STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE

The priority of the MDI should be to make government work better through the following strategies:

- enable public sector bodies to improve productivity and provide better services;

- manage shifting boundaries in policies and complex relationships resulting from policy shifts;

- promote partnership, consultation and co-operation between and among executing agencies;

- collaborate with regional and international organisations;

- promote responses to the peoples' needs and accountability to the public;

- develop a public service ethos to be shared by both the public and private sector;

- identify and develop skills and competencies for future public service leaders.

These strategies are proposed amidst some concerns about problems experienced in policy formulation in most African countries. The concerns, according Paul Anangwe[4] (1997) are:

- that policy-makers do not seem to understand their policy environments and the kinds of problems they face;

- policy-makers seem to be making choices without adequate information because of poor articulation between political and administrative roles in the policy process;

- research institutions have been marginalised to the extent that their findings do not meaningfully impact on the policy process;

- the inability to mobilise adequate resources, as well as the inability to effectively utilise available capacity, render policy-making a symbolic exercise;

- policy implementation rates, particularly national development plans, have ranged from between 5% and 30%;

■ policy-makers do not like to hear that their policies are performing poorly. Hence previous mistakes remain undetected and uncorrected. At the same time, no meaningful lessons can be learnt from past performance within this milieu.

The contribution of MDIs to national development can be facilitated by well-formulated training policies which can be invaluable to policy-makers, managers and trainers in enabling them to take the initiative, to draft a policy and try to obtain agreement from the highest authority in government. Training policies should cover the nation as a whole, the public service and particular sectors such as local government and public enterprises. The national training policy on human resources should cover such issues as the nature of government's commitment to human resources development and training, how it is to be organised and managed, and priorities in terms of content areas, levels or approaches. These will be discussed below in detail, but first we discuss why we believe a formal training policy can be useful.

In this regard, MDIs can assist government through conducting policy analysis studies with a view to understanding the problems associated with the policy intervention strategy and provide advice based on well-researched information. Such professional advice can be provided through collaboration with the policy analysis review unit which is usually placed in the Cabinet Office, the heart and hub of central government. The policy analysis review process provides an opportunity to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the policy itself in order to identify the capacity with which to facilitate public service reform, for example. The mechanism for collaboration, co-operation and co-ordination formulated through the auspices of the institute gives an opportunity for policy-makers and managers to establish a better understanding of each other's role. The collaborative policy framework contributes to the meaningful utilisation of the limited resources available in providing local solutions to local problems and, above all, to the sharing of skills and knowledge for the public service reform process. Dialogue between MDIs and the Cabinet Office creates an opportunity for their objectives and mission statements to be reviewed and make them relevant to the needs and demands of the public service reform process.