



MINISTRY
PUBLIC SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**MINISTER N. KIVIET
KEYNOTE ADDRESS ON
PUBLIC SERVICE
REFORM TOWARDS
PROFESSIONALISATION
AT GCIS ON THE
12 OCTOBER 2023**

Programme Director

Public Service Commission Chairperson, Prof Somadoda
Fikeni

Public Service Commission Commissioners

Former Public Service Commissioners

Director – Generals present.

National School of Government Principal, Professor Busani
Ngcaweni

Professionals and Academics

Government Officials

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

I am honoured to be part of this great initiative by the public service commission to look on the path traversed within the public service since the dawn of democracy. This indeed comes at a strategic time of 29 years of our democracy and few months before the end of the Sixth Administration.

In that review the Deputy Chairperson of the National Development Planning Commission made a clarion call for the government in particular the President and the Cabinet to own the NDP. The Deputy Chairperson view was that the NDP is an orphan without the parent.

Today as we gather here, we have to make an honest, robust assessment of what we have done in the public service. This will enable the government in the 7th administration to do more and to do what is needed.

Influenced by the ideas of Max Weber, the prevailing approach to public administration for much of the 20th century drew on a model of bureaucracy based on the twin principles of hierarchy and meritocracy.

It was initially introduced as part of wide-ranging bureaucratic reforms in the United Kingdom and Prussia in the late 19th century to overcome patrimonial systems of administration where patronage and favoritism dominated government decisions and public appointments.

This approach had several distinctive features. It relied on centralized control, set rules and guidelines, separated policymaking from implementation, and employed hierarchical organizational structure.

This approach worked well in a number of countries, notably in Singapore where the post-independence political leadership built a high quality and efficient civil service.

A similar approach was followed in China in a form of a one-party state.

But many post-colonial states experienced a decline in the quality of governance and the effectiveness of public administration in subsequent years as neo-patrimonial pressures asserted themselves and state resources and public

appointments were subject to the personal influence of political leaders and followers.

Governance and public service reform efforts in many developing countries from the 1980's continued to adopt the centralized, bureaucratic model of public administration as the point of departure for effective development.

World Bank in its 1997 World Development Report, identify merit-based appointments and career stability for public servants as key factors in the effectiveness of public administration.

The governance approach to public sector reforms did not simply set out to re-establish the fundamentals of earlier systems of public administration.

Many public bureaucracies were seen as bloated, inefficient, and self-serving, shaped fundamentally by underlying political economy factors.

The fiscal imperatives of structural adjustment programmes meant that the public service was frequently the target of radical reforms aimed at cost containment and efficiency improvements that focused on reducing the size of the civil service, rationalizing the number of departments and agencies through employment reforms.

These reforms were designed to reduce public spending and to limit the size and scope of government, but they did not depart significantly from the Weberian model of a centralized and hierarchical public service.

The goal was a smaller, cheaper, and more efficient version of the old public administration not its wholesale replacement by a new model.

Following dismantling of the apartheid public service in 1994 the new government had to build a democratic, inclusive and responsive public service.

Democratic South Africa inherited a racially skewed public service in which 95.5 % of the top 3239 civil servants were white and only 0,6 % were black Africans.

Black Africans made up the vast majority of the public servants in the lower ranks, with a few middle and senior public servants in the homeland governments.

In the 1990's several policies were produced to bring about the desired transformation of South Africa in general, and the public service in particular.

At the turn of the Millenium, there was a concern, particularly from government, that the transformation of the public service was moving at the snail's pace.

Pursuant to this observation the Department of Public Service and Administration Review of 1999 to 2000 was undertaken, which identified many shortcomings of the transformation project.

Following the review Senior Management Service (SMS) was introduced, which developed a Handbook defining a competency framework for senior managers in the Public Service (directors, chief directors deputy directors general and directors general.

The 2002 competency framework identified ten core managerial competences, honesty and integrity being a central competency. A diagnostic overview of the Public Service was undertaken by the National planning Commission in 2011.

South Africa has gone through significant transitions. At the same time the public sector has also changed, becoming more representative of the diverse backgrounds and needs of the South African people.

Similarly the Public Service Commission mandate is reflected on Section 196(4) (c) of the Constitution which empowers the PSC to propose measures to ensure effective and efficient performance within the Public Service and section 196(4)(b) which provides that the PSC has the power to investigate,

monitor, and evaluate the organization and administration, and personnel practices of the Public Service.

Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa prescribes that the public administration must be governed by the democratic values and principles enshrined in the Constitution, including the following principles:

- A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.
- Efficient, economic, and effective use of resources must be promoted.
- Services must be provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
- People's needs must be responded to, and the public must be encouraged to participate in policy making.
- Public administration must be accountable.

- Good human resource management and career development practices, to maximize human potential, must be cultivated.

The constitution stresses the need to maintain and promote professional ethics within the public service and it ends up with the principle of good human resource management that is career developed and capable of maximizing and cultivating human potential.

This can only be achieved when public service managers are professionally skilled and developed to manage and lead.

The South African National Development Plan (2030) also referred to as Vision (2030) echoes the sentiments of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, that of developing a capable and effective state, characterized by professionalism, career orientated and prestigious public service.

The National Development Plan focuses on the following overarching actions towards building a capable and developmental state:

- Stabilizing the political administrative interface,
- making the public service and local government administration careers of choice,
- developing technical and specialist professional skills,
- strengthening delegation, accountability, and oversight
- improving interdepartmental coordination,
- taking a proactive approach to improve relations between national, provincial, and local government.

While the implementation of these actions has been slow, a key milestone towards building a capable and developmental state is clearly articulated in the National Framework Towards the Professionalization of the Public Sector which was approved by the Cabinet in October 2022.

Then Framework provides insight into the preconditions to achieve efficiency, improve performance and accountability, and improve service delivery.

These preconditions require that the public service be staffed by professional, skilled, competent and selfless public servants whose interest is to serve the people.

This institutionalizes meritocracy in the state's human resources practices by giving effect to the NDP's recommendations about the type of public sector required to drive a developmental state agenda in a democratic system of government.

Progress has also been made towards the finalization of the Public Service Amendment Bill (2023), The Public Administration Management Amendment Bill (2023) and the Public Service Commission Bill (2022), which legislates the recommendations of the NDP and give effect to professionalization of the public service for an effective state across all spheres of government.

The amendments to the Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000), which the President signed into law in October 2022, set the trend by, among others barring municipal officials from holding party political office.

The African National Congress 55th National Conference Resolution on Legislature and Governance emphasized that the approach to governance and transformations is based on the following:

“Main goal of state transformation is building a developmental state that provides effective basic services and with capabilities to take forward a far-reaching agenda of national economic development, whilst at the same time placing people and their involvement at the centre of the process “

It further says that building a capable and developmental state at all three spheres of government must be achieved through the following measures:

- Strengthening and professionalizing the Public Administration, particularly top management, and the delivery sectors.

- Building the educational and skills feeder system to produce developmental skills, technical and professional personnel.

Despite the Batho Pele Principle, South Africans complain about unprofessional public servants. This has been cited as the main cause of poor services.

The evolution of the public service since 1994 has not been without challenges. There are still a few challenges in need of immediate attention.

Such challenges include corruption in some government departments, a lack of accountability resulting in the tarnishing of the image of public service.

Corruption has the propensity to tarnish and undermine the state's institutional integrity, leading to citizens apathy towards of the state.

Indeed, the government is slowly making good progress on corruption as many government officials have been charged and sentenced some suspended, others resigned and, in some instances, dismissed.

In conclusion, public service reforms efforts need to embrace the changes that have been done and draw on a range of public management models that are appropriate to different contexts while putting the needs and interests of the people at the heart of reform efforts consistent with new Public Service approach.

There is a compelling case for drawing elements of the new public service approach to ensure that public sector reforms are grounded in the interests and needs of citizens rather than driven by technocratic impetus of public officials of self-interest imperatives of public representatives.

The new approach to gain traction, public servants must not be hired based on political loyalty and self interest but on impartiality and the willingness to serve the public interest.

Placing citizens at the forefront of public service requires a fundamental change in the mindset on the part of public servants, in which reforms are directed to changing values and behaviors as much as enhancing administrative capacity, centered on efforts to deepen motivation and instill public service ethos.

Placing citizens at the center of public sector reform efforts has important implications for their design, implementation and sustainability. This initiative by the Public Service Commission is greatly appreciated. I wish all the best for taking forward professionalization of the public service framework.

I wish you all the best in your engagement on this important subject matter.

Thank You