**CIVIL SERVICE REFORM IN PAKISTAN**

**Capacity, Competence, Courage and Compassion**

**ISHRAT HUSAIN[[1]](#footnote-1)**

My remarks this afternoon will be divided into three parts. First, I will dwell on the question: Why reform the Civil Service? What is the rationale and justification for reform? Second, if it is necessary what should be the end-result of the reform and what needs to be done to achieve this objective. Third, what should be the phasing and sequencing of various reforms if there is an agreement on the need, the objective and the content of the reforms.

The overall governance structure is important because it is through this structure that economic policies are intermediated and translated into economic and social benefits for the vast majority of the population. This can be compared to a water system whereby water is gushing out of the tap but if the pipe through which water is conveyed is corroded, leaking or clogged then those expecting water at the other end of the pipe would either only get a trickle or water of unhygienic quality that is not usable for drinking, cooking, bathing and other uses of human consumption. So we may have rapid rates of economic growth, i.e. the water at the tap is gushing out with full pressure but if the benefits of economic growth are either hijacked on the way by those running the institutions of governance in their own favor or favor of their cronies and supporters ( leaking) or those institutions are dysfunctional (clogged), or access is available only through connections or money (corroded), the majority of the population would be deprived of the basic public goods and services to which they are entitled as citizens of the state. Of course, the governance structure consists besides the Executive of other organs such as judiciary and legislature but the highest impact on day to day life is created by the Executive branch of the state. The present discussion will therefore focus on the Executive branch whose main pillar is the Civil Service.

**WHY REFORM THE CIVIL SERVICE?**

“If it ain’t broken, why fix it?” This is quite a pertinent question to ask. However, there is almost a consensus both among the Civil Servants themselves and those interacting with these Civil Servants that the present system has become dysfunctional and is not doing the job. The following extracts from the Human Development in South Asia Reports of 1999 and 2005 depict a vivid picture of the governance in south Asia that is even more applicable in case of Pakistan.

Human Development South Asia Report 1999

“South Asia presents a fascinating combination of many contradictions. It has governments that are high in governing and low in serving; it has parliaments that are elected by the poor but aid the rick; and society that asserts the rights of some but perpetuates exclusion for others. Despite a marked improvement in the lives of few, there are many in South Asia who have been forgotten by formal institutions of governance. These are the poor, the downtrodden and the most vulnerable of the society, suffering from acute deprivation on account of their income, caste, creed, gender or religion. Their fortunes have not moved with those of the privileged few and this in itself is a deprivation of a depressing nature.”

Human Development South Asia Report 2005

“Governance constitutes for ordinary people, a daily struggle for survival and dignity. Ordinary people are too often humiliated at the hands of public institutions. For them, lack of good governance means police brutality, corruption in accessing basic public services, ghost schools, teacher absenteeism, missing medicines, high cost and low access to justice, criminalization of politics and lack of social justice. These are just few manifestations of the crisis of governance.”

A question that is often raised in Pakistan is: Why has India retained the same Civil Service Structure as they had inherited from the British? Why is Pakistan moving to change the legacy, texture, and complexion of the Civil Service?

Grass is always greener on the other side of the pasture. I would only like to quote one of the very perceptive analyst of the Indian scene, Kuldip Nayyar about his views on the state of the Civil Service in India.

“Public servants have invariably become an instrument in the hands of Ministers in the Centre and in the States. Ethical considerations inherent in public behavior have become generally dim and in many cases beyond the mental grasp of many public functionaries. The desire for self-preservation guides their actions and behaviors. Manmohan Singh, who was a top Civil Servant, should have devised some steps to retrieve the situation. Anxiety to survive at any cost is the crux of the approach to the problems before public servants. The Mussorie Academy where they are trained is an Ivory Tower. It is too elitist and too distant for the common man. It should be obligatory for the trainees to work with NGOs at the grass root level. They may learn, if not imbibe, the qualities of humility which they lack.”

This only goes to show that things are not all that good on the other side of the fence. The recent Corruption scams and the news stories about Swiss accounts in which the Indian civil servants are involved in cahoots with the politicians shows the veracity of Kuldip Nayar’s assertions.

Empirical evidence across countries has now confirmed that economic performance not only in terms of aggregate growth but also the distribution of income is determined by the quality of institutions. These institutions, in turn, are manned by the Civil Servants. Countries such as Singapore and Malaysia that have attracted, retained and motivated Civil Servants of high professional caliber and integrity and allowed them the authority and powers to act in the larger interest of the public at large have performed relatively well. This leads us, therefore to the second question we have to address: What needs to be done to achieve the objective of having a professional Civil Service?

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Before we delve into this question, we have to settle a prior question. What should be the end-result of the Civil Service reform? We have a history that clearly tells us that for the first two and half decades the country had Civil Servants who had the capacity and competency to take decisions in the larger public interest. They also enjoyed courage of conviction whereby they resisted extraneous pressures and influences which could disable them from taking the right decisions. But being wedded to the Colonial Civil Service their mind set and attitude betrayed the tendency of guardianship and paternalism. They were not responsive to the needs of the population and lacked the compassion to come to the rescue of the poor, marginalized and less well-to-do segments of the society. Their social mingling with the landed gentry and big businesses along with the enormity of the powers they enjoy made them more insulated and non-accessible except to the influentials. What is being proposed here is that the first three attributes of Civil Servants – Capacity, Competency and Courage – have to be revived and re-inculcated in them through these reforms while the compassion has to be imbibed through greater exposure, awareness and incentives. The end result of the reform should therefore be a majority, if not all, Civil Servants displaying and practicing these attributes.

The National Commission for Government Reform (NCGR) consisting of both senior serving Public Servants and individuals from the private sector who have excelled in their professions have submitted a comprehensive report to the Government of Pakistan (GoP) in May 2008 with very detailed and specific recommendations. The gist of these recommendations is given below:-

1. Open, transparent merit-based recruitment to all levels and grades of public services while protecting regional representation as laid down in the constitution.
2. Performance evaluation to be based on measurable objectives, and assessment of key performance indicators.
3. Promotions and career progression to be based upon a combination of past performance and assessment of potential with mandatory training at post-induction, mid-career and senior management levels.
4. Equality of opportunity for career advancement to all employees without preferences or reservations for any particular class. A shift should take place in the mind set from “Entitlement” to “Eligibility”.
5. Replacement of the concept of Superior Services by equality among all cadres and non-cadres of public servants, Federal and Provincial Civil Services, professionals and generalists. Suitability for the job should be the governing principle rather than the origination of the appointment.
6. Grant of a living wage and compensation package including decent retirement benefits to all Civil Servants.
7. Strict observance of security of tenure of office for a specified period of time.
8. Separate cadre of regular Civil Services at the Federal, Provincial and District levels co-existing with contractual appointments and lateral movement.
9. Creation of a National Executive Service (NES) for senior management positions open to all Federal, Provincial and district Civil Servants through a competitive process.
10. Induction of three specialized cadres under the NES for Economic Management, Social Sector Management, General.
11. Citizens’ Survey and Score Cards to judge the responsiveness.

**PHASING AND SEQUENCING OF REFORMS**

The NCGR reform package is both ambitious and politically difficult to implement in the short run. It has therefore to be phased over a period of 5-10 years with adjustments and fine tuning to meet the exigencies of circumstances. However, a start should be made by picking up those reforms that are least contentious, do not disturb the existing power relations in a significant manner and the benefits can be appropriated in a way that the politicians get mileage out of it.

The fiscal problem in Pakistan has many root causes but one of them is the leakages, waste and inefficiencies in key public corporations. The main culprit is the weak governance structure and poor management of these key institutions. A proposal has been made to identiy, screen, evaluate and select the Board of Directors and the Chief Executives of the Corporations in a way that will throw up the right people for the right jobs. The implementation of this proposal will, over time, minimize the quantum of subsidies granted by the Government to meet the financial losses of these corporations. Their resustication to health will bring good name to the government of the day.

There are cross cutting issues that can contribute towards efficient working of the government and thus endear the political party in power to the people. These are the e-government tools whereby an ordinary citizen can gather information, download the forms, apply through the web, or social networking and get responses from the government functionaries through SMS or email. They can file taxes, obtain licences, permits and no-objection certificates electronically without running around various offices and spending money on bribes. The transparency achieved through automation will minimize the discretionary powers of the government functionaries and provide convenience to the citizens who are actually the voters in ultimate analysis. The posting of updated Foreign Exchange Manual on the website of the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) which could be accessed by anyone from his home or office created a lot of trust in the organization. Computerized land records will substantially bring down the volume of litigation that is clogging our courts and provide a lot of relief to those engaged in protracted and expensive court cases.

Government rules, regulations and manuals are not widely available to the affected population. They are not updated and have therefore become a major source of harassment and extortion. There are conflicting rules on the same subject co-existing in the rule book or manual because the old ones and those superseded have not been weeded out. Some of the rules are so outdated that they have become a nuisance. If all the government rules, regulations, instructions, circulars are continuously updated and only the most current versions are posted on the website of each ministry a lot of good will be done to make the lives of common citizen easy. The approvals and NOCs required from various departments in a sequential rather than simultaneous manner have become a major source of rent-seeking and delays for the private businesses and development projects. Business process re-engineering to streamline these procedures and eliminate those which have become redundant and unnecessary will reduce the cost of doing business in the country.

**CONCLUSION**

Good governance reforms are necessary for improving economic performance and reducing income inequalities and regional disparities in Pakistan. The thrust of these reforms lies in a dynamic, vibrant civil service whose members have the capacity and competencies but also display qualities of courage and compassion.

1. Address at the International Conference on Economic Growth in Pakistan organized by the Planning Commission at Islamabad on July 13, 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)