

The Political Economy of Reform *Designing, Initiating, and Sustaining Public Sector Reform in Developing Countries*

SECOND PART

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Enhancing Transparency and Accountability

Among developing countries there is considerable cynicism about the sudden enthusiasm (notably in the 1990s) for good governance and public sector reform on the part of the multilateral donors. In countries where dictatorships were replaced by democratic regimes (the Philippines, Bangladesh and Indonesia), donors demanded new standards of governance that had never been an issue earlier. Indeed, donors had been comfortable with the modalities of policy implementation under non-democratic regimes, less susceptible to legal challenges and better able to ignore public protests.

While it is recognized that donors are under pressure from their own taxpavers to ensure that aid resources are spent wisely, aid recipients remain unconvinced of the moral authority of those pushing measures to improve transparency and accountability. The uneven application of governance and reform conditionalities (dictated by the unwillingness to harm bilateral trade and investment interests and the geo-political interests of key shareholders in the Bretton Woods institutions) has, however, exposed the subjective nature of the standards set by donors.

The suspicion with which donor prescriptions on governance are viewed must not be allowed to obscure the fact that transparency, openness in government and accountability still remain intrinsically worthily goals, being essential to ensuring efficient government which in turn must underpin faster growth. Accountability and transparency in government represent safeguards which can help ensure that the public interest is pursued, quality services are provided to citizens equitably and at the lowest possible cost, and that the development of a competitive private sector is encouraged

Improving citizen's access to information about government can have important benefit in terms of checking corruption and improving the quality of decision-making, and in this regard the laws on secrecy in government may need to be reviewed in quite a few developing countries. Civil servants in India and Pakistan and Bangladesh will routinely treat the most innocent requests for information with caution, unsure as to whether this information may be used to criticize their (or their bosses' actions). Thus, a policy of openness in government must begin with a change in the legislation to create sanctions against the withholding of information except in the rare cases where national security may be involved. In New Zealand the Official Secrets Act says that all information about the activities of the government is available unless designated as secret. The problem in South Asia is that this classification is granted far too readily. One reason is that access to confidential information is itself an important source of rent-seeking by public officials. Exposing discretionary authority to the glare of public scrutiny can in itself serve as a powerful deterrent to wrongdoing by public officials Much has been written about the high levels of corruption prevailing in developing countries and the absence of legal and administrative sanctions to check corrupt practices. The low levels of civil service pay are part of the explanation, but the pervasiveness of corrupt practices in the broader society is a more important factor. It is a difficult problem, without easy clinical solutions, but that should not be an excuse for inaction. There are two general approaches to the problem of corruption, which are not mutually exclusive: reducing the opportunities for corruption by restructuring government to reduce discretionary authority through liberalization measures, and imposing sanctions

for wrongdoing. There are limits to the former in terms of problems engendered by rolling back the state too far. In the critical area of regulation, for example, a large discretion-

arv element must remain. This becomes a serious problem in most developing countries, as knowledgeable regulators respected for their integrity are difficult to find. The imposition of sanctions has met with very mixed successes, given the lack of confidence in the process through which guilt and punishment are decided. The deterrent value of court-imposed fines or sentences is diminished by widespread perceptions that the (lower) courts themselves are corrupt. The implication is that a guilty verdict merely reflects the inability or unwillingness of the accused to meet the "price of justice". Anti-corruption bureaus in developing countries have also not covered themselves in glory given their predilection for the selective pursuit of cases filed against members of previous government. Moreover, as they are often headed by senior civil servants they have generally not successfully pursued

ses against other civil servants. Given resource constraints it is generally not feasible to raise all government salaries to levels that would remove the most basic incen-

tives for corruption. The gap with private sector salaries (even if it does not have to be bridged entirely due to the benefits in terms of stability of civil service employment) is so large that it cannot be significantly narrowed without endangering the achievement of macroeconomic targets by blowing out the budget deficit. However we would argue that the total budget for the judiciary is generally small in relation to total government spending and it may be possible to bring salaries in this sector in line with market levels without unbalancing the fiscal position. The rationale for this is that although it is not possible to use higher salaries to save the entire public sector from the temptation for rent-seeking one can at least try to insulate the only available instrument for corrective action. In this context, however, the problem of adverse selection" should be noted simply raising judicial salaries of incumbents may reward those who

had been attracted to the judiciary by the prospect of illegal incomes. We are left with few real choices in terms of short term remedies. Clearly, the first approach described above (reducing discretionary authority of public officials) is the best available option. However, the process of reducing corruption is likely to be a long one, and we would argue that the likelihood of donors or external agencies significantly speeding up the process is slim.

Expanding the role of (elective) local governments (LGs) must be an important element of any program to enhance accountability and promote good governance. One common objection to supporting such initiatives is that local governments are susceptible to capture by local elites This may be so, but as long as there is active competition among elite groups for electoral support and elections remain fair, local governments will be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of communi ties than appointees from the center. The critical issues in bolstering local overnment include: !developing LG units of an appropriate size, so that they are large enough to exploit economies of scale and undertake lumpy investments, while at the same time remaining small enough to ensure wide participation and effective monitoring by the local community; !reforming LG finances and where possible, expanding local revenue sources to supplement subventions from the national government; and, !transferring basic public services to LG management. Note that this does not mean that LGs would be responsible for service delivery, which could be contracted out to the private sector, NGOs or even agencies of the central government.

... Government is doing too many commercial functions that others can do better, and too little in quantity and quality of what it should be doing more... It is overextended with attendant regulatory intrusiveness, inefficient in most of its activities, and has too many people doing too little but more often obstructing initiative without any penalty for delayed decisions. World Bank, Bangladesh: Government That Works--Reforming the Public Sector (1996), p. xvii.

Reforming the Civil Service

With a few exceptions such as Thailand (which did not experience direct colonial rule) developing countries' civil services have tended to retain many of the features of their colonial predecessors. However, whereas colonial administrations were geared to a relatively narrow range of functions such as the maintenance of law and order and tax collection, the civil service of a developing country must deal with the much more difficult task of managing and implementing the country's social and economic development. Three post-colonial developments have made radical reforms in this area essential. First, government has expanded in size and its scope: secondly, under a democratic framework greater responsiveness is required. Third, the abuse of discretionary powers has led to the creation of protective layers of decision-making and cross-checks to dilute authority (and responsibility for decisions).

As a consequence of poor training, low levels of motivation, excessive political interference in promotions and postings, decision-making in most developing countries' civil services are characterized by the following weaknesses: "First, most officials are either

unaware of the appropriate government policies, or are unwilling to express a clear opinion in case this is misconstrued as second-guessing a superior officer. Second, the system appears to be based on the belief that passing a file through five (partially competent) layers, greatly enhances the probability of detecting a problem. Third, civil servants prefer group decision-making over

Ironically, the capability of the civil service to manage and implement public sector reforms is often eroded by the first phase of liberalization and other market-oriented reforms. The latter increase employment opportunities in the private sector, and when this is combined with IMF-World Bank sponsored civil service retrenchment programs (sometimes geared towards freeing up resources to allow an increase in salaries) there can be serious adverse consequences in terms of the loss of the

best and most skilled staff. It may be argued that the root of the problem is acceptance of the hypocrisy of the gross underpayment of civil servants. This is an issue that the IMF tends to avoid, because corrective action would jeopardize fiscal consolidation efforts. In fact, part of the erosion in public sector salaries can be traced to periods under IMF programs. Public sector salary levels in developing countries have failed to keep pace with inflation or private sector remuneration, particularly for senior civil servants. For example, for Bangladesh during the period 1962-94 the salary compression ratio for Secretaries relative to peons has declined from 1:46 to 1:10. Moreover, public sector salaries are at most one-fifth that of private sector comparators in Bangladesh

The Role of the Multilateral and Bilateral Donors

As noted earlier, it has been argued that developing countries have not been able to develop the mechanisms for continuous institutional and policy reforms that are operational in the developed economies. It has been suggested that the absence of a public outcry against the power to punish non-compliance and to reward "reformist" governments, as the second quotation above would indicate.

The influence of these agencies is further accentuated by crossconditionality in lending. Although generally denied, in practice the Bretton Woods institutions exert their influence to ensure that other donor agencies (including bilaterals) and private international banks pull back from new lending (or even delay disbursements where governments fail to reach agreement on conditions attached to World Bank-IMF lending programmes. It may be argued that this practice is sometimes difficult to discern given other lenders genuine concerns about the failure to reach agreement on a World Bank-IMF programme, but nonetheless, it does occur. While this pressure is generally effective when the country in question is facing balance of payments or other financial difficulties the acceptance of conditions made under duress rarely leads to wholehearted acceptance of specified reforms. It is assumed that the two agencies work in tandem to push a reform agenda. In cases where there is disagreement between them countries face the prospect of satisfying neither in attempting to

go along with both. Certainly, the legitimacy of the Bretton Woods agencies' new role as the advocates and arbiters of good governance may be challenged. Recommendations on transparency and accountability from the IMF appear ironic given its continued secretiveness and resistance to such things as any genuine external review of its activities or the creation of a competitor agency

restructuring the civil service and curbing corruption) are not susceptible to quick fixes and may require long-term programmes outside the time horizon of most staff members. In many cases genuine progress may be difficult to gauge and there is

quite superficial "milestones" It may be argued that these agencies must have some measuring rods of success, however imperfect, even though progress reforms is necessarily more difficult to monitor and quantify than, for example, economic stabilization programmes. However, it should be noted that in practice the pursuit of some intermediate targets in reform programmes may not only be meaningless and but may actually delay achievement of the ultimate goals. An example of this would be the civil service retrenchment programmes undertaken in Papua New Guinea under the aegis of the World Bank in the late 1990s. These were done without proper functional reviews of government agencies and resulted in the erosion of their effectiveness demonstrated by declining (as standards of service delivery) with little benefit in the form of lasting cost savings

A second set of issues relates to the "ownership" of reform programmes. Without labouring the point, we would note that the World Bank and IMF often pay only lip service to this concept and then appear bewildered at the slow and incomplete implementation of reforms and their clients' indenious attempts to negate the impact of lending conditions. One example of this has been Russia, where an initial round of IMF financing was provided in 1993 (for obviously political rea-

'... ill-timed financial assistance to unready countries can undermine the pressure to reform... This suggests that foreign assistance follow a different course of action in countries that are ready to reform from those that are not." World Bank, Bureaucrats in Business (1995), p. 259.

group-aided decision-making: they prefer to make decisions in committee to diffuse the responsibility". World Bank, government That works, p. 106-7

Two broad approaches to meritocatic recruitment for the civil service are suggested: the "mandarin" or "cadre" system based on entry at the beginning of a lifelong career through competitive examinations, and less commonly, the open recruitment system. The latter is a more market-oriented and flexible system of recruitment and is exemr the system in place in New Zealand. The difficulty with the latter is the need to provide managers with more discretion in hiring and firing decisions in many developing countries the risk of political pressures to make appointments is very obvious. In general, developing countries would thus appear to be better served by the "cadre" system, but the overall quality of the civil service in terms of education, training and motivation need to be improved through what must be a long-term process of reform. One of the best examples of well-planned reform is that of Malaysia, which completely revamped its civil service beginning in the mid-1960s, but began to reap the benefits of reform in the 1980s as the individuals recruited at the outset of the programs began to head departments. While such a process is ongoing, it is suggested that as a temporary measure lateral entry

inefficient government reflects the (such as the Asian Monetary Fund), "ineffectiveness of the constitutional and public structures that regulate accountability and transparency" (World Bank, 1996, p. 50). Accordingly, it has been suggested that external support is needed to strengthen the internal forces for reform in developing countries. However, here one enters the territory of intervention in a country's political processes and institutional framework. Over the past decade or so the World Bank and the IMF (and shaping countrie individua agencies

are often difficult to accept. It is widely perceived that the governance standards to which countries are held differs widely depending on the external financial position of the country in question and its political relationship to key shareholders in these two institutions. Even if one does not subscribe to conspiracy theories, there is room for legitimate concerns about the large and unchecked discretionary power wielded by the Bretton Woods

sons) with few effective conditions attached. This has been followed by further but declining levels of support as the absence of real political commitment to the reform process became obvious

A third, related issue relates to the sustainability of public sector reform. This issue has several dimensions. the two most important of which are: the political survival of the group undertaking the reforms. Where the groundwork for implementing reforms are not done, and an effec-

process has to be externally designed, initiated and then sustained through promises of enhanced resource flows (or indeed, threats of withholding aid) progress may be slow and deceptive. Developing countries correctly perceive that countries are treated very differently by the multilateral agencies, and the absence of any really objective standards for perfor mance in implementing reform weakens any moral authority that the donors may wield. This does not mean that donors should step back from the public sector reform area entirely, but perhaps their thinking on the issue needs to change given the a tendency to focus on sometimes long-term processes involved and the need to ensure strong domestic support for reform. In fact, there is now increasing recognition among donors that a policy of supporting ngoing domestic reform efforts as a facilitator rather than as a manager may be a more effective strategy in

sector reforms. Where the reform

Building Up a Constituency for Sustained Reform

the long run.

One puzzling aspect of poor public sector performance in most developing countries is the low level of public protest at inefficiencies and inadeuacies in service delivery. This is reflected in the absence of any reference to this issue in most political parties' election platforms. Although newspapers sometimes carry stories of government waste and inefficiency, most citizens are resigned to the fact that such shortcomings exist, and have no real expectation of improvement.

There are a number of reasons for the absence of any public outcry at government failure. One reason is that the pervasive cynicism in these countries even extends to the press as there may be a perception that the owner of a newspaper is targeting a particular public official or department due to the failure to extract some favour, or even for payment. A second reason is the fear of the power of the state, which may be the monopoly provider of many essential services. Third, the wealthiest and most articulate members of society have to a large extent been able to bypass the failures of the state in areas by turning to private suppliers in areas such as health, education and security. Fourth, there is a perception that even if there is waste, it is largely foreign aid that is being squandered. Increasingly, as countries become less dependent on foreign assistance, this factor will subside and there will be greater

ciency in government. For sustainable reform to take place, it is vital to demonstrate to the political leadership that public sector reform is an attractive electoral strategy. Enlightened self-interest rather than threats of aid cutbacks are more likely to succeed in achieving the subtle attitudinal changes that are being sought. This can be done in four ways: through educating political leaders about the nature. net benefits and possible modalities of reform; by undertaking consumer/voter surveys that will demonstrate interest and support for such measures, and reduce uncertainty about the nature and costs of the reform process:

public outrage at waste and ineffi-

these measures may be the somewhat longer time-frame required for their implementation, but we would argue that there is limited scope for telescoping the reform process.

Educating the political leadership in the benefits of reform must be given priority. In most developing countries, for example, new appointees to the Cabinet (those without direct experience in administration) must learn about aspects of the operations of their agencies and key policy options while dealing with daytoday issues, with little more than cursory briefings by senior officials. Ideally, it would be beneficial to provide training on public sector reform issues in seminars such as the ones being undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat, but in many cases ministers may find it impossible to match their schedules with such programmes. A more longterm approach would focus on groups such as backbench MPs of both the government and opposition, who are likely to have more time to

attend such programmes. The use of consumer and voter surveys may also be a potent tool for increasing awareness of the underlving demand for public sector reform. As political parties operating in a democratic setting must be sensitive to the aspirations of the electorate, this should be effective in demonstrating support for reforms. The difficulty here is that in countries with low levels of education and poor communications, there may be little public awareness or understanding of the benefits of reform. If this is true, however, does it make sense to try to force democratic governments pursue unpopular reform programmes?

Educating people about public sector reform through media programmes may thus be essential in cases where there is poor understanding of the benefits. Innovative approaches using the electronic media may need to be developed in societies with low literacy levels and poor communications. These public education programmes should be designed and undertaken by the national and local government authorities rather than donors. This campaign should highlight the domestic compulsions for reform noted earlier, most importantly the need to use public sector reforms to strengthen the economy and to avoid a situation where reforms are

forced upon an unwilling nation. Given the very low expectations of citizens in developing countries about the quality of public services. even marginal changes may gain public appreciation. It may be useful to begin with an explicit statement of the new user-oriented approach to the provision of government services in the manner of the "Citizen's Charter" (CC) in the UK or the "People First" programme in South Africa. The CC, for example, indicates that citizens can expect public service providers to provide: explicit standards: information and openness choice and consultation; courtesy and neiptuiness, easy to use con plaints procedures and value for money. It is also important to select the right sectors for "pilot programmes" which can have significant demonstration effects and increase public awareness of the benefits of reform. It would also be useful in this regard to highlight the cases of individual government agencies that operate more efficiently than the rest of the government and examine the possibility of replicating their successes.

from outside the civil service for a limited number of management positions may be considered. despite the likely resistance from members of the civil service.

collectively through Aid Consortia) have overcome any remaining compunctions about infringing on a country's sovereignty in this manner, even when the country's policies are based on democratic processes. Initially, these agencies devoted their attention only to structural adjustment in the economic sphere but now there is much greater recognition now that public sector weaknesses and governance shortcomings can ieopardize the implementation of any broad programme of economic reform. Although bilateral donors do push the governance agenda, the lead (at Paris Group and other donor meetings) is invariably taken by the two international agencies, and the discussion that follows will focus on their activi-

donors

ateral

Both the World Bank and the IMF use their lending programmes to aggressively push for improvements in governance, linking disbursements to performance benchmarks and necessary policy actions (including the promulgation of new laws). This gives these institutions

reform agendas.

However, even if we do not question the right of the Bretton Woods institutions to initiate and push a public sector reform programme, simply accepting the reality of their enormous leverage over borrowers, there are some critical issues notably those of design, "ownership" and sustainability raised by their interventions.

First, it should be emphasized that the World Bank and IMF have certain features in common with other bureaucracies, notably difficulties in measuring performance and in creating appropriate incentive systems. There is, for example, little accountability for wrong lending decisions, and a preoccupation with inputs (scale of lending, number of loans) rather than outputs (positive impact of loans or programmes). Another problem is their focus on short-term, quantifiable results and "achievements" such as discrete

policy actions or announcements (that can then be listed at Board discussions). However, many of the

problems being addressed (such as

alliance of interests in favour of reform have not been mobilized. undertaking far-reaching reforms may involve the unreasonable requirement that the political leadership accept the risk of being pushed out of power, and

the extent to which, on balance the initial reforms broaden the constituency for further reform. The success and benefits of the initial reforms may need to be publicized, but this should not be taken to mean that putting the right "spin" on reform through a publicity machine will always be effective. Even in countries where educational standards are low, it would be wrong to underestimate the perceptiveness of users of public services in judging whether touted improvements in service quality. access and delivery have in fact taken place.

In summary, we would argue that public sector reform in developing countries can be furthered by pressure from donors but only up to a point. Moreover. the IMF and World Bank bureaucracies may not be the most appropriate vehicles for the design and implementation of public

through public education programmes that would highlight the success of initial reform measures and emphasize the adverse conse quences for growth and equity of

inaction in the remaining areas; by making an explicit statement of the purposes of reform and by initiating reforms in selected areas characterized by high levels of public interaction, both of which could ensure an early recognition of benefits.

All of these measures would assist in developing the constituency for public sector reform without which programmes would otherwise founder due to the "lack of political commitment" which is so commonly decried by donors. One objection to

(Concluded)

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Excerpts from the main report of Hamoodur Rahman Commission of Inquiry as declassified by Government of Pakistan

POLITICAL BACKGROUND: XII

ETWEEN the 13th February, hen General Yahya summoned the National Assembly and the 1st March, when he postponed it, other political activities of a more subtle kind, were going on in West Pakistan. We have already had occasion to refer to General Mohammad Umar, ostensibly Secretary of the National Security Council but really engaged, during the election campaign in collecting and distributing funds, secretly but obviously in pursuance to General Yahya's own political plans. Evidence of various witnesses shows clearly that at this time he was employed for the purpose of persuading some of the West Wing politicians not to attend the National Assembly and or to demand that it be postponed. Among those whom he visited for the purpose were Mr Daultana and Khan Abdul Qayum Khan. Others, including Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani of the Jamiat-e-Ulam-i-

Pakistan, have told us that General Yahya was not successful in his attempts; for instance Maulana Shah Ahmed Noorani actually went to Dacca. Except as to the Pakistan Peoples Party of course it is impossible to say of the others that they would not have gone, much less that they were dissuaded by General Yahya. Since the postponement was announced on the 1st March after which it would, in any case, have been pointless to go. But we have not found it possible to accept either General Yahya's or General Umar's denial of the activities alleged, in view of the other evidence. It is, we think, clear, that having decided to postpone the Assembly General Yahya wanted it to appear that his hands had been forced by the attitude of the West Wing politicians who intended to boycott the session if it was held on the 3rd March. To say, however, that the General and Mr Bhutto were in close concert

with each other is not, we think, justified. We have narrated at some length an account of the meeting that took place between Mujibur Rahman and General Yahya early in January as also that which took place soon thereafter at Larkana. There is on the other side an allegation of the Pakistan People's Party that the General was in fact collaborating with Mujibur Rahman. In support of this charge is cited the fact that General Yahya purported to find nothing unacceptable in the Six-Point programme, that he publicly announced that Mr Mujibur Rahman would be his Prime Minister and that he privately received and welcomed an invitation to continue as President. We are constrained to come to the conclusion that so far from General Yahya collaborating with Mr Bhutto or with Shaikh Mujibur Rahman much less with any minor party, he was playing one party against the other. To this course of action he appears to have

been driven by the unexpectedly massive support which Shaikh Mujibur Rahman had received in the polls. That in the ultimate result this scheme resulted only in the disintegration of Pakistan and the fall from power of General Yahva himself is a sorry sequel but hardly one we think that had been calculated. After the elections in East Pakistan, the convening of the National Assembly had been eagerly awaited and when that was delayed the tension was gradually at first and more rapidly later mounting. The announcement on the 13th of February that the Assembly would meet on the 3rd of March, relieved this tension. But in direct proportion to this relief and even accentuated thereby was the provocation offered by the postponement announced on the 1st of March. That postponement, West Pakistan read as a final announcement that come what may, they would not be allowed to enjoy the fruit of the election results. East

Pakistan reacted violently. Accordingly, the immediate results were violent demonstrations and disturbances in Dacca. The army was called out to cope with the situation but after taking some action was called back to the barracks within 48 hours. This was followed by the inaction of the Army right up to the 25th of March, 1971. By this time, of course it was useless to hope that the ordinary agency of the government namely, the police or even the paramilitary forces like the East Pakistan Rifles, could be relied upon to restore law and order. After all, members of the civil services, and even the armed forces. however disciplined, are human and in the violent upsurge of feeling that had taken place revolving round militant sense of Bengali nationalism, it was only to be expected that most East Pakistanis would share the feelings of the populace. The situation had to be controlled then if at all, by the regular armed forces.

From that day onwards the violence ent on mounting.

The question that has been raised before us over and over again and which has disturbed our mind is how could a government absolve itself of the duty of maintaining law and order and protecting the life. liberty, honour and property of its citizens on any excuse whatever, and still call itself a government. The explanation which comes forth reveals a peculiar state of affairs. We are told that the local administration, that is, the Martial Law Administration and the Governor were restrained from Pindi from taking action. They could, in any case, not resort to the arrest of a leader of any importance without express permission from the Centre and this, it is stated, is the explanation why the army having been called out in Dacca on the 2nd and having taken some action, was not allowed to continue to do so but had to return to their barracks. The

reason behind this prohibition is stated to be that at all costs the door of negotiations with Shaikh Mujibur Rahman had to be kept open and that nothing was to be done which

to refrain from interfering with or

prohibiting a political movement: it is

quite another to permit violence of its

order. The first may well be regarded

as the refusal by a government to

interfere with the expression of

people's political will. The second

can only be regarded as a shameful

oblivion of government's essential

functions and primary duties. Indeed

this inaction on the part of the gov-

ernment led to two verv serious

In the first place early and firm action would have necessitated the use of far less force than later was employed. It may well have had a would annoy the Shaikh so as to salutary effect. A senior army officer make him unwilling to negotiate. We posted in East Pakistan has told us are quite unable to accept this that he himself, a day before 7th of March, 1971, when an important explanation. There is no evidence meeting of the Awami League to before us that such strong instructions were given and even if they which we shall presently refer, was were, this would not absolve the to be held, informed Shaikh Mujibur local administration, with the full Rahman that while government force of the military available to it of would not interfere with peaceful its own responsibility. It is one thing political meetings, however,

consequences.

attempted or if the anticipated unilateral declaration of independence was made.

Tomorrow: POLITICAL BACKGROUND-XIII

extreme their tone be, they would

come in firmly if violence was