

29th Caribbean Conference of Accountants

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Reducing Bureaucracy – A Vision for Government Customer Service

Introduction

I am delighted to share with you on the occasion of the 29th Caribbean Conference of Accountants and would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to participate in this session. Let me also express heartiest congratulations to the organisers of this conference and wish you every success.

The theme “**Reducing Bureaucracy – A vision for Government Customer Service**” is most apt as we rationalise and restructure the public sector. People and technology are the two most important aspects of this process of transformation. Putting the appropriate structures and systems in place is critical, but requires more importantly, people with the right attitude complementing the appropriate set of skills and competencies, to yield the specific outputs and expected outcomes.

A Paradigm Shift

As we contemplate the restructuring of the public sector, the most challenging aspect will be how we change the mindset of public officers generally; although many are doing an excellent job. We are mindful however, of the perception that has lingered regarding public officers being less than facilitators in providing excellent service to the public. For some, service is often confused with servitude. A dramatic paradigm shift is therefore required to change that image and to that end, the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) has embarked on developing the Strategic Policy Framework for a transformed Public Sector.

This framework will articulate those values that must be inherent in our modus operandi and exude the guiding principles, such as courtesy, truth, integrity,

transparency, trust and professionalism that govern our attitudes and behaviour in our daily operations, both in dealing with our internal and external customers. Public officers themselves will define this new ethic, which will govern the customer service ethos that must exist in this new dispensation.

Growth Inducement Strategy for Jamaica in the Short to Medium Term

We are fully cognizant that an efficient bureaucracy is an imperative to advance good governance. This is obvious also to the Planning Institute of Jamaica which developed the “Growth Inducement Strategy for Jamaica”, dated March 4, 2011, which identifies the Public Sector Transformation, as one of the seven pillars essential for economic growth in the short to medium term. Under the guiding principle - *“Modernize and improve the efficiency of government”*, the Strategy document proposes that “government should seek to performing well its core functions, efficiently delivering services to the public and acting, not just to facilitate, but also to become an effective partner with the private sector”. The Public Sector Transformation Unit (PSTU) accepts the PIOJ as a strategic partner and has in fact, been working with the PIOJ to assist in institutionalising the Vision 2030 National Development Plan in key Government Entities.

Achieving the Vision

Our vision for: **“a transformed cohesive Public Sector that is performance-based, efficient, cost effective and service oriented”** depends on a number of factors. These include maximising the use of information and communication technology that will eliminate the manual method, thus increasing efficiency. Business process re-engineering will also be critical to institutionalise processes and procedures that are not complex and laborious for customers. Simple procedures inevitably reduce corrupt practices that tend to emerge in complex systems.

An applicable Information and Communication Technology Management Platform is crucial in modernizing and transforming the public sector. The introduction of a technological platform throughout government will facilitate the streamlining of relevant business processes. The complaint often expressed is the constant

request of various government Entities for the same information, such as bio-data. This is due to the persistent manual method of data collection, collation and analysis, which still permeate many government offices. It is therefore critical to expedite the Government Network (GovNet) project that will facilitate join up government, which will inevitably adduce better customer service through the use of technology.

The current complex bureaucracy adds to the transactional costs both for government and citizens. This presents key challenges for customers who must obtain various services from Government; for example, to obtain licenses and permits. The absence of “one-stop” shops or offices in close proximity is also time consuming and impacts generally on the productivity level of citizens, who must leave their jobs for a significant period of time to conduct their business. Restructuring the business of government will inevitably result in a reduction of the transactional costs of doing business for both public and private sectors.

Central also to providing excellent customer service is instituting a new governance framework that will transfer authority from the Centre, namely the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Finance. This will empower Heads of Entities to manage their operations, human resources and financial resources, within a strict Management Accountability Framework. The Heads of Entities must in turn also de-concentrate authority to line workers who can take decisions to expedite matters at the point of the delivery of service. In so doing, delays will be minimised or nullified thus reducing customers’ frustration.

Facilitating this new governance framework will require a review of existing Statutes and Regulations to give credence to the new Management Accountability Framework. The current governance arrangements in many instances, do not allow for the effective delivery of service, as they rely on a hierarchical structure for decision-making. It is for this reason that a paradigm shift is essential, as it entails the alignment of responsibility with authority and accountability.

I must reiterate that people and technology must be at the forefront of a transformed public sector. The public sector seeks to continually upgrade and

maintain a highly qualified and competent workforce responsive to the needs of the society. This must be demonstrated in pragmatic ways, which improve Jamaica's current position of 81 out of 183 countries, regarding the ease of doing business.

Public Sector Customer Service Awards

The Government of Jamaica is highly cognizant of the importance of excellent customer service, hence the recent staging of the fifth biennial **Public Sector Customer Service Awards** organised by the Public Sector Modernization Unit which took place at the Wyndham Hotel. The competition recognizes and rewards Public Sector bodies that have performed well in customer service and in so doing, help to encourage continuous improvement throughout Public Sector Entities. The successful Entity that met the criteria of excellence, received the Prime Minister's Award. Of note, Chief Judge Wayne Jones, former President of the Jamaica Civil Service Association, urged public sector workers to remember that service excellence is a requirement of each worker and stated accordingly: **"You are employed by the public and the public is demanding quality public service. You have a moral obligation to satisfy this requirement. The issue of how we serve our public is critical to national development."**

Conclusion

In closing, while I acknowledge the importance of reducing bureaucracy, and the importance of an effective bureaucracy to ensure good governance, the interface with public officers must be an impeccable experience to realise the objective of excellent customer service. Only then can we achieve our vision of a **transformed cohesive Public Sector that is performance-based, efficient, cost-effective and service oriented"**.