



A Matter of Public Governance

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Editorial

There is a growing global concern on how public services are administered or managed to effectively avail quality services to the individual, family, community and the society at large. On reviewing the definition of Public administration it becomes evident that it refers to administration and management of activities undertaken by personnel who are regarded as public officials employed by the state as public servants. As a discipline it is used to study the phenomenon which underpins the activities of public servants who often fall into three bureaucratic tiers, senior, middle and junior personnel. Those who are in senior or middle management carry out expressive functions while those who are junior implement the instrumental functions, both of which are guided by policy which emanates and operate under political guidance.

In implementing activities public servants cannot do anything at wanton manner but must abide by policy and use it as a frame of reference to get work done. The Acts of Parliament as Gazette are the cornerstone of policy from which activities are guided. In units where implementation takes place the concept protocol is used as it refers to policy that may not be a verbatim derivative of policy but is used to protect institutions against unscrupulous public servants. Where protocol is applied it should be observed to serve the purpose for which it is formulated. The other guiding tool for activities to be undertaken is availability of procedure manuals, which are tools enabling public servants to function and implement activities that are instrumental at grass roots level. Policy manuals are also handy for orientation or staff induction in units.

Public institutions cannot be managed or administered without availability of finances, which are referred to as public funds. Funds are needed for availing movable, immovable assets and personnel to execute duties. Public finances need to be regulated since this is money owned by the public to meet their needs. A budget needs to be drawn conforming to policy which guides expenditure. No public institution can exist without a budget as it is the oil that keeps public service machinery going to perform its functions.

For the execution and implementation of activities in public office there is a need to organize those who are to carry out these actions, that means suitably qualified staff, competent to carry out policy directives and objectives to attain set goals. Furthermore public institutions need to be organized to ensure that implementation of activities remain consistent and continue uninterrupted, and for continuity duties need to be delegated vertically downwards or horizontal. Whatever mode of allocation or delegation is implemented there is a need for clear job descriptions and job specifications to enable the delegate to perform to the best of his/her ability to attain the set objectives and goals. The fundamental aspect to delegation is the power and authority that defines the right when operating in that delegated position.

The aforementioned power and authority to the delegate requires that careful consideration be given to assess the suitability of the person to the post. Appointment according to seniority needs to be weighed against the knowledge, skills and expertise required by the post. Availing appropriate human resources for the job in public service should also look at how staff is recruited, utilized and retained, as these measures can ensure that communities receive consistent services which are of quality.

The quest for excellence in public office is also driven by control mechanisms that are to be in place to avoid staff for working in any other way. These control mechanisms are multiple and dynamic, and whichever is in place once applied must still conform to policy guidelines. There is a need to control what should and what needs to be done in public office and it is the duty of each public official to conform to policy regulating activities.

Public administration therefore deals with the whole spectrum of management duties expected of public officials to remain accountable for acts committed, wittingly or unwittingly omitted. All activities undertaken are geared towards good governance for the benefit of the country and its people as individuals, family, community and society as a whole.

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