

PRDS – MAKING BARBADOS WORK BETTER: “Public sector working towards a renewed professionalism”

by Carol Gay, Project Officer, Performance Review and Development Unit)

In keeping with the Public Sector Reform theme “Making Barbados Work Better”, The Performance Review and Development System (PRDS) Unit has been working steadfastly towards the development of a renewed sense of professionalism in the public sector.

To date more than one thousand public servants have been trained in the use of the system and over eighty officers have been trained as trainers. The Unit is also continuously engaged in the sensitization of the wider public and has conducted numerous programmes for various interests groups. Training has been completed in the pilot agencies specifically in the Ministries of: Labour and Social Security; Home Affairs; the Civil Service; Finance and Economic Affairs, Office of the Attorney General; Personnel Administration Division; Training Administration Division and the Office of Public Sector Reform. Additionally, Staff members of approximately twelve (12) line agencies of the pilot ministries have been trained in the usage of the system and will come on stream using the PRDS from April 2004.

The PRDS Unit consisting of six (6) staff members is headed by Project Coordinator Mrs. Wilma Turton; she is supported by Assistant Coordinator Mr. Wayne Charles-Soverall and four project Officers Carol Gay, Curtis Gilkes, Franceine Morgan and David Stuart. The unit is mandated to implement and manage the Performance Review and Development System (PRDS) in the Public Service of Barbados.

The PRDS system aims to develop a culture of renewed professionalism. It is believed that this reformed culture will provide an environment in which public sector employees will have opportunities to:

- ❖ Want to work to the best of their abilities;
- ❖ Have improved dialogue among managers, supervisors and employees;
- ❖ Take pride in their achievements;
- ❖ Link personal with organisational goals;
- ❖ Identify employee competencies and allowing the prioritising of training and development needs;
- ❖ Appraise the work performance of all employees in an open, fair and consistent manner and;
- ❖ Identify unsatisfactory work performance and developing employee performance improvement plans;

- ❖ Recognise and reward good work performance through incentives and opportunities for career development.

This thrust towards a performance management culture has certainly rendered it, 'business unusual' for the public sector. Public servants using the system are now required to develop work plans which must be agreed on and signed off between supervisors and employees, all officers must have results oriented job descriptions with performance standards, up to date organisational charts and procedures manuals are also pre-requisites of the system.

The implementation of this reform initiative in the Barbadian Public Sector has met with a number of challenges, however benefits are being realized as more and more public servants embrace the strive towards a performance management culture.

In order to obtain feedback the Unit conducted an evaluation of the PRDS for the period March/April 2002 to March /April 2003 using a four prong approach which consisted of an evaluation of the development of a of the application of PRDS discussion. The focus group used to ascertain the views of are attached to the pilot primarily on:



the usage of the (PRDS) form, questionnaire, an examination concepts and a focus group discussion methodology was a cross section of officers who agencies. Discussions focused

What went well and what required improvements

- ❖ Usage of the PRDS form
- ❖ PRDS Training Strategy
- ❖ Recognition and Reward Suggestions and issues.

The evaluation process revealed that the officers generally embraced the system however the main area of difficulty during the period identified was the actual documentation of performance objectives.

Mr. Roger Marshall Senior Executive Officer in the Ministry of Finance is a user of both the PRDS and the present appraisal system, he recently commented that after using the PRDS system he found it to be a more accurate and objective appraisal instrument to assess and measure the work performance of staff members over the course of a year. Mr. Marshall stated that as a supervisor it gives him a chance to assess the strengths and weaknesses of officers, he further noted that the continuous progress meetings allow for the supervisor to realistically monitor an officer's progress and determine whether performance standards are being met, he reiterated that in some cases standards may have to be adjusted depending on the officers' skills, abilities and available resources.

It is recognized that the support of the Trade Unions is critical in order for a major human resource initiative such as the PRDS to be effective. In this regard there is partnering with the trade unions throughout the PRDS process. The unions are represented on all the PRDS committees and staff members of the National Union of Public Workers have been trained in the use of the system.

Project Coordinator Mrs. Wilma Turton expresses appreciation to all persons who have contributed to the success of the system to date, she further urges all stakeholders to continue in the joint effort to facilitate the smooth implementation. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". Mrs. Turton informed that agencies outside of the pilot have expressed an interest in using the PRDS, to this end the unit has conducted several sensitization sessions with the related staff members. Furthermore some regional Public Sector Reform Offices have been benchmarking the Barbados experience.

What's happening? The Unit is working closely with ministries and departments as they begin a new year in the performance management process. Training courses and the provision of technical assistance in the use of the system for all levels of staff continue, as the Unit moves towards bringing about a, 'renewed professionalism' in the Public Service.

The PRDS Unit looks forward to partnering with all stakeholders to make Barbados "Work Better."