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# PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS

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## INTRODUCTION

South Africa has been pursuing various public sector reforms since 1994, especially after the Presidential Review Commission (PRC) made comprehensive recommendations about the critical public sector reforms that were needed at the dawn of democracy. The first President of the democratic South Africa Nelson Mandela established a Presidential Review Commission on the Reform and Transformation of the Public Service in South Africa in 1996 and it submitted its report in 1998. The country has over the years come up with various frameworks and policies and has also encouraged the participation of all stakeholders in the state-building endeavour. To be sure, when I talk of public sector reforms, I am thinking of modifications necessary in the organisation of the government in order that government can be more effective in terms of achieving its goals and objectives. In the context of South Africa, the transformation of the government was and is critical so that it not only performs well but is able to redress the ramifications of apartheid and colonialism. A transformed public sector needs to be agile, more responsive and citizen-centric. Linked to this is the enhancing of the capacity and the restructuring of the government and its institutions so that it can be more effective.

For South Africa, as far as the ANC is concerned, the public service ought to ensure that the National Democratic Society (NDS) that comes about through the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) is achieved. This implies that the political economy of post-apartheid South Africa should be significantly different from the political economy of apartheid South Africa. The apartheid state was not concerned with inclusive development (viz. improving everyone's wellbeing) in South Africa. The post-apartheid state appears to be failing in attaining the national democratic society – a society in which all citizens can thrive without the limitations imposed by discrimination and exploitation. The transformation of the state remains a challenge, hence the political economy of post-apartheid South Africa is effectively identical to that of apartheid South Africa.

Public sector reforms have been pursued in the context of a democratic developmental state. Included in the various government documents is the idea that South Africa aspires to be a developmental state (Gumede, 2019a). The Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF, 2019), for instance, indicates that the South African developmental state must meet peoples' needs by being interventionist, developmental and having a participative

public administration. The National Development Plan or Vision 2030 makes a case for strong leadership and a focus on people in order for South Africa to be an effective developmental state. Strong leadership must be provided by the Presidency through ensuring that long-term planning is robust, coordination is effective, and implementation is sound. People-centredness (*Batho Pele*), on the other hand, means that the public sector must care for the citizens and be committed to serving them.

The chapter starts by describing public sector reforms in South Africa and how they have evolved since 1994. I then highlight specific public sector and public management reforms pursued by each successive post-apartheid administration, starting with the Nelson Mandela administration.

## **EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS**

Institutions pursuing public sector reforms have evolved since 1994 and there have been numerous legislative and policy interventions. These reforms, besides the reorganisation of the government nationally and provincially, started with the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service (1996) (WPTPS) and the Public Service Act has continually been amended.

The provision of training in the public sector, for instance, has evolved since 1994 and the main institutions tasked with providing training have reformed over time. The South African Management Development Institute (SAMDI) was the first institution that was established, post-1994, to provide necessary training for the public sector. Initially, the SAMDI was largely a coordination entity rather than a provider of practical training and it developed interventions that could contribute to the improvement of the public sector. The SAMDI was effectively part of the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) but later (in 1999) SAMDI became a fully-fledged department, and a Director-General was appointed. Still later, the SAMDI was transformed into the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA) whose main aim was to provide or coordinate the provision of training and management development interventions that lead to improved performance and service delivery in the public sector. PALAMA, which was established in 2006, reported to the Minister of Public Service and Administration. In 2013, the National School of Government (NSG) replaced the PALAMA.

There is a question about the effectiveness of PALAMA or NSG. Dastile (2018) undertook a study of management training interventions in the public service, focusing on the NSG. Among other things, the study concludes that 13% of the respondents indicated that it was not always the case that the training they receive is relevant to their work. The implications of undertaking training that is not relevant to an employee's responsibilities is that the employee's performance will not improve, and this has an impact on the overall performance of a component and ultimately the department and the