



Promoting prosperity for all



Think Piece #2

What's the future of and for Public Services in the Caribbean?

**Presentation from CARICAD on the Charter for Caribbean Public Services
Wednesday July 26, 2017
2:30 pm to 4:45 pm**

Public services are diverse and can include the arts and culture, transportation, airlines, air traffic control, banking, food subsidies, forestry, prisons, telecommunications, extractive industries ...

"Public services are those which are universally provided to the public and available equally to all; they affect life, safety and the public welfare and are vital to commercial and economic development; they involve regulatory or policy-making functions; the service is incompatible with the profit motive or cannot be effectively or efficiently delivered through market mechanisms."

Our experiences in the Caribbean clearly point to and demonstrate the **value of public services**. Public services transformed the quality of life for many in the post-colonial period. And after independence these public services (taken for granted by many) created a strong middle-class. The underlying principles for modern public services are mutual support across all communities and shared social objectives.

Communities expect more from less

Budget constraints are driving a push for efficiency gains and rationalisation of both services and service providers. However, the expectations of customers are only increasing. More than ever, public sector organisations need to demonstrate the value they offer and become truly customer centric.

This is not always easy. Legislation or regulation may oblige public sector organisations to act, but is often silent on the outcomes being sought. This can create confusion around what services are provided, the levels of such services and who should pay.

The Neo-liberal agenda and public services

In the current global context which is dominated by market ideology, there is a significant shift in the nature of the state based on pro-market neoliberal principles. Characterised by the primacy of market forces and the adoption of market-driven policies and programs, the role of the public service has also changed in terms of an increasing concern for streamlining public sector activities, enhancing economic efficiency and improving customer satisfaction, as well as other areas. A key question is what are the socio-political consequences of this changing role, especially in developing countries of the Caribbean.

“In recent years, the role of the public service has undergone significant changes due to the contemporary transition in the nature of the state based on neoliberal beliefs in market-led policies and reforms. As some scholars observe, the emergence of such a neoliberal state—often viewed as the market state or competition state—has led to a corresponding shift in the nature and role of its public service (Ainley, 2004; Bobbitt, 2002; Pownall, 1999). These new directions in the formation of the state and the role of public service emerged largely in developed capitalist nations with diverse catchwords, such as “reinventing government,” “good governance,” “entrepreneurial government,” and so on (O’Flynn, 2004; Pownall, 1999). Under these major initiatives for transforming the system of governance in these countries, the public service has gone through significant reforms based on the principles and standards of business management, which are encapsulated as the so-called New Public Management or NPM.”

The common features of this NPM model of public service include the downsizing of public sector, privatisation and deregulation, outsourcing and public-private partnerships, and customer

Is there still a public sector ethos in the Caribbean?

What is the role of the state in Caribbean societies?

How valuable is the state in the Caribbean setting?

Especially in times of crisis we need public services. High quality public services are key to strong sustainable societies. They provide opportunities for growth and development. They are key to the achievement of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) and the [SAMOA Pathway](#)¹ as well as the realisation of the goals contained in global agreements made in late 2015 and 2016. ([The Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) and the [Paris Climate Change Agreement](#)).

The future of public services

Throughout the Caribbean, there is the urgent call to “transform the public sector” to “modernize” the public sector and there have been many attempts to do so over the years. The incomplete processes have in many cases created fear, and there is a lack of trust, as workers in many ways feel targeted and that their jobs are threatened. Current discussions in the sub-region on the Future of Work², initiated through the [ILO’s seven Centenary Initiatives](#), bring into sharp focus for many what needs to be done to create the kind of future that we want.

As Caribbean policy-makers seek to reverse the low growth and high debt situation, productivity comes into stark focus. And given the fact that governments in the region are the largest employers, then the public sector is called upon to play its part. But how do we measure productivity in the public sector?

Undoubtedly, public services cannot be unchanging. They need to deal effectively with a constantly and rapidly changing environment. Some changes are as a result of changing politics: fewer resources as a result of reduced financial resources; the current crises and policies of global institutions that impose their will on regional institutions and local governments. Some changes are also internal: some services may be ineffective or badly managed; the presence of corruption; or political interference in regulatory functions. Undoubtedly, we all have a vision of prosperity in our various countries and a prosperous Caribbean. That vision must speak to the development and maintenance of equitable societies, the improvement and expansion of quality public services,

¹ The SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway/Action Platform was developed to support the follow up to the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS Conference),

² See the Report on the Caribbean Future of Work Forum held in Kingston, Jamaica on February 22, 2017 - http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---americas/---ro-lima/---sro-port-of-spain/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_550131.pdf

and the further promotion of sound democratic traditions. What will the public service of the 21st century look like? What do **you** want it to look like?

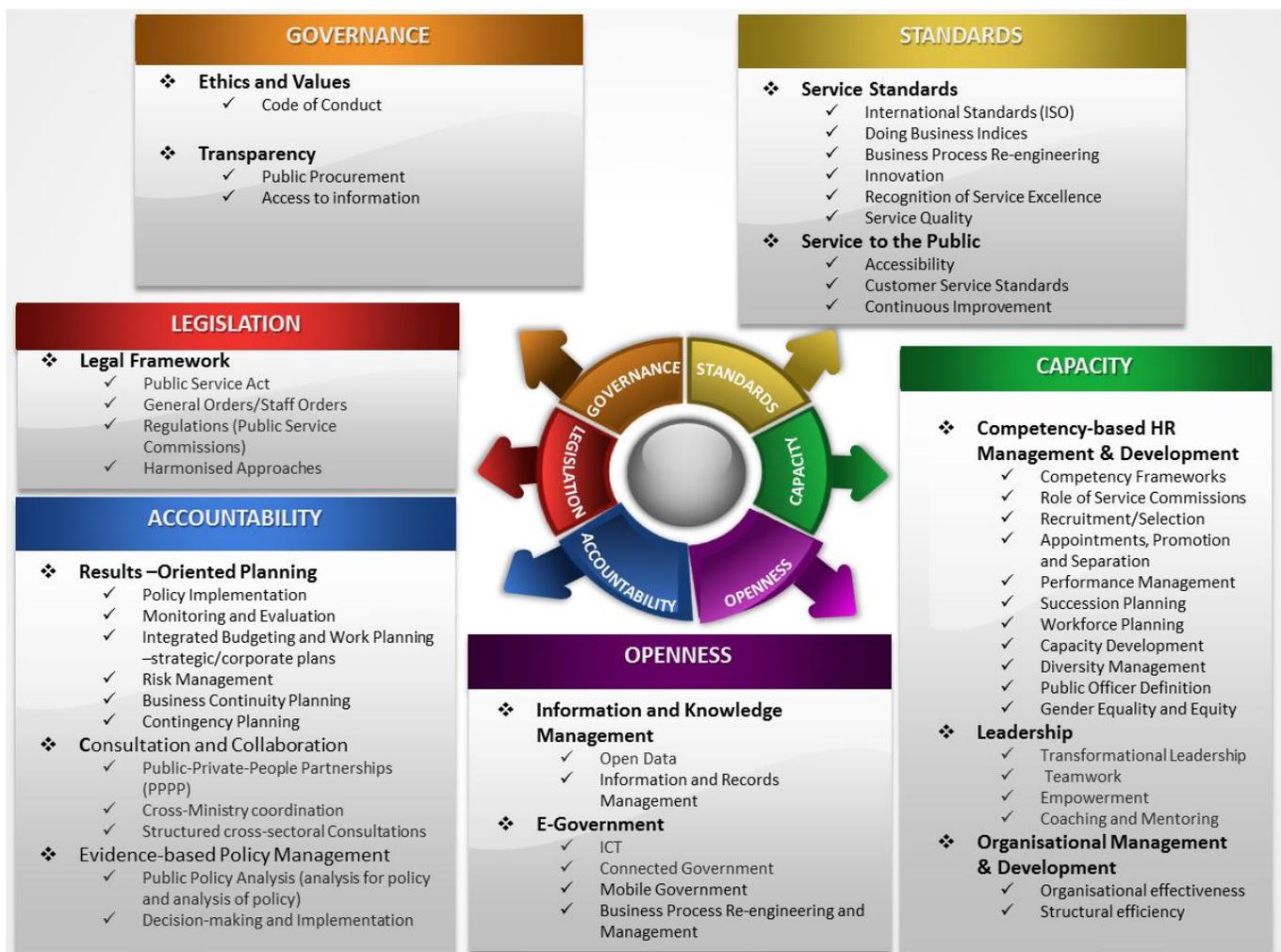
Charter for Caribbean Public Services and the Implementation Guide ³

More recently, the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD) has drafted a [Charter for Caribbean Public Services](#). According to Charley Browne, Director of the Office of Public Sector Reform in Barbados,

“It establishes a general framework of guiding principles, policies and management mechanisms, reflecting a common commitment of the public services of the Caribbean region. It is intended to serve as a catalyst for the reform, modernisation and transformation of national public sector entities within the context of the country’s realities and priorities.”

The Charter has six (6) Pillars, thirteen (13) Core Principles and fifty (50) Strategic Priorities.

Will this lead to greater productivity in the public sector?



³ The two documents are available for download at <http://www.caricad.net/index.php/resources/>

The [Public Service of the Future as seen by the UNDP](#)⁴ is dramatically different from what we are accustomed. And it promotes that neo-liberal agenda that suggests that government should serve as a platform rather than deliver services.

Public funding/tax justice

There is an urgent need to stop corporate tax dodging. This missing money is key to the problems with finding the resources to fund public services.

Around the world, PSI is calling for public country-by-country reporting to increase tax transparency, protection for whistleblowers who expose abuses, the establishment of a UN global tax body to set global tax standards and monitor shady capital flows and a minimum corporate tax rate to stop the race to the bottom.

[Estimates](#) (pdf) put the total amount in offshore tax havens at over \$20tn (£15.8tn). Economist Jeffrey Sachs [calculated](#) the total cost of ending extreme poverty worldwide would be a fraction of this amount – around \$3.5tn (£2.8tn).

Many are beginning to see, and expose, the fact that corporate profits have soared since governments bailed out the banks and other large companies. Yet many of our governments are struggling to properly fund schools, health, housing, infrastructure, social services and other valuable public services. And the result is that everyday citizens have once again to shoulder the burden.

<http://www.world-psi.org/en/23-june-want-fund-better-public-services-end-corporate-tax-dodging-0>

Some questions

- Having examined the documents, what is missing? What more do you need to connect with the Charter and the Guide?
- What is your analysis and reaction from a sectoral perspective? For example, how will this work in the health and social services sector, or the education sector, or the justice sector, or the municipal/local government sector?
- What is the capability of the civil/public service in your country? How would you describe it?
- What is your understanding of staff skills in the public service? What is missing?
- Where are the people? What is the people strategy?
- Can you describe your vision of the future public service in your country? Give some examples of one or two ministries or departments

Some other resources

- Public sector reform and demand for human resources for health (HRH) - <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC538275/>
- The road ahead for public service delivery, PwC - https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/psrc/pdf/the_road_ahead_for_public_service_delivery.pdf
- PSI's website page on Quality Public Services - <http://www.world-psi.org/en/issue/quality-public-services>
- PSI's website page on privatisation - <http://www.world-psi.org/en/issue/privatisation>
- PSI's website page on public funding/taxation - <http://www.world-psi.org/en/issue/public-fundingtaxation>

SYM/07/2017

⁴ UNDP working paper, "Work in the Public Service of the Future" http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/capacity-development/English/Singapore%20Centre/WorkingPaper_Work-PS-Future.pdf