
Tanzania: Making civil service more attractive

*Richard Gerster**

“It takes about an hour to get from here to the next health station. But the services often leave much to be desired. There is not enough staff. Medication is frequently lacking. And sometimes two or three women who have just given birth have to share one bed or sleep on the floor.” Because of such assessments the Meena Women Group who is working close to Tanzania’s capital Dodoma has decided to sensitise the women and children in their neighbourhood in issues related to health, nutrition, motherhood and family planning. This includes knowing and making use of the state health service. Switzerland is supporting the group in their self-help efforts. German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) is implementing a programme for Community Based Health Initiatives (CBHI) on behalf of Switzerland. Dr. Cyrialis Mutabuzi, District Medical Officer in Dodoma’s city administration, confirms the experiences made by the Meena Group: “When it comes to infrastructure, many things have improved. Our challenges now include finding enough qualified personnel, sufficient medication and to disposing of means of transportation.”

The idea of service

To improve public health, to ensure public security, to impart an education in schools or to offer useful agricultural counselling to farmers – the bottleneck for all these state services is civil service personnel. Improvements in this area is therefore high on the reform agenda. A first wave of reforms has been implemented in the years 2000 – 2007: strategic personnel planning, linking planning with the budget, performance based personnel management, reorganising the government with its national ministries, (decentralised) local government agencies, parastatal agencies for areas such as statistics or the airport and outsourcing of secondary services such as cleaning. Sensitising civil servants with re-

spect to the necessity to give account was also a part of the reforms. A charta is informing people about their rights. “This enables people to make a fuss, if they are not happy”, summarises Eric Shitindi, Deputy Permanent Secretary for Public Service Management in the President’s Office.



Recruiting health personnel for remote areas is difficult.

These reforms are the basis for notable progress. An opinion poll carried out by the independent research Organisation RE-POA in 2006 in six communities, has identified greater satisfaction overall with respect to state services compared to 2003 – however, with marked local and sectoral differences. “Hospital and health stations at all levels are heavily understaffed. In view of the modest salaries and the hard working conditions it is remarkable that the health system functions at all – this is only made possible because of the staff’s dedication”, says Nick Brown Team Leader in the National Malaria Control Programme. In spite of such examples the idea of service is not yet anchored in the public. Inefficiency is not yet overcome. “Too many public servants go about their duties out of sheer habit. Media should help to shed a light on these practices because we Tanzanians deserve better services from our government than we are getting presently”, says an observer.

Budget support's key role

For some years Switzerland – together with a group of 14 countries and multilateral organisations – has been cofinancing Tanzania's state budget on the basis of "Mkukuta", the country's poverty reduction strategy. In the 2008/09 financial year the donor group completed Tanzania's own revenues with 717 million US dollars, thereof almost 6 million dollars (6,5 mio CHF) from Switzerland. In addition to all important reforms the government is engaged in a constant dialogue with the donors. Thematic working groups and an annual conference constitute the main fora for the dialogue. Apart from providing general budget support the donors support specific projects and programmes, such as a basket fund for reforms in the public service.

In return for the financial injection into the budget the government has committed to reach concrete goals in all areas vital for the population, such as education or health services. Among other things, the performance assessment framework (PAF) records that the government revises and adopts its middle term pay policy for the civil service, as civil service reform is one of the four pillars of governance reforms – together with public finance management, legal sector

reforms and the fight against corruption. "A dynamic and efficient administration is directly increasing the benefits created by budget support", describes Eric Shitindi the general interest in effective improvements. Budget support, in return, makes the urgently needed wage rounds possible in the first place.

Unattractive outposts

Since the government's decentralisation local personnel like teachers or employees of the health sector are employed by the local districts rather than the respective central ministries. Two thirds of all employees in the public service therefore receive their salaries from the local administrations. Labour costs of the more than 200'000 employees in the education and health sector absorb about half of all the local governments' financial resources. But the transfer of the funds to the districts is generally delayed.

Six or seven of ten positions on local job lists are vacant. "Horror stories from health centres are topping each other. In a health clinic only three of 20 midwife positions are occupied and these three work until they drop", says Charles Llewellyn, USAID's re-



Those who can afford it change from the bus to bicycle taxis in order to reach remote villages.

sponsible for health programmes. In 2007/08 the health ministry recruited 3645 new employees but only 2533 took up their positions. In the remote Rukwa-Region for example, only 31 of the 122 new health workers were on the spot on their first day, which meant that eight health centres remained closed. Furthermore, many gave up again in the first weeks and months. Reasons for this include: Costs of transport to reach a remote working place are not reimbursed; very often no salaries are paid within the first six months; there is no decent housing available and the work environment is discouraging: Patients are critically ill and personnel has no access to adequate medication and instruments to help effectively. Employees are often isolated and there is no professional supervision. "This is why many quit again and after six months only a fraction of the 3645 recruited employees work as planned", knows Charles Llewellyn.



Spare tyres are used to promote the public sector's reform programme.

The current salary increases are first but insufficient steps in the right direction. Five years ago, the minimal salary was 45'000 Tanzanian shillings (40 USD) per month, today it is 100'000 Tanzanian shillings (80 USD). In view of the costs of living and family commitments, this is not sufficient. Particularly when it comes to qualified jobs, the government can still not compete with the private sector. When starting to work for the government in a first job after university, a newly graduated economist receives some 250 dollars. In the private sector the starting salary offered amounts to 600 – 700 dollars. Eric Shitindi insists that payment is only the top of the iceberg:

"More money will not be sufficient, because in remote places there is nothing. Even if you take a TV with you, there is no electricity. People follow the infrastructure. Look at Mtwara in the South of Tanzania. With the new road it only takes around six hours to get there and people like working there. Before it took 24 – 48 hours with a rickety bus and you never knew whether you would have to spend several days on the road because of impassable roads or break downs."

Voting with one's feet is not only done by the large majority who decides to work in the centres. When it comes to qualified personnel Tanzania is also competing with its neighbouring countries and South Africa. Some Tanzanians, particularly from the health sector, also dare to make the move to Europe, particularly Great Britain. This loss of well educated people ("brain drain") is a heavy burden, even if international migration is small compared to other African countries. Eric Shitindi: "Tanzanians love to live in Tanzania!"

Wrong incentives

The previously mentioned salary of 250 dollars per month is not enough to feed a family, which is why civil servants try to enlarge their income with supplements. For a trip abroad, for example, an allowance of up to 300 dollars to cover accommodation and meals is paid, depending on the location and costs of living. For a ten day business trip this amounts to 3000 dollars. A frugal way of living during the trip enables a person to legally save a multiple amount of his/her monthly salary. For trips and seminars within Tanzania an allowance of maximum 62 dollars (80'000 TSh) applies. These reimbursements together with low basic salaries lead to wrong incentives. Many public servants are constantly travelling instead of doing their work. The activist Rakesh Rajani has asked Tanzanians how they understand the term "development". Many answered that "it is to be sensitized and get an allowance." Indeed it is no longer possible to conduct a workshop without allowances. And the costs of all supplements add up: "By abolishing these allowances one could finance a substantial

general salary increase”, argues Denis Biseko, a World Bank specialist for public sector reforms. That this is a politically sensitive matter goes without saying.

The low salary level sets wrong incentives, even if the business with the allowances is legal. It does not help to win over small scale corruption either, even though some steps have been taken. Increasingly simple bureaucratic procedures when starting a new enterprise or using information technology for the registration of land rights increase transparency and reduce opportunities to move matters along with financial courtesies. Furthermore the population is better informed about their rights than they used to be. A successful public sector reform will also dry up the swamp of small scale corruption.

To be continued

The public sector reform was a key issue on the agenda of the 2008 annual conference for budget support. Its progress was judged to be moderately satisfactory by both the government and donors. An analysis identified the concern: “The pattern of human resource distribution in Tan-

zania remains highly uneven, and the gap has been widening in recent years. ... Areas with lowest staffing allocations have the highest rates of poverty. ... The main underlying cause of this pattern is the difficulty in attracting and retaining workers to under-served areas.” In order to further improve the effectiveness, efficiency and integrity of the public service the following approaches stand at the centre:

- New packages of incentives (living arrangements, additional compensation for schooling, etc.) shall increase the attractiveness of under-served regions as working places;
- These additional costs for the under-served districts are to be financed by additional transfers from the central government;
- The salary level in the public sector needs to be improved in the medium term.

The public sector reform is not a success story, in spite of partial successes during its first phase (2000 – 2007). A comprehensive second phase for 2008 – 2012 has just started. Its aim is to make the public service “a national institution of excellence that plays a pivotal role in achieving sustained



When it comes to recruiting staff, the state and private sector stand are in a competitive situation (photo: machine for peeling peanuts).

economic growth and prosperity, and in the eradication of poverty in the 21st century.” There is still a long way to go. Specific contributions as well as general budget support assist the government in its efforts to

achieve the break through. Because without effective public sector reforms the Millennium Development Goals will not stand a chance.



The contrast between constructions such as the building for the personnel reform authority and the neediness in remote areas could hardly be more distinct.

* The author, Dr. Richard Gerster, is an economist and works as independent consultant and publicist (www.gersterconsulting.ch). This article is part of a series commissioned by the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) to take a closer look at budget support from various points of view. They reflect the author's personal opinion.