



ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON OFFICE OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM

What is the role of the Office of Public Sector Reform?

To put it in a 'nutshell' - we do whatever we can with our resources to promote the public sector reform process, we are therefore willing to listen to any ideas which will assist us in so doing.

More specifically the Office of Public Sector Reform provides a range of services to various Ministries, Departments and Agencies with the aim of assisting them in improving the standards of service offered. Some of these areas are developing strategic plans, conducting organisational reviews, developing customer service standards, managing the Employee Assistance Programme, assisting with sectional reviews especially registries, communicating public sector reform activities, arranging workshops, seminars etc and other reform-related activities.

What progress has been made by the Office in pursuing these activities?

We have not been as successful as we hoped for - the public service has been especially weak in the 'quality of interaction' between public sector workers and the public and also amongst public officers themselves. The Employee Assistance Programme has been very successful with over 200 workshops conducted since its inception in 1997 and over 1000 employees being counseled. The programme also makes provision for crisis interventions for public officers when colleagues are tragically taken from them. In addition the strategic plans and organisational reviews have been helpful in a number of Ministries and Departments - particularly as prerequisites for the Performance Review Development System. We have also done a lot of work in the area of Registry Systems.

What are some of the more recent activities being pursued by your Office in promoting the Public Sector Reform Programme?

There are three major focus areas we are pursuing:

A Humanised Management and Personal Excellence Programme. We recognise that Public Sector Reform must go hand in hand with personal reform. We are seeking to concentrate more on the public service worker as an individual rather than just a public service employee to be trained in systems, procedures etc. We want managers and supervisors to be aware of the importance of treating workers with respect. Public officers need to do two things, embrace people and embrace change and it needs fortitude to do both. Embracing people requires that each one of us is always aware of the importance of being positive in our attitude to people and that one has the responsibility for choosing one's attitude. Embracing change means that each one of us must recognise that reform is about change - seeking to improve oneself and the way one does things. There will be some glitches and true public sector reform is exhibited when we pull together as a team to positively address any difficulties.

What we are seeking to do also is to create '**work friendly and exciting working environments**' so that public officers will enjoy coming to work and to this end we also understand the need to pay attention to the physical environments under which we work. We also involve the Unions in our programmes since we are aware that they also play a critical role in public sector reform.

The other two focus areas are an improved and more proactive **Communication Strategy** and a **Customer Service Assessment and Improvement Programme**.

What efforts are being made to inform the public and public officers of various reform activities?

1. E-mailing of information to Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments. Also to Unions, Heads of Umbrella organisations such as BCC, BEC, call-in moderators and persons who wish to be kept updated on our plans. We always request feedback on our programmes and recently we have been getting some responses;
2. A website has been set up at www.opsr.gov.bb which provides general information on PSR;
3. Newsletter - is published and distributed as widely as possible - our circulation figure is 5000;
4. On-going workshops and Seminars - including those held by the unions and other organisations which invite us from time to time to give presentations on PSR;
5. The selection of Reform Liaison Officers at various Ministries and departments will assist immensely in our PR efforts; &
6. Newspaper Articles - arrangements have been made for the printing of articles in the newspapers.

How does the local reform programme compare with those of other countries?

The Director has indicated that he has been to a number of seminars, forums & conferences on PSR and is never embarrassed in presenting our PSR programme. Our general reform initiatives range from our IT programmes such as Smart Stream to Human Resource Programmes such as the Performance Review Development System - reference can also be made to initiatives such as Penal Reform, E-Government, Pension Reform, Job Evaluation, New Public Service Act, Social Partnership Protocol, Employee Assistance Programme, Establishment of Fair Trading Commission, Consumer Protection Act, Establishment of HIV/AIDS Commission, the Drug Service, Edu-Tech Programme, Postal Modernisation Programme, Anti-Money Laundering Authority, Value-for-Money Auditing, Financial Management Information System, Human Resource Management System, Procurement System, Constitution Review Commission, and a number of others. One must be aware that '**customer service**' is only one aspect of PSR although it is an important and visible indicator of good PSR.

It is also to be noted that Barbados ranks 29th on the UNDP's Human Development Index - a country's ranking is reflective of its public sector management and we have some of the best senior public officers who can hold their own anywhere in the world. Of course we must strive to be number one but with our limited resources we can still hold our heads up. Our reform programme therefore compares very favourably with that of other countries.

Are public officers responding to the reform programme?

The response has been mixed - some people embrace it and recognise its importance, some are indifferent but still too many doubt that some meaningful changes are taking place and will continue. Public Officers should not only ask '*what PSR can do for me, but what I can do for PSR*' and influence positive change. This is why the PSR programme is focusing on personal reform.

The feedback from recent evaluation forms from workshops geared towards this end suggest that participants are understanding the importance of personal reform and the majority have indicated that they will make efforts to reflect this positive change in their ongoing relationships with people both in and outside of the service. Whether or not they will do this depends on the strength of their initial commitment.

What is the general overview of the future of public sector reform successes?

The Commonwealth experience has indicated clearly that successful public sector reforms are built on a foundation of balanced organisational and attitudinal change. The process of reforms must '**capture the imagination of public officers**' if they are to lead to sustainable service improvements. There must therefore be a deliberate process of changing attitudes in step with reforming structures, processes and systems. This Office is promoting the importance of attitudinal change as necessary to the future successes of public sector reform. **Public Sector Reform and Personal Reform must be strongly related.**

Finally it is also important that persons at the highest levels - Ministers, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Departments etc - lead by example and show commitment to the process. All of us require some measure of Personal Reform.

We can make the Barbados public sector reform programme, especially its customer service aspect, one of the best in the world - it just means **choosing the right attitude every time.**

What is a public sector reform initiative?

A public sector reform initiative is a programme, project or activity which seeks to improve the delivery of public services to the general public, specific organisations or sectors.

Will the aims of public sector reform offer real benefits?

It should bring about greater productivity, better service to the public and an improved quality of life

What is the time frame for achieving public sector reform?

There is no specific time frame for this, but specific projects are assigned deadlines as part of this process.

Who will be the drivers of this process?

The public sector, the private sector, the unions and to a lesser extent the public at large.

Is the public sector reform process feasible in terms of resources?

Not at present, more resources have to be put into the process - human and financial

What is likely to hinder the process of reform?

The overall programme for reform could be hindered if the political directorate is not fully committed to the process

What are the likely political implications of the reform initiatives?

Reforms which improve services and assist in development of the private sector will of course enhance governments image as a worthwhile social partner. Action is being taken in discussions with private and public sector personnel to identify the most critical areas to be addressed.

What is the existing degree of awareness and appreciation of public sector reform activities among civil servants?

The majority of senior and mid-level public officers are aware of and appreciate the need for public sector reform. Seminars and workshops assist officers to stop and think of the challenges faced by the public sector reform programme.