

Summary

Several Commonwealth countries have implemented different forms of the contract system of employment for permanent secretaries and other top government officials. This study looked at the experiences of four Caribbean countries, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica and St Lucia, in implementing contract systems of employment and other contractual arrangements for senior public service officers, specifically permanent secretaries, at the turn of the century. Primary research was conducted using multiple methods including fieldwork and observation, survey, elite interviews, examination of public policy documents and review of secondary literature and qualitative methods of analysis. The findings show that policy changes, broadly based on the tenets of New Public Management (NPM), were made to the old public administration systems associated with the inherited Westminster-Whitehall model in these countries. These reforms produced various outcomes as follows:

- Adhering to the tenets of the New Public Management, contracts of employment (generally of the fixed-term renewable type) and delegated authority from the Public Service Commissions of these countries were issued to most, if not all, permanent secretaries in Belize and Guyana. Only four out of fourteen permanent secretaries in Jamaica were placed on employment contracts and seven signed delegation agreements. St Lucia had four contract permanent secretaries between 2002 and 2006, but withdrew its contracts system for permanent secretaries at the end of 2006 with the change of administration after the national elections.
- The four countries have adopted new management models for the public service in the form of performance management, strategic and results-based management. The practices associated with these management models are yet to be embedded or are only slightly embedded in the public service of these countries. The contracts given to the permanent secretaries in all four countries are not performance contracts, and as a sequel no formal evaluations are conducted on the performance of the permanent secretary. Only Jamaica has a semi-formal evaluation mechanism, but evaluation reviews are conducted irregularly.
- In spite of these countries' acceptance of the tenets of NPM and associated management models of strategic management, the administrative environment in each country has remained almost the same. Public service regulations and staff orders have remained fairly stable, the principle of political neutrality of public servants has been reaffirmed in Jamaica and St Lucia, and the traditional budgeting processes and management style have not been changed in tandem with the adoption of the new management models. The permanent secretaries

who are on contract are also under the same public service regulations as those on open tenure. These conditions have impinged on the ability of the permanent secretary to exercise leadership and influence national development in a meaningful way.

- Conflict resolution mechanisms are still institutionalised in statute and in the constitutional provisions of these countries. There are two types of conflict, internal and external. Internal conflict could be construed as lower level conflict and the external conflict could be interpreted as higher-level conflict. The internal conflict was conceptualised to include day-to-day issues that are under the purview of the permanent secretary while the external conflict is of a political nature and involves the permanent secretary and the minister. For the internal conflict, some good practice was revealed to the researcher. This has come about as a result of the adoption of improved management practices and the skills set possessed by the permanent secretary. Conflict related to permanent secretary–minister relations is in each country handled by the cabinet secretary (or Head of the Civil Service), with recourse to the president or prime minister. In Jamaica and St Lucia, when conflicts escalate the cabinet secretary can reassign the permanent secretary to another ministry. The evidence from the field showed that the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Ministry in Belize is more vulnerable because he/she has lost this kind of protection, as he/she is politically appointed.
- In terms of human resources endowment for results production, permanent secretaries noted that they lacked sufficient highly trained (at postgraduate level) policy analysts and public administration experts to work with. It was also noted that the permanent secretary *per se* needs enhanced knowledge and understanding of the legal environment in which they operate and how their decisions affect national macroeconomic development.
- With regard to value for money, it is still too early to determine whether the contract system of employment of the permanent secretary has delivered the results that were envisaged. Opinions are divided on this issue because of the stricture imposed by the macroeconomic outcomes in each country and the fact that the operating environment has not been changed to facilitate the achievement of strategic goals by the permanent secretary. The Belize model (which seems to be the closest to the New Zealand model that was abandoned – see chapter 1) went farther than that of the other three countries, and the Government leaders in that country surmise that they have achieved their objectives.
- Lessons learned: The strengths of the contract system of employment of the permanent secretary have been widely acknowledged by those who were interviewed in Belize and Jamaica. It offers an opportunity to fill the top post in the public service by drawing from a wider pool of expertise from the private and public sectors. According to the cabinet secretaries in Jamaica and Belize, contracts and delimited tenures were seen by holders to act as a source of motivation and

performance, and the package of conditions and remuneration are supposedly favoured by the young professionals who do not want to be tied to one job for life. The conclusion, however, is that the contract system of employment for permanent secretaries is a work in progress and that Belize, Jamaica and Guyana are nowhere near the end of the road. It requires a commitment to institutionalising the system properly, improving the public sector management environment and ensuring periodic evaluation of the value of this flexible approach to public employment, if that is the way these countries want to go.

