

Introduction

This book is based on a comparative study of contract systems pertaining to the employment of permanent secretaries and chief directors in Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. These countries have embarked on the reform of their public services since the latter part of the 1990s with a view to infusing their public administration systems with private sector practices, which theoretically have been deemed to be proficient in turning around malfunctioning public services.

This new way of reforming the public service had come about as a result of the sea change in the ideology of administration called the new public management. These four Commonwealth African countries were selected by the Commonwealth Secretariat on the basis of two main criteria, namely (a) that these countries have consistently and more broadly undertaken public service reform since the 1980s, and (b) that they have tried to borrow or emulate aspects of the New Zealand model of corporatisation of the public service, a model which seems to have influenced reform of practice in most parts of the Commonwealth, but about which only anecdotal evidence had been gathered relating to its success or efficacy and the extent to which some of these ideas have been implemented in emulating countries.

Qualitative research methods were used including an academic literature review, documentary review and primary research, which involved elite interviews and assessment of policy documents and evaluation reports commissioned by the governments of the case study countries. Field visits were conducted in Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia in July and August 2008 and these afforded a unique opportunity for direct observation of the work of permanent secretaries and chief directors, even if within a limited timeframe. These methods were appropriate to the kind of audience encountered who were mostly from the highest level at the centre of government. The foregoing claim about the appropriateness of this methodology is significant, because an online survey which had been designed to assist in a simultaneous rapid assessment of permanent secretaries in a similar study in the Caribbean had to be abandoned in the African study for reasons of non-patronage by the target group.

The research revealed that a broad range of new practices for managing public services and senior public service officers have been adopted in Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia. All four countries had instituted contracts of employment and contract-like arrangements in the form of performance agreements, contracts of employment and the retention of a good mix of the former permanent and pensionable modes of employment. These contracts and agreements were signed between the permanent secretaries and chief directors and their governments. In Botswana, Uganda and

Zambia the superior/employing authority (government) were normally represented by the cabinet secretary.

The experiences of these countries do not necessarily represent a wholesale borrowing or copying of the New Zealand model, but certainly the ideas about improving public service delivery systems using contract re-engineering processes were borrowed and translated. It was also found, using analysis of documented evidence produced by these governments and from complementary and systemic means of communication, that the sources of reform ideas and lesson drawing for these countries were multiple and not restricted to New Zealand. There is also a circularity of flow of ideas and lesson drawing is continuous rather than a one-off activity. However, even though each country's experience is unique, reflecting the alignment of power and forces of interest, there were also important commonalities to be drawn.

Contract entitlements generally included gratuities and access to official vehicles in all countries. In the contract-like arrangements under which permanent secretaries and chief directors operated, state pension schemes had been retained in Ghana and Botswana, while gratuities of 40 per cent and 100 per cent of gross salary were paid to permanent secretaries in Uganda and Zambia respectively. The basic pay of the Zambian permanent secretary was considered to be very low by the Independent Management Consulting Company in 2004. The same agency also noted that the gratuity of 100 per cent that is taxed at 35 per cent on collection at the end of the three-year contract does not necessarily show that the system is generous. It argued that bringing the pay of the permanent secretary to market levels might actually be a better option. In Ghana, Uganda and Zambia where contracts of employment have been issued to permanent secretaries and chief directors, the norm for length of a term tended to be three years.

The most important finding of the study is that, to benefit from performance improvements associated with these contractual arrangements, countries must fully implement performance contracts or back up their performance agreements with performance management and performance measurement instruments which could be evaluated at regular intervals, and the performance information fed back to improve management. In this regard, 'Performance and Co-ordination Units' will be needed at the Office of Cabinet or Office of the Head of the Civil Service (as appropriate), with local units at each ministry to ensure compliance, consistent measure of results and policy co-ordination. These arrangements will be congruent with the institutions established in Botswana where a balanced scorecard system has been installed and is seemingly producing value for money for the government and people of that country. One issue that is still not established, with the available information, is whether Botswana's success has anything to do with the small size of its population of 2 million and a public service of about 15,000, while the other countries have large populations of over 20 million each and larger public services. Similarly, the issue of bringing ministers and permanent secretaries to a certain level of knowledge and understanding of public policy and public service delivery, and to press home a

common view that the two succeed or fail together might also be a key lesson to be learned from Botswana by the other countries.

The study cannot, however, make over-reaching conclusions about the detailed workings of the public service systems in those countries as it concentrated on institutional aspects of implementation of the chosen models by each country, and the length of time spent in each country did not permit an ethnographic type study.

The book is structured into seven chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction. It gives a summary of the study and structure of the book. Chapter 2 explains the research methodology and analytical framework used for the study. The study uses case study approaches and qualitative data collection methods, which include in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The second part of chapter 2 pulls together the framework for analysing and interpreting the data. The framework draws on theoretical approaches based on the new public management concepts as well as a historical background within which the public sector reforms in Africa were located. The chapter also specifically highlights the cases of the contract systems pertaining to the employment of permanent secretaries in four Commonwealth African countries – Botswana, Ghana, Uganda and Zambia.

The empirical evidence and analysis of the four country cases are presented in chapters 3–7. Chapter 3 analyses the first country case study – the contract system pertaining to the employment of senior public service officers in Botswana. Chapter 4 deals with the analysis of the second country case study – the contract system pertaining to the employment of senior public service officers in Ghana. Chapter 5 examines the analysis of third country case study – the contract system pertaining to the employment of senior public service officers in Uganda. Chapter 6 investigates the fourth and final country case study – the contract system pertaining to the employment of senior public service officers in Zambia. The concluding chapter 7 summarises the findings and draws conclusions.

