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English only

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in Public Administration and Finance
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Country profiles on public administration

A. Background

1. In the last half of the twentieth century, Governments were under pressure to respond to the demands from their citizens and to increasing complexity and change in their global environments. The response to these demands has taken the form of programmes of administrative transformation, administrative reform or administrative development. Often, these programmes have established government systems, procedures and projects that attempt to provide high quality services. The search for strategies has led to formulas such as downsizing (right sizing), technological applications and citizen participation. Globalization has emphasized the need to deal with not only national affairs but also the relationship between national Governments and regional, interregional and supranational entities. The purpose of this project is to track governmental strategies and accomplishments in administrative change.

2. The worldwide trends of globalization and citizen participation have compelled Governments to debate “the role of the State”, to explore various partnerships with private sector and civil society organizations and to consider re-engineering of government systems, retraining of public officials and rethinking of public policies. Given the rapid changes in technology and the global economy, Governments have also been motivated to learn to continuously re-evaluate government performance in relation to citizen demands and global pressures.

3. Government responses to these demands and pressures are based on context, culture and perceived urgency. In the more developed countries, the common response seems to encompass efforts in re-engineering or reinventing the public institutions. The trial-and-error process of re-engineering, at first at odds with more theoretical approaches, seems to be gaining popularity in academia. However, most of the developing countries are still grappling with administrative reform or civil service reform to achieve efficiency in the public sector. While some of these reforms are forced upon developing countries by donor countries as well as the Bretton Woods institutions, others are initiated by the Governments themselves in

order to improve service delivery, reduce costs, increase efficiency and streamline the public sector. Although reform connotes “change for the better”, some reforms, especially those imposed from outside, have had some negative impact on both national economies and the society. Some of the negative impacts have been transitory while others have left permanent footprints. Both the “imposing outsiders” and the “reforming government officials” are involved ultimately in the effectiveness of administrative transformation efforts.

B. Objective

4. In order to get a complete picture of the status of the public sector in developing countries, the Division for Public Economics and Public Administration of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS), launched a survey, the results of which will be used to prepare country profiles on a regular basis, if the Group of Experts is agreeable to the initiative. This survey is expected to provide essential information with regard to the country-level experiences that will be instrumental in understanding the current situation, the historical background and the future trajectories of public administration in developing countries. Such information can also be useful in creating guidelines for a model public administration for the twenty-first century.

5. Similar surveys have already been carried out by the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development providing valuable information to both Governments and practitioners in the public sector as well as academicians who are interested in further exploring and developing mechanisms to improve public management. In addition, several regional organizations, such as the African Association for Public Administration and Management, the Arab Administrative Development Organization, the African Training and Research Centre in Administration for Development, the Latin American Centre of Administration for Development, the European Group of Public Administration, the Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration and the Observatoire des fonctions publiques africaines (African Civil Services Observatory), are involved in analysing administrative developments in their regions.

6. The main purpose of this survey is to understand national public administration systems, to review how they relate to transparency, accountability and participation in the respective countries, and to develop guidelines for institution-building and management capacity for development and growth. The survey and subsequent guidelines would serve the practical purpose of helping policy makers and practitioners in their search for useful information.

7. More importantly, the survey would reveal how developing countries are responding to the demands of their citizens and to the call of donors to improve the government machinery. While the survey will include various questions that would shed light on the current situation of the public sector in general, it also seeks information on, *inter alia*, the type of reform carried out recently and the impacts of such a reform(s), the lessons learned and the strengths and weaknesses of the reforms. One cannot emphasize enough the importance of this information not only to understand the situation of a country at a given point, but also to understand where it is heading.

8. In order to ensure that the results of such a survey serve its intended purposes, care will be taken to cover a broad range of issues related to public administration. Respondents to this questionnaire could also annex additional documents, statistics, graphics, tables and other relevant information to supplement their response to the questionnaire.

C. Tentative survey results

9. On the basis of the responses to the questionnaire, 27 country profiles on public administration covering all the regions of the world were prepared. A sample of five profiles is submitted as a background document for review and comments.

10. Generally speaking, these profiles provide some basic information on the structure of public administration but are not meant to provide analytical and evaluative information on the functioning of the system and process of public administration. The Secretariat seeks the guidance of the Group of Experts to improve its work in this area. In reviewing the country profiles, it should be noted that:

(a) This is the initial stage in the preparation of profiles and, as such, they provide some basic information on public administration but fall short in providing analytical and evaluative information on the functioning of the system and performance of public administration;

(b) While the format of the profile is uniform, the responses to the set of questions under each chapter are dissimilar, thereby making comparison across countries difficult;

(c) The format of the profile might have missed some key areas of public administration, and the topics identified under each chapter of the questionnaire may require some improvement;

(d) With these observations, the attached country profiles are submitted for the Group's critical review and specific comments and suggestions. Specifically, suggestions would be welcome on the following points: (i) target groups for the profiles; (ii) the purposes these profiles should serve; (iii) addition of any new chapter in the questionnaire; (iv) inclusion of any new topic under the current chapters; (v) the extent to which substantive information should be included in the questionnaire in order to understand the functioning of the public administration system; and finally (vi) whether it would be useful to prepare and publish such country profiles on a regular basis.

11. Samples of the five profiles (Algeria, Brazil, China, Germany and Ghana) will be distributed to the Group of Experts during its fifteenth session.