pakistan's Health Policy Forum. It must be clearly understood that the success of all these reform measures and others that may be in the pipeline will rest not only on the manner in which they pay the attention to human resource solutions – within the civil service – but also within the broader context of human resources. The aforementioned five points have been articulated with a view to catalyse a long term vision in line with this approach.

The author is the President of the NGO Heartfile and Pakistan's Health Policy Think Tank. Email: sania@heartfile.org

Dr. Sania Nishtar

### change

regulatory checks and in the case of its expanded definition to public services, active engagement in service delivery. Exceptions notwithstanding, this model has little relevance to the problems of the public sector today which relate to harnessing the entire resources of the economy towards the goal of development. The public sector's limitations – owing to lack of resources and management issues – therefore underscore the need to develop interface arrangements, with organizations that could facilitate achieving this goal. Such interface arrangements, which have to do with establishing partnerships with the private sector for providing sustainable outcomes warrant a paradigm shift in reconfiguring the role of the public sector. This would entail 'exercising administrative control' through participatory decision-making in evidence-based frameworks, 'enforcing regulation' through setting of standards, an unbiased approach to ensuring compliance with these standards and assurance through strengthening peer organizations as we move to new models of financing and delivering services and implementing frameworks for public-private partnerships. This would require major institutional changes in the present arrangement of civil service operations. Reconfiguring to meet this goal is the first challenge that the civil service reforms will have to address.

bridge the current disparity between the current public-sector salaries and the public-sector-accepted-market-rate for professionals, which is evidenced by what consultants ‘within’ the public sector are offered. However, it must be recognized that lack of capacity is clearly a constraint on the ability to act on these incentives. This highlights the need for instituting appropriately tailored capacity-building programs in tandem with Recruitment, Promotion and Pay and Pension Reforms currently on their way to being implemented. However, capacity building must be needs-based and targeted. The current three-pronged capacity building initiatives inclusive of the Professional Development Program, the Executive Development Program and revamping of the existing training institutions must pay careful attention to the local context of capacity building at the strategic and operational levels.

Building capacity for performance must be approached in tandem with creating a milieu to enhance performance and the incentive-performance link completed by factoring-in accountability into the equation. This highlights the needs for institutionalizing transparent managerial audit within public sector institutions at various levels. Careful attention should also be paid to developing appropriate instruments for assessing performance. Currently, the Annual Confidential Report is the chief instrument for assessing the performance of public officials in Pakistan; however it is widely perceived that it is not an effective instrument for promoting accountability and is also reportedly used as a means of exploitation.

**3. Civil service reforms to reorient institutional culture:** civil service reforms should not just be about incentives for performance, about reforming a line for service or about compensation of bureaucrats. The reform process must focus on governance in its broader context and enhancing efficiency in the delivery of public services in a conducive institutional culture – a culture geared in the outcomes-efficiency context rather than being focused on short term gains. Therefore, in addition personnel management reforms which go beyond personnel action and set standards for performance and build mechanisms for their assessment and rewards there is a need to pay attention to transparent regulation and minimizing vested interests, political benefaction and interference in decisions, particularly in relation to recruitment, transfers and disciplinary actions as these are perceived as an impediment to efficiency within the system, in addition to being a demoralizing factor within the public sector.

**4. From civil service to public service reforms:** the current focus on ‘civil servants’ within the context of ‘service reforms’ is understandable given that it is seen as an instrument for mainstreaming second generation macro-economic reforms. However if this is to translate into improved social services delivery, other cadre and ex-cadre categories of public servants must be brought within its ambit. One of the challenges posed to service delivery in the area of health and education relates to human resource – low numbers for certain categories, migration of skilled workers, misdistribution of workforce, staff absenteeism, dual job holding, lack of motivation to perform and the proverbial brain drain are manifestations of the lack of economic opportunities and incentives often complicated by other factors. These must be at the heart of a strategic reform process rather than *ad hoc* measures.

**5. Devolution vis-à-vis Decentralization:** Civil service reforms to improve governance must also have an added context given that social service delivery is now devolved to 100 districts governments who have little experience of such responsibility in the past. This underscores the need for the reform efforts to pay close attention to two processes. In the first place, granting district autonomy and authority should proceed on a sliding scale with capacity as a due consideration. In the second place, it is important to build appropriate safeguards against several issues which have been brought to attention during the initial years of implementation of the Local Government Ordinance of 2002. For example, Provincial Governments still retain influence over establishment decisions and have considerable de facto control over recruitments, career management, transfers and termination. It has also been shown that political and administrative ‘decentralization’ has also paradoxically created ‘centralization’ of some functions within the district itself as the DCO now has centralized control over all the staffing decisions vis-à-vis EDOs. In addition discrepancies in reporting relationships are also worthy of note in the context of the need to address them.

Many reforms measures are presently on their way to being structured and implemented in many sectors – of these the Police reforms, Judicial reforms, and reforms introduced by the Public Procurement Regulatory

Authority and the National Anti Corruption Strategy have been announced and there may be others, in the pipeline. A reform agenda in the health sector has also been tabled by the Pakistan's Health Policy Forum. However it must be clearly understood that the success of all these reform measures and others that may be in the pipeline will depend not only on the manner in which they pay due attention to human resource solutions – within the civil service – but also within the broader context of human resources. The aforementioned five points have been articulated with a view to catalyze a long term vision in line with this approach.

*The author is the Founder President of the NGO Heartfile and Pakistan's Health Policy Think Tank. E mail: [sania@heartfile.org](mailto:sania@heartfile.org)*