

Good Practices in Public Service Excellence to Prevent Corruption

Public service excellence plays a key role in the prevention of corruption. This is a key focus of Chapter II of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) on preventive measures,¹ and is further supported by the global adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Of notable relevance is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16: “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”, and SDG 16.6 specifically targets the development of “effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels”.²

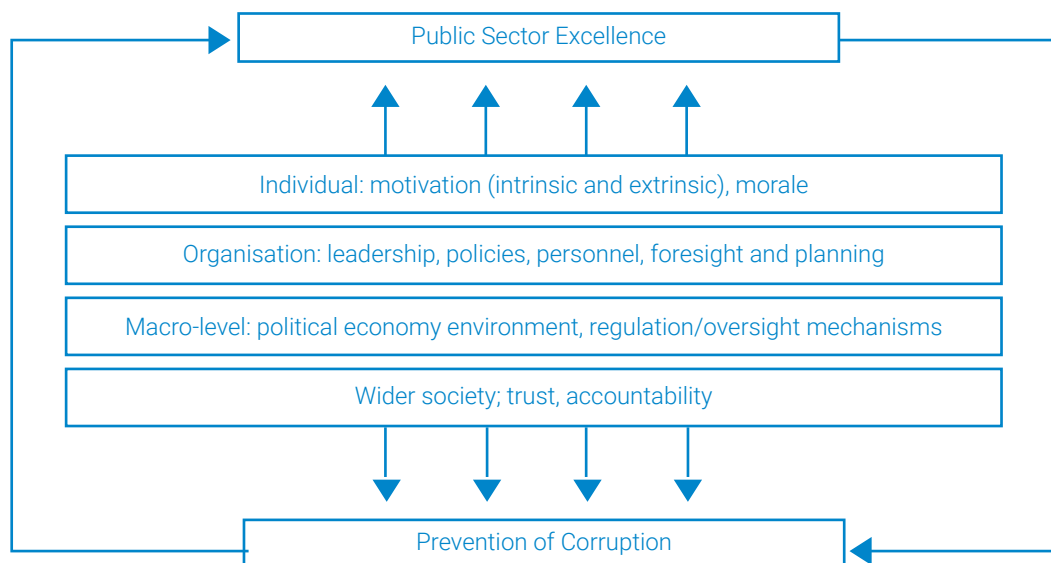
For a State to build appropriate, relevant and comprehensive corruption prevention measures in the public sector, it must first clarify and define the meaning, scope and purpose of ‘public sector excellence’ (PSE)

and the ‘prevention of corruption’ within its own national context. These two separate but inter-related concepts continue to pose a challenge for States as they remain largely undefined and without an agreed upon definition (see Diagram 1 for an exploration of how the levels of influence between PSE and prevention of corruption are linked).³

The Linkages between Public Sector Excellence (PSE) and Prevention of Corruption in the Pacific

A good starting point for any State in reaching a satisfactory and workable definition of PSE (and therefore working towards PSE implementation) is to ask what PSE is seeking to achieve. The answer is

DIAGRAM 1: The four levels influencing public sector excellence and anti-corruption efforts



¹ *United Nations Convention Against Corruption*, GA Res 58/4, UN GAOR, UN Doc A/58/422 (14 December 2005) Chap II.

² Sustainable Development Solutions Network. 2015. Indicators and Monitoring Framework: target 16.6. [online]. Available from: <https://indicators.report/targets/16-6/>.

³ Martin Polaine. 2018. Good Practices in Public Sector Excellence to Prevent Corruption: A Lessons Learned Study in Support of the Implementation of UNCAC. [online]. Available from: https://www.mn.undp.org/content/mongolia/en/home/library/democratic_governance/good-practices-in-public-sector-excellence-to-prevent-corruption.html.

likely to be arrived at through either the aims of SDG 16 or through anti-corruption measures. Having decided on its definition, a State may then consider the nature and role of public sector management, and how it may feasibly be brought about within the wider 'political' framework. However, a workable definition of PSE is transparency, accountability and efficiency measures that bring about service delivery and in turn, promote corruption prevention.

Having considered PSE, a State will need to design and put in place corruption prevention measures. Like PSE, 'prevention' lacks definition; although it is suggested that the 'prevention of corruption' means the steps, measures and programmes that a State should put in place, and the actions and initiatives it should take to address and mitigate the risks of corruption within its public sector (institutional, functional and individual). Each aspect of a preventive measure should be based on a corruption risk assessment, which will serve to inform the specific measures to be developed and introduced. Finally, a system of periodic review of the corruption risks is needed in order to determine if they have been effectively mitigated and ascertain whether new risks have been addressed.⁴

Pacific Island States must evaluate their own specific needs before adopting or adapting specific practices or models, with small jurisdictions, in particular, having their own challenges that will need to be addressed. For countries in the region, there are usually specific features to their public sectors; the government is typically the main employer and a high proportion of financial and human resources (relative to GDP) are dedicated to it. Therefore, patronage and established affiliations can make neutrality on the part of public servants extremely challenging.⁵

Despite the difficulties faced by small Pacific States, measures aimed at achieving PSE have been met with some success. In respect of performance

management (e.g. appraisals, trainings) and a more inclusionary approach towards public officials at all levels, Vanuatu has yielded positive results and similar measures have been introduced in Tuvalu.⁶ Similarly, co-ordination reforms in the Solomon Islands, backed by political support, have achieved a level of sustainable improvement in inter-agency coordination.⁷

Key Lessons and Recommendations

Based on contextual analysis and examples from the Pacific, the following are some non-exhaustive recommendations and lessons learnt to consider:

- Excellence in the public sector should be promoted by States;
- For institutional capacity, effectiveness is as important as accountability and transparency. They are co-dependent and prerequisites for service delivery;
- The functions of a body or ministry, not its form, are key to building excellence;
- States should avoid the simple transposition of institutional models;
- Integrity-building should be understood as a 'whole-of-society', not just a public sector, issue;⁸
- Education and outreach are key in civil servant recruitment and retention;
- A focus is needed on avoiding, identifying and managing apparent and potential conflict of interest situations in a public servant-inclusive manner;
- A 'top-down' approach could be considered to manage conflict situations, with effort taken to establish credibility with the wider public and to understand cultural and societal context; and
- States should establish a series of 'trust relationships' within the State, if transparency is to be achieved.

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4 Ibid.

5 Zenobia, I. 2019. Public Sector Reform and Capacity Building in small island developing states. *Knowledge, evidence and learning for development (K4D)*. p. 2. [online]. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5cd996c8e5274a38bf503d31/583_Small_Island_Developing_States_Revised.pdf.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid. p. 3.

8 Nikolas, K., & Simone, Webbe. 2019. Being a Trusted and Respected Partner: The APS Integrity Framework. [online]. Available from: <https://www.apsreview.gov.au/sites/default/files/resources/being-trusted-respected-partner-aps-integrity-framework.pdf>.