

## POLICY BRIEF



# CAPACITY PROFILING AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF SWAZILAND

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## What is the issue?

Governments are constantly under pressure to improve public sector performance and at the same time restrain expenditure growth. Public sector organisations are responsible for providing the necessary public goods and services to the citizens, hence the administration of the public service is traditionally grounded in the achievement of efficiency in the work of its departments in pursuance of goals related to service provision (Manzoor 2014). Some scholars argue that the efficiency of the public sector is key to delivering a ‘smarter state’ capable not only of delivering more for less, but better public services, which requires an evidence-based understanding of what the public service has been able to deliver so far, the drivers of these outcomes and the different options available (Hawkins *et al.* 2016).

Swaziland’s private sector, non-governmental organisations, and the public feel that while the country’s public service is evolving, it is still grappling with finding an ideal management style that will ensure better service provision, but in the process of evolution, service delivery of public goods remains compromised, hence customer satisfaction is low. So what can be done to improve the efficiency and performance of the public service? Analysts argue that implementing e-governance has brought unprecedented efficiencies in the work of government to serve citizens (Manzoor 2014). To achieve this and more, governments are widening their base of development partners who can assist in capacity building for civil servants, and funding for the implementation of its programmes.

This policy brief highlights the current state of the public service in Swaziland, its capacity in executing its mandate, and possible policy responses.

## Why does public service efficiency matter?

Efficiency in the public service is more than a technical relationship between resources and output; it has another dimension that incorporates outputs in relation to values and

accountability as an inherent quality of governance (Manzoor 2014). The Kingdom of Swaziland has a vision to have attained a level of development akin to that of developed countries by 2022, while ensuring that all citizens are able to sustainably pursue their life goals, enjoy lives of value and dignity in a safe and secure environment in line with the objectives of sustainable development (National Development Strategy 2014).

One of the key factors to achieving this goal is an efficient and able public service that not only delivers essential services to the public, but also provides a supportive framework for private sector economic activity. Arguably, an inefficient, unresponsive and poorly capacitated public service cannot be able to support Swaziland's national development strategies or to respond swiftly to global issues that have a bearing and impact on the country's plans and priorities.

To pursue this national strategy and move towards achieving the country's strategic goals, government realises that there is a need to have an efficient and effective public service underpinned by adequate and sustainable institutional, organisational, and human resource capacities. This is evident through the various public service reforms aimed at improving performance that have been introduced over the years. These interventions include the Public Sector Management Programme (PSMP) launched in 1995 as part of an internal Structural Adjustment Programme aimed at raising the standards of service delivery so as to realise greater efficiency and cost effectiveness in the civil service. However, some analysts argue that the PSMP has not made remarkable progress in accomplishing its key mandate and objectives; that is, improving the performance of the civil service since its establishment in 1995 (Dlamini 2003).

Lessons learnt over time have proven that it is futile to have well-funded, planned and budgeted programmes if there are weak institutional frameworks and systems, poor knowledge management skills, non-strategic leadership, and outdated or misplaced skill sets to implement them. For Swaziland to have a public service with effective, action-oriented leaders giving oversight to highly capable civil servants who have the right attitude and relevant skills to meet the challenges of a modernising Swaziland, the ever-changing nature of work, and the increased expectations of its citizenry, the government needs to address urgently any capacity gaps within the public service.

## **How was the study conducted?**

To get a better understanding of the Swaziland public service, a review of literature constituting National Development Strategy (NDS) documents, past studies undertaken and ministry-specific policies, strategies and bio-metric data was done. The study conducted interviews with Principal Secretaries, management teams within each ministry, development partners, civic society, and private sector representatives. Detailed data and information was

collected through structured questionnaires/data collection templates from the principal human resources officers and principal accountants of each ministry. The data and information collected was then analysed using the Maziwisa Global Public Sector Capacity Assessment toolkit, McKinsey<sup>1</sup>.

## What did the study find?

### Governance and structure

The Secretary to Cabinet, who is the head of the civil service, does not have oversight capacity of the public service. The authority and accountability lines, in as far as the supervision of Principal Secretaries, are not clearly defined. There are no clear or detailed job descriptions showing the duties, parameters, and key result areas of Principal Secretaries and the Secretary to Cabinet, other than what is stated in the Constitution, resulting in PSs just being administrative figureheads rather than providing strategic leadership.

There are no schemes of service for PSs, leading to views that their appointments are not based on ministry-specific qualifications and skills but rather on political grounds, a situation which may result in these offices failing to adequately meet the ever increasing challenges that come with government delivering services to the nation.

Some units within ministries hang loosely or are improperly positioned to be effective in the discharge of their mandate, while others have unclear reporting lines or overlapping functions with a unit or department in another ministry.

### Staffing and skills

There is no link between the human resources function within the Ministry of Public Service and the human resources recruitment function of the Civil Service Commission, and line ministries are not involved in ministry-specific general and specialised training. Staff are drawn from narrow, instead of diverse backgrounds and experience, which results in a limited range of skills.

At the time of the research, there were 2 370 vacancies open within the public service, with instances where posts had been vacant for over five years, which is detrimental to efficiencies within ministries. In many ministries, the skills held by some individuals do not match the

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<sup>1</sup> Maziwisa Global Assessment tool is a combination of individual, organisational, institutional and benchmarked questionnaires and templates, with the McKinsey 7S framework, best practice development and international audit standards and principles and embedded in them, that aid in conducting capacity gaps.

core functions of the ministry they are serving; this is mostly found at management levels and it is prevalent at Principal Secretary level.

Local capacity building and training institutions are under-utilised and in most instances, they also lack the necessary capacity to meet the needs required of a highly specialised public service. Also, more than half of the civil service is above the age of 40, which is indicative of an ageing public service workforce and points out to the need for a clear succession planning programme.

### **Systems and procedures**

The entire public service has no performance management system in place other than performance appraisals that are conducted annually as a matter of formality with no objective basis and at times only as and when there is a vacancy. The appraisals are not linked in any way to ministry performance targets and are only filled when there is a staff member to be promoted or confirmations of appointments are being done, hence rendering them useless for effectively managing performance.

Some provisions in the General Orders (procedure manuals) are outdated, unusable in some cases and in conflict with other pieces of legislation governing employment in Swaziland; while legislation used by some ministries and/or departments is outdated.

There is a serious shortage of tools and equipment including vehicles, computers, software and specialised field gadgets for technical departments. Also, the communication network, which includes internet, intranet and electronic mailing system is highly unreliable, which hinders the effective flow of information, both internally and externally.

This is further compounded by the fact that more than half of the public service hardly utilise electronic modes of communication, which could also be attributed to the fact that the civil service age profile is skewed more towards the older generation and this has the potential to stifle e-initiatives introduced across departments.

### **Strategy**

Over the years, government has come up with a development and implementation framework that includes officers stationed in all ministries, who act as advisors and ensure that strategies and action plans are mainstreamed into all government development programmes. However, there are strategy documents which are clearly articulated but have never been, or not fully, implemented.

In addition, line ministry strategies that were reviewed showed little alignment with the National Development Strategy and some ministries do not have strategies in process or these

have expired and they are in the process of crafting new ones. This lack of consistency in the availability of ministry strategies has the potential of misaligning focus, and monitoring and evaluation can become a challenge.

### **Shared values**

There is no shared corporate culture and general work ethic; no shared beliefs and values, references and practices; and customer care is unsatisfactory throughout the public service. Appreciation of the value of teamwork, cross functional teams, harnessing team synergies and leveraging on team dynamics is lacking.

### **Leadership**

Key people management skills are lacking, as evidenced by weak coaching, mentoring, emotional intelligence and motivation of staff to deliver effectively. There is a lack of effective action oriented leadership at senior and managerial levels within government.

## **Recommendations**

Given the importance of the civil service in making Swaziland attain development akin to that of developed countries by 2022, while ensuring that all citizens are able to pursue their life goals, enjoy lives of value and dignity in a safe and secure environment, the study makes the following recommendations:

- The Government of Swaziland needs to seek alternative sources of funding and possibly enter into new partnerships with development partners to counteract the budgetary constraints faced by most ministries, which result in limited resources and consequently, inefficiencies.
- An Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Policy is needed to guide the operations, access, use, and delivery of ICT services across the public service.
- The Computer Services department should be resourced so that it can deliver internet and intranet services to the public service as a whole as well as aid ministries in stabilising operations through the use of IT-based initiatives.
- The public service must be adequately resourced in IT infrastructure, office accommodation and other supporting tools so that it can deliver on its mandate to the nation.
- A result based performance management system needs to be introduced to ensure effective implementation of the Government's Programme of Action.
- A Knowledge Management Policy must be developed to guide the efficient handling of information and resources within the public service, as well as to ensure that knowledge management is integrated in the activities of all government ministries.

- There is need for a policy that decentralises training and staff development to line ministries, with the Human Resources Department playing a coordinative, advisory and facilitative role.
- The introduction of management and leadership development programmes for those in leadership and principal secretaries should be considered, as well as equipping them with change management and organisational development skills.
- Review legislation in all ministries and departments to ensure that it is still relevant and supports the public service’s mission and mandate.
- Capacitate the Civil Service Commission with the right skills, systems and resources for it to efficiently service the public service.
- The Public Enterprise Unit should be repositioned and its capacities strengthened so that it can offer a more effective monitoring and value adding service to parastatals.
- There is also potential to collapse at least three ministries and strategically place their departments in other ministries where they can enjoy better synergies.
- Formulation of a policy that gives guidance when a staff member is seconded to a line ministry should be considered, to ensure continuity and sustainability of ministry programmes.
- Approved vacancies for all critical positions must be filled within (at most) three months of their becoming vacant, which will require a collaborative effort from line ministries and the Civil Service Commission to ensure that this timeline is achieved.
- A recruitment strategy that targets skills from the private sector, non-governmental organisations and those with regional experience should be developed and supported by an incentive programme that makes the public service attractive and guarantees sustainability.

## References

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