

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Management Development Institutes were established in most of the African countries soon after independence. Their role was to provide training, consultancy and research services to governments, particularly to the indigenous populations who had assumed senior positions in the state machinery. The main target group and recipients of their services were the top-level, senior and middle managers within the bureaucracy. They were accorded a high profile because of the nature and type of skills and knowledge that they were to acquire. In addition to building capacity for the public administration system, they were also expected to serve as think-tanks through their research into public policy formulation and policy reforms.

The mandates for establishing management training institutions and for training top and senior managers in the public sector (civil service, local government and public enterprises) were fairly similar in essence. The mandates for Ghana, Gambia, Tanzania, Swaziland etc. were formulated on the same basis and, as a result, the structures and objectives of these management institutes bore the same characteristics.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this publication is to identify ways and means by which management development institutes can be strengthened in their role of facilitating the public service reform process. The intended readers are ministers, permanent secretaries, directors of management institutes and training institutions, managers, administrators, training consultants, donors and practitioners. The essence of this publication is, therefore, to assist practitioners and institutes in improving their performance in delivering service to the public and in particular in the reform of the public service.

The content of this publication is based primarily on the experience of both policy-makers and management training institutions in Commonwealth African countries. The author has also drawn on rich material resulting from regional and round table meetings and seminars and workshops organised by the Management Training Services Division of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. However, the major problems, issues experiences were identified at a regional workshop organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat held in Maseru, Lesotho in February 1998.

THE NEED FOR PUBLICATION

Tremendous strides have been made over the past thirty years in the development of training throughout the world. Public service training in Britain was largely confined to on-the-job and departmental training prior to the creation of the Centre for Administrative Studies in the early 1960s. Training in the majority of Commonwealth countries that had only recently attained independence or were still under colonial governance was very limited indeed, if it existed at all in any formal sense. Then came a period of rapid expansion in the training function spurred by the need to localise the middle and senior levels of the public service and to cater for the demands for skilled manpower to implement ambitious social and economic development programmes. Initially the expansion relied heavily on technical assistance from a range of multi- and bilateral donor agencies. Increasingly, highly qualified nationals have replaced expatriate staff in executive positions, although there are still many expatriate advisers. By the beginning of the 1990s public service training had been firmly established.

Yet despite this impressive record of growth, both in quantity and quality, to which the Commonwealth Secretariat has made a significant contribution, there is still much to be done to improve the effectiveness of training in improving managerial performance. Writers for the World Bank (Kubr & Wallace, 1983; and Paul, 1983) expressed disappointment at the impact of training on the quality of public service management in many developing countries. They identified specific weaknesses in the training function, the bulk of which is done through training institutes. Our own experience and that of the workshop participants suggests that these findings still apply. In summary, the typical weaknesses are:

- (a) training tends to be treated as a discrete event rather than an integral part of human resource management and development;
- (b) the training function is seldom regarded by managers as a matter of their concern;
- (c) training policies may not exist and, where they do, they often bear little relationship to wider development policies or tend not to be implemented;
- (d) training needs are seldom assessed accurately or tend not to be acted on; and,
- (e) the design of training programmes too often ignores both policy and needs and may rely too heavily on borrowed models.

Two points need emphasis. First, these constraints are by no means confined to developing countries. Second, while they do appear to be fairly common, there are many excellent training establishments within the Commonwealth where

institutional training has reached a very high standard and these defects are strictly limited. The difficulty is that the above weaknesses cannot be solved through the institutes alone.

This publication aims to help overcome these defects with a thoroughly down-to-earth approach. There is a growing literature on training, some of which deals with policy, needs assessment and programme design. However, the problem is that most of it is based on research and experience in the private sector in industrialised countries. That which derives from developing country experience tends to be confined to journal articles and official reports which are seldom available to the training practitioner. The United Nations organisations – especially the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Department for Technical Cooperation and Development (TCTD) – and the World Bank, have published useful papers on training but their coverage of policy, needs assessment and programme design is surprisingly slender (though there are a few notable exceptions such as Kubr and Prokopenki, 1989). There is also a tendency for such organisations to be shy of criticism (Reilly and Clarke, 1990).