

## THE IMPERATIVES FOR COLLABORATION

Despite the seeming marginalisation of MDIs, there is evidence that both they and the Public Administration System need each other, particularly in the administration reform initiatives. The imperatives for joint collaboration are dictated by the need to find appropriate solutions to emerging problems. The imperatives are linked to various types of transition that require sharing of information and the identification of appropriate strategies for solutions and policy formulation. The transitions have been related to the political, economic and organisational factors. Within the political arena, the transition is characterised by the movement from one party or military regime to multi-party democracy. In this regard, there has been pressure to resolve conflicts and establish peace in a democratic manner. In the economic field there is transition from a state-dominated economic order to a market-based economic system with emphasis on the private sector development. The organisational structures that are responsible for executing these policy measures have had to change in order to suit the new circumstances. The organisations are expected to be business-like in their approach in order to satisfy the needs of the customers and clients.

Questions have been raised as to whether public servants have the credibility and impartiality to manage these transitions and whether public administration can manage economic policy consistency and credibility when it lacks independence and a knowledge base. These questions all point to the need to strengthen the public administration as an integral part of policy reform. One useful and innovative strategy in this respect, for strengthening the autonomy and professional competence of public servants, is through the use of Management Development Institutes which have a mandate to conduct management research, offer policy advice and train managers in the management of the new responsibilities and functions.

Thus, the transition to a market-based economy has three main implications for public administration; namely providing an effective regulatory framework that is vital to efficient functioning of markets; re-orienting the public service to be efficiency-conscious with regard to cost and time; and greater reliance on market mechanisms for the management of public enterprises (commercialisation). The transition to democracy poses challenges of strengthening watch-dog mechanisms – organisations for upholding accountability whether democratic, legal or professional; and promoting and protecting the neutrality and professionalism of the public service. As regards the transition from conflicts to reconciliation, the main challenges are instilling public trust in the disciplines of law and order agencies; fostering policies that promote economic and social equity; and increased opportunities for popular participation in decision-making process (Asmelash 1994).

The one common, unifying theme that runs through these challenges is the need to develop the management skills and knowledge needed by policy-makers and managers for them to be efficient and effective. In order to meet the challenges of the future, MDIs can contribute to the debate which seeks to develop partnerships, ethical relationships, common goals and trust between officials, service-providers and the public. Since MDIs are think-tanks in policy development and management, they can contribute a great deal to the organisation of debates, the dissemination of knowledge and the latest thinking, and the sharing of best practices.