

5. PUBLIC SECTOR MANAGEMENT REFORMS

- 5.1 In almost all countries, the State remains the largest single employer. It fulfils the basic functions of providing goods and services of public interest to its citizens. The public sector which is responsible for the provision of these goods and services is considered pivotal in the promotion of socio-economic development and is at the base of the effectiveness of the State. As public funds are involved in providing these services, a continuous scrutiny is exercised by the population, putting the public sector under pressure to achieve private sector results. To ensure that the public sector continues to be effective and competitive, reforms need to be brought thereto whenever necessary.
- 5.2 Reform initiatives aim at strengthening the capacity to perform Government functions necessary for sustainable economic and social development. It is expected that the application of reform measures will render the public sector more responsive to the needs of citizens through increased accountability, promoting effectiveness and efficiency and ultimately raising the quality of public services to satisfy citizens.

Government Vision/Strategy

- 5.3 The aim of Government is to make Mauritius an innovation-driven high-income economy, based on inclusiveness and shared prosperity. To this end, in its Programme (2015-2019) entitled "Achieving Meaningful Change", it undertook to consolidate a responsible and responsive Public Service. Consequently, a series of cutting-edge measures focusing, among others, on Human Capital Development, Streamlining of Processes, and Optimisation of Information and Communication Technologies were announced to bring about transformational change in the public sector.
- 5.4 Along the same lines, the Government has in its new Programme 2020-2024 committed to, *inter alia*, enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms within institutions; uphold the philosophy of equity and "*chances égales pour tous*" to ensure merit-based selection and recruitment; and strengthen governance of parastatal institutions along with ensuring adequate and appropriate gender representation on their Board of Directors. Furthermore, as Public Sector Transformation occupies a prominent place in the 2020-2024 Programme, Government is envisaging to pursue with the implementation of a cohesive Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy encompassing the Whole-of-Government Approach.

Current State of Affairs

- 5.5 In its 2016 Report, the Bureau advocated the synergizing of the following six institutions for the transformation of the Public Service to take place: the then, Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms, the then Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, the Public Service Commission, the Pay Research Bureau, the then Ministry of Technology, Communication and Innovation, and the

then Ministry of Financial Services, Good Governance and Institutional Reforms. Further, the drivers of reforms, namely the Reforms Steering Council; the Strategy Policy Unit; the then Public Sector Re-engineering Bureau; and the Reforms Cell as recommended in the EOAC Report 2013 were maintained. Additionally, the Bureau also upheld the reform initiatives enunciated by the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms (MPSAIR).

- 5.6 The major reform initiatives which have been adopted hitherto in the public service are, *inter alia*, adoption of Financial Performance; budgeting; e-Procurement; Performance Management System; Flexi-time; implementation of ISO certification scheme for public sector organisations; adoption of Information Technology and Digital Government Strategy which includes providing online services and inducing a paperless working environment; strengthening accountability and transparency in the public sector; setting up of Gender Cell and formulating/implementing Gender mainstreaming strategies and policies; adoption of a National Code of Corporate Governance; setting up of anti-corruption committees; and adoption of office automation in certain public sector organisations.
- 5.7 The implementation of Public Sector Management Reforms, in the context of Government's renewed vision for a modernised, efficient and effective public service, has been mostly ensured by the MPSAIR. With a view to transforming the Public Sector into an adaptive, responsive, high-performing and customer centric service provider, a Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy developed by a Consultant from the Commonwealth Secretariat was adopted. The Strategy revolves around 10 implementation pillars, namely Growth and Development; Business Transformation; Innovation and Acceleration; Digital Transformation; SMART processes; Strong Governance and Institutional arrangements; Performance; Capacity Building and Capability Development; Implementation; and Public/Customer satisfaction. The Strategy aims at creating an enabling environment for the successful and long-lasting transformation of the Public Sector in Mauritius.
- 5.8 In 2017, for the implementation of the Public Sector Business Transformation Strategy, the Public Sector Re-engineering Bureau was revamped into the Public Sector Business Transformation Bureau (PSBTB) as the main catalyst of Government's transformation agenda. Moreover, in line with the recommendations of the PSBTB strategy, the following three committees have been set up:
- **High Powered Committee** under the Chairmanship of the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service to oversee the implementation of the PSBT strategy and Action Plans.
 - **National Planning and Results Committee** (in replacement of the Reforms Steering Council) under the Chairmanship of the MPSAIR to oversee and monitor the integrated planning, resourcing and delivery of Government's mandate and priorities, including Public Sector Business Transformation.

- **Transformation Implementation Committees** (in replacement of Reforms Cell) at the level of each Ministry to ensure, *inter alia*, the implementation of the Transformation Plan as well as Government Programmes and Projects.

- 5.9 The PSBTB has implemented several projects geared towards the transformation of the public service and the improvement of the quality of public service delivery. Thirty-eight (38) Transformation and Implementation Committees have been set up at the level of Ministries and Departments to oversee, monitor and evaluate the development and implementation of their respective Business Transformation Initiatives. The PSBTB was also assigned the responsibility to monitor the implementation of three Key Performance Indicators adopted by Government in respect of e-Procurement, training and good governance to accelerate the process of transformation across the public service and promote integrity. As at date, almost all the Ministries and Departments have already embarked on the e-Procurement system, and as from next year, all procurement will, as far as possible, be carried out online.
- 5.10 In the transformation process, the MPSAIR has introduced the Work from Home Scheme, a job rotation policy and also developed a Sandbox Framework to facilitate the adoption of new and emerging technologies that have a transformative impact on public service delivery. Moreover, in a bid to digitalise the HR functions of Ministries and Departments, a new Human Resource Management system, e-HR has been conceived for implementation across the service using open source software technology. Along the same lines, the Prime Minister's Office launched the Citizen Support Portal (CSP), a modern and practical online platform under its ambit. The aim of the portal is to, among others, address complaints and queries of citizens including civil servants regarding provision of public services.

Views of Federations and Other Stakeholders

- 5.11 In the context of this review exercise, stakeholders have expressed that the reform initiatives enunciated so far in our Reports have either been partially implemented or not implemented at all. Some federations observed that the decline in quality of public services is a matter of concern, particularly if it is linked to frustration among public sector employees. Another federation averred that Public Sector Management Reforms have still some way to go, for instance Training Needs Analysis and Human Resource Planning still have room for improvement while one federation expatiated on the issue of training to certain category of employees more particularly those in manual grades and wished that more training could be made available, as part of reform initiatives.
- 5.12 The objectivity of recommendations pertaining to the Performance Management System was questioned by a federation which also expressed that the flexitime implemented by the MPSAIR, is neither in consonance with the 2016 PRB Report, nor user friendly and may consequently be scrapped. The Federation of Parastatal Bodies and Other Unions on its side canvassed the setting up of a Parastatal Bodies Service Commission as well as monitoring and implementation committees for parastatal bodies, whereas some other federations viewed that it was imperative for

Management to impart training in areas where weaknesses are identified following Performance Management exercise.

- 5.13 For the majority of stakeholders, more thrust, engagement and commitment of institutions in implementing certain reform measures should be more visible. Laxity in the pursuance, monitoring and evaluation of reform measures advocated so far was also highlighted by them.
- 5.14 The staff side has unanimously voiced out that non-implementation of reform initiatives has impacted seriously on the morale of public sector employees, even leading to frustration in certain cases.

Strategic Direction

- 5.15 Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic in the year 2020, the resilience of our Public Sector as well as its capability to face such an unprecedented calamity were put to test despite the fact that many public officers had to be confined at home. However, the public service, as the executive arm of the Government, showed remarkable resilience and rapidly re-engineered itself to respond to the exigencies of the new post-Covid realities. The essential services of the public sector organisations, namely policy making bodies, disciplined forces, health services and Local Authorities ensured continuity of services by coming up with innovative, fast, flexible and robust measures to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and also to meet the expectations of our citizens.
- 5.16 The MPSAIR had also developed a framework for the creation of a conducive environment for the adoption of the flexible working hours as well as a Work from Home Scheme which has greatly contributed to enhance efficiency, promote social distancing and improve on work-life balance. Some of these changes will certainly outlast the current COVID-19 crisis and become the new norms. It is to be recalled that all the measures taken are in line with the recommendations of the International Labour Organisation.
- 5.17 Besides, the collaboration and expertise of the UNDP have also been availed to, amongst others, further gauge the effectiveness of homeworking in ensuring business continuity and agility in public service delivery in times of crisis. Subsequently, Government has adopted the Work from Home Protocol developed by the UNDP Consultant, the Price Water House Coopers and same has been rolled out in the whole public sector. A Steering Committee has also been set up to discuss on the appropriate measures to be taken to promote the Work from Home culture in the public sector which will be part of the new normal.
- 5.18 While upholding the permanent hierarchical structure, namely the High Level Committee, the National Planning and Results Committee, the Public Sector Business Transformation Bureau and Transformation Implementation Committees (TICs), we have also maintained certain recommendations contained in the Bureau's previous Reports, *inter alia*, Performance Management System, Executive Performance Management Review for Supervising Officers and Training Needs Assessment.

Subsequently, to be able to cope with the myriad of challenges of the fast-changing environment as well as the growing need for technology and innovation in the public service, as reported above, the Bureau views that digital skills-set for an empowered workforce is one of the imperative and anticipatory measures towards the intended transformational journey.

- 5.19 In this context, with a view to better equipping Senior Officers with the tools and techniques to manage business resilience, the MPSAIR has, in collaboration with the Civil Service College, Mauritius, provided appropriate training to them on "Business Continuity Management". From a technological viewpoint, the new Sandbox Framework which has been introduced as mentioned above, can have a direct and positive impact on Government Service Delivery. From this perspective, the Public Sector will be called upon to be more pro-active in the years to come.
- 5.20 The submissions of the MPSAIR, in the context of this review exercise, mainly aimed at embracing reform measures as a means to achieve effective, efficient and elegant service delivery by public sector organisations. The main initiatives proposed were the promotion of lean structures; the establishment of an accountability and responsibility framework at all level within the public sector; outsourcing of non-core government businesses with a view to reducing administrative hurdles and saving in terms of cost and time; adoption of paperless public sector offices; and enhancement of Work from Home Scheme.
- 5.21 In consonance with Government Vision and the "*raison d'être*" of public sector organisations, the Bureau considers that there are four vital pillars that need to be further consolidated, namely the shift from Manual and Digitalisation to Artificial Intelligence in conducting the affairs of the country; institutionalisation of a solid Governance Framework for the public sector as a whole; continual promotion of skill development through capacity building programmes, training, and sharp knowledge sharing; and adoption of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework at organisational level to gauge the effectiveness of programmes and projects as well as learn lessons for further improvement.
- 5.22 Reform Initiatives that are IT related are cited in this Chapter from the broader perspectives but are dealt with more details in the Chapter on Digital Government Transformation. Concerning the continual promotion of skill development through capacity building programmes, provisions thereto related have been made under the Chapter on Training and Development. Similarly, the concept of Work from Home has been lengthily discussed under the Condition of Service on Working Week, Flexitime, Workers on Shift/Roster/Staggered Hours and Overtime while subsequent amendments to schemes of service have been recommended in the Chapter on Review of Schemes of Service and Qualifications. However, from a reforms viewpoint, we are making necessary recommendations to ensure a smooth delivery of government services and providing for mechanisms to enable proper implementation of reform initiatives.

Recommendation 1**5.23 We recommend that:**

- (i) the MPSAIR should investigate into the cause of non-implementation of reform initiatives so far recommended and propose corrective measures;**
- (ii) Responsible Officers should initiate procedures at the level of the Transformation Implementation Committees to revisit their business processes, particularly in the context of Work from Home, and consequently, consider a review in grading structure so as to eliminate superficial levels to promote effectiveness and efficiency; and**
- (iii) Responsible Officers should also ensure that reform initiatives adopted by Government are effectively implemented in Parastatal Bodies falling under their Ministries.**

Accountability Framework

5.24 Accountability is another important aspect that needs to be ingrained in the processes at all levels and should be reflected in the schemes of service. It has often been emphasised that reform initiatives have failed because of lack of ownership on the part of certain officers. To address this issue, we are hereunder making appropriate provision.

Recommendation 2

5.25 We recommend that the National Planning and Results Committee, in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, should design an Accountability Framework for grades at all levels in the public sector.

5.26 We also recommend that Transformation Implementation Committees should follow up to ensure that reform initiatives are scrupulously implemented.

Discretionary Powers

5.27 The freedom and latitude to act on one's own authority and judgement in taking decision and making choices within certain legal bounds, referred as discretion, is an important aspect of decision-making within the public sector. The exercise of discretionary powers exists at all levels of public policy as well as law enforcement and may, however, be subject to misuse or arbitrary decisions thereby undermining integrity and leading to wrong practices. Hence, to uphold integrity, transparency and accountability in the public sector, it is vital that potential risk be circumvented.

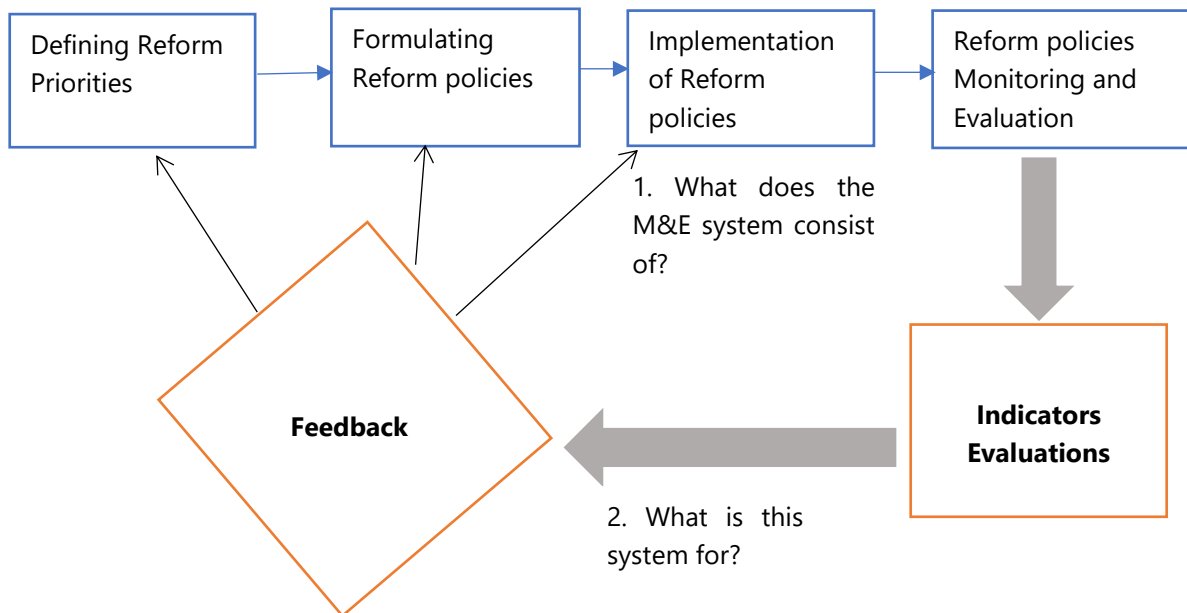
5.28 In collaboration with the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) and bearing in mind the legal and moral parameters, the MPSAIR has developed a set of guidelines for Public Officials who are endowed with the exercise of discretionary powers. The guidelines define the key steps for judicious exercise and management of discretionary powers. For the proper functioning of the civil service machinery, the Bureau upholds that public sector organisations should adhere to the guidelines developed by the ICAC and is recommending accordingly.

Recommendation 3

- 5.29 We recommend that Supervising Officers should take appropriate action to implement the “Guidelines – Exercise of Discretionary Powers’ within their Ministry and Department as well as at the level of Local Authorities/Parastatal Bodies/ State Owned Enterprises falling under their purview as per Ministry of Public Service, Administrative and Institutional Reforms’ Circular Letter No. 21 of 2021.**

Monitoring and Evaluation

- 5.30 Public Sector Management Reforms or public sector transformation cannot succeed without proper monitoring and evaluation. To ensure that any reform measure is well geared and thriving towards attaining the expected outcome, it is imperative that the measure is properly calibrated, monitored and evaluated through appropriate indicators, practical targets and allocated responsibilities. The foregoing would undoubtedly indicate and guarantee that reforms/transformations are achieved with the judicious and optimal use of resources.
- 5.31 The 2016 PRB Report went a step further in ensuring that reform initiatives are implemented and administered in a correct manner. Though monitoring and evaluation has been recommended in the 2016 PRB Report, the Bureau views on the same wave length with the outcry of the Federations/Unions that line Ministries/ Departments are not readily valuing their importance. The way forward to achieve successful reforms is only through the proper monitoring and evaluation as well as documentation and monitoring which so far seem to be lagging behind.
- 5.32 According to the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (2010), effective policy making requires information on whether Governments are doing things right and whether they achieve the results intended based on strong Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Systems. Strong M&E systems are considered to provide the means to compile and integrate valuable information into a policy cycle, thus providing the basis for sound governance and accountable public policies. Similarly, effective reform initiatives can be attained through a sound M&E system which will ensure that they are being implemented in the desired manner and gauge the output/outcome in terms of desired objectives as well as long term benefits.
- 5.33 Currently, the Public Sector Business Transformation Bureau has been entrusted the responsibility to coordinate and monitor the implementation of measures and government projects, with a view to eliminating bottlenecks. A Management Information System for the TICs has been deployed to allow TICs to report progress on the implementation of transformation projects at their levels. The M&E system to be adopted can be similar to those in the public policy cycle and should not be considered as an end in itself but as a continuous innovating process. It is an ongoing process based on the system’s logic and organisation climate. To elucidate the issue, the two questions that M&E should ask, are as follows:



5.34 Reform initiatives undertaken so far, in the public sector, are in line with Government’s programme and vision. Nevertheless, to ensure that these initiatives do not remain mere rhetoric on the brink of failure and be referred to as a ‘process’, the Bureau considers that establishing/strengthening the feedback arrangement mechanism; taking appropriate corrective actions at the right time and in the right manner; and proper evaluation and documentation of reform processes, be resorted to. The Bureau is recommending along these lines.

Recommendation 4

5.35 The Bureau recommends that:

- (i) the National Planning and Results Committee under the Chairmanship of the MPSAIR should monitor, evaluate, update, innovate and prepare an annual performance and outcome Report on public sector reform initiatives rolled on, in accordance with deliverables of the Committee as per MPSAIR Circular No. 80 of 2017; and**
- (ii) regular feedbacks on performance including shortcomings and corrective initiatives should be reported to the High Powered Committee under the Chairmanship of the Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service.**

Recommendation 5

5.36 The Bureau recommends that the reform initiatives enunciated above should, to the extent possible, be extended to all organisations governed by the PRB Report.

