



**ADVISORY NOTES PREPARED BY THE NATIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION ON THE DRAFT
NATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK TOWARDS THE PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE
PUBLIC SERVICE**

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The National Development Plan (NDP), Chapter 13: Building a Capable State recommends that South Africa needs to focus on building a professional public service and a state capable of playing a developmental role in realizing the vision for 2030. This requires well run and effectively coordinated state institutions staffed by skilled public servants who are committed to the public good and capable of delivering consistently high-quality services for all South Africans, while prioritising the nations developmental objectives.
- 1.2. A key component of this envisioned capable state is the professionalisation of the public service, which according to Chapter 13 of the NDP, is premised on tenets of ‘a public service that attract highly skilled people and cultivate a sense of professional common purpose where recruitment and management are based on experience and expertise’. Therefore, the state needs to reinvigorate its role in producing the specialist technical skills that are essential to fulfil its core functions, and provide appropriate career paths for technical specialists.
- 1.3. The Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) and the National School of Government (NSG) have been instrumental in conceptualising the draft National Implementation Framework towards the Professionalisation of the Public Service (referred to as “the draft Framework”). This Framework is a response to the recommendations of Chapter 13 of the NDP, and it provides the state with an opportunity to develop key actions and systems to ensure the professionalisation of the public service. The ultimate outcome is to ensure a responsive, meritocratic and professionalised public administration in the service of the people.

1.4. The draft Framework was published for public comments in December 2020, and in January 2021 the National Planning Commission (NPC) requested a workshop with the NSG to discuss the draft Framework with the intention to provide comments and inputs. The workshop took place on 11th February 2021, where the NSG made a presentation on the key features of the draft Framework and the Commissioners made their comments. The NSG hereafter requested written inputs or advisory notes to be submitted by the 1st week of March 2021. The NPC is therefore submitting these comments and recommendations to the NSG for consideration.

2. THE NEED FOR PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

- 2.1. One of the mandate and tasks of the second NPC was to monitor and review the implementation of the NDP to advise government on the recommendations and priority actions towards vision 2030.
- 2.2. Some of the key findings from the review of Chapter 13 include, a significant challenge and contradiction that goes against the developmental state aspiration of South Africa identified is the rejection of meritocracy in the country's public service. Persons are appointed to jobs in State-Owned Entities (SOEs) and the public service without the requisite experience, skills or gravitas as a result of inappropriate political involvement in selection and performance management. This interference with recruitment processes is a major contributor to the poor institutional performance of the state in South Africa at all spheres of government. The lack of a professional public service, with no clear career path for officials within the service, nor clear determinations of competencies, e.g. widespread political appointments at administrative levels at local government, has contributed to poor service delivery outcomes.
- 2.3. Therefore, NPC emphasises that for South Africa to become a Capable, Professional and Ethical Developmental State, it needs to focus on strengthening a Capable Developmental State through active overhaul of State systems; having actionable plans and programmes that promote ethical behaviour and professionalisation within the public sector; and putting in place the necessary interventions that will improve coordination and implementation capacities of State institutions and officials.

3. NPC's PERSPECTIVE ON THE DRAFT IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK TOWARDS PROFESSIONALISATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

3.1 The importance of stability

- 3.1.1 Instability in government is as a result of a number of factors, including changes in Ministers, Directors' General, Premiers, Members of Executive Council, Mayors and Municipal Managers, political infighting, people in acting positions, suspensions etc. This not only affects the individuals themselves, but importantly hobbles activity in their departments or spheres of government. Projects get put on hold, new policies cannot be implemented etc., as officials do not know how policy will change under the new leadership.
- 3.1.2 Even the implementation of policies can cause disruption and instability. When the Back to Basics (B2B) programme was implemented by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, many municipalities restructured to respond to the requirements of B2B (as they had done with the implementation of Spatial Planning and Land Use Management). Some of the restructuring process took almost a year to implement. In the existence of District Development Model (DDM), another round of restructuring will take place, which will probably be more significant than B2B as DDM has a stronger Intergovernmental Relations component. This takes time, energy and importantly distracts officials from focusing on the real issues.
- 3.1.3 Changes in senior staff cause incredible disruption. At a local government level, even an average municipal manager (MM) can, given time and political support, manage the municipality relatively well. However, even an excellent MM cannot achieve much, if they are only there for a short period of time. If one could compare dysfunctionality in municipalities, there would be a strong overlap with political infighting and senior staff or leadership changes.

3.2 Creating a more conducive and an enabling working environment

- 3.2.1 An important component of professionalisation of the public service is to create a more conducive working environment for professional staff to work in. In many state institutions the working environment is characterized by a toxic culture, long hours, endless meetings, weekend work etc. The public sector employees cannot be expected to work effectively

in these conditions and the state will not be an employer of choice if these are not addressed.

3.2.2. The issue regarding the rapid promotion of people is serious and needs consideration. The issue of meritocratic system of succession is critical for attracting the correct skills for the correct jobs, and the professionalisation must be able to build on the context and content. The examinations are a good initiative, for understanding the public service better and the expectations thereof. This process is one contributing factor, and pathway towards building a developmental state that will take us very far if we have a professional public service. It is critical to also understand who is the State and the role of the public service in attaining the developmental aspirations of the country.

3.2.3. The NPC appreciates the high-pitched aspirations especially with the theorisation of the aviation profession with a non-acceptable or next to zero margin of error. This is something that the country can start to work towards its realisation. On the issue of the tenure of Heads of Departments and Director General's, how is the implementation envisaged by the key role players? The appointments of non-Executive Directors and Boards of State-Owned Enterprises is something that has been discussed for a few years, but the appointments are still not aligned with the recommendations. Therefore, how will this be achieved through this Framework, and how to ensure that the Framework and its recommendations get implemented.

3.2.4. **Compliance above service delivery:** This process and engagement is very timeous and necessary. The focus on compliance above delivery has the effect of making our public service fairly ineffective and leads to a level of paralysis, where it is easier to deliver nothing and undertake a whole lot of activity in holding workshops, meetings and producing reports.

3.2.5. **Annual performance** reports are not conducive to encouraging innovation or to respond to pressing problems. We cannot predict all the issues that will arise over the course of year, and if public servants only work towards the issues that on their APP, a lot of opportunities will be missed.

3.2.6. **Leadership and Judgement:** there appears to be very little room to allow professional public servants to use their judgement in their areas of professional expertise. But this must be combined with a far greater degree of transparency in information on how

budgets were spent, how appointments were made etc. Good leadership is missing at all levels of government.

3.2.7. Supporting Functions: Building on the above, it seems that functions such as Human Resource, Supply Chain Management (SCM), Information and Communication Technology and Finance within any state entity appear to see their role as being watchdogs to police public service staff, whereas they should be there to support and assist public servants to do their jobs to the best of their ability. This may sound trite, but it is a huge problem that faces many public servants. For example, SCM appear to see their role as being there to act as rule-makers and traffic controllers, whereas they should, of course be mindful of the legal and policy requirements, but should also see their role as facilitatory in assisting professional staff to get their work done. Currently SCM staff delay procurement, over-implement the rules, yet still allow a huge amount of corruption to go unchecked.

3.2.8. The distinction between apolitical and partisan is very useful. The public service is by design political to the extent that it is vested with means to manage how political power (governance) is used to improve the lives of people. They ought not be partisan in the sense that they must not abuse this power to advance partisan interests (party political, narrow interest groups, personalities). Political parties by design will seek to weaken this as it enables them to infuse their interests a lot easier. This is the experience the world over. But systems are built such that it is difficult for political parties to use their tenures in government to remake the government in their image, for doing such would lead to constant remaking as parties take turns in government, leading to instability. What is done to help political parties understand the need to protect and advance professional public service is a major factor in the success or failure of this initiative.

3.2.9. Demand and supply side of professionalisation needs to be carefully thought through. Fixing what is happening inside the public service will not be enough to protect the public service from vectors that come from outside it, which is a key source of challenge.

3.2.10. The idea of associations from various professions reminds us that the public service is already a public profession, so professionalising does not mean making it a professional but deepening ethics, values and professional conduct, drawing from the host of professional codes various public servants belong to. This interface between the

individual professions and the public profession that the public service is, is clearly important. Public profession is thus being strengthened through this initiative.

3.2.11. In light of the Constitutional imperatives to professionalise the public service, what is the level of authority that is required by the NSG to make sure that this Framework is implemented? Secondly, why is it that those in authority are unable to implement basic things, for example, the issue around the appointment of the board of Directors despite an easy exercise by looking at one, the expertise that the candidates have etc. where does the problem lie in this regard? The issue around the revolving door, at what point is it going to stop, because people get appointed without being interviewed at a very high level simply because they have the political connection, and that kills the initiative of professionalising the public service. Proposal is to overhaul the HR component to start playing a critical and strategic role to be able to give those particular steps that the Framework has articulated. Another dynamic is around the interviewing panel of boards, who are very political but are required to ask technical questions without the content knowledge.

3.2.12. **Long-term Planning:** Research on the building of a capable and developmental state reveal that countries that have succeeded in improving their development trajectories are those countries that have decisively embarked on long-term planning, and the impact and success of this bigger debate will be realised in the long-term. Chapter 13 of the NDP can be seen as a culmination of long-term debates around actions and things that started in government around 2003 until this far and are able to conceptualise the critical areas of success.

4. PROPOSALS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The NPC makes the following recommendations:

4.1 Scope of application

4.1.1 Political principals in their ongoing work should, in addition to the above independently verified portfolios, be required to attend accredited Schools of Government programmes, to complete customised qualifications in (a) local government theory (b) constitutional law and administration theory (c) public finance and economic development

(d) international relations and business administration (e) African history and one elective language.

4.1.2 Mandate that all administrative positions in government be linked to a professional body, which will monitor and evaluate the following (a) hired administrator's qualifications are verified and kept up to date in line with applied position (b) all promotions are vetted and are accompanied by independent verification to ensure competence for position and without any political interference.

4.2 Application across all spheres of government

4.2.1 The local government is faced with various challenges, while the current process is mainly focusing on professionalisation at the provincial and national level. This is a great concern, and in this regard **inclusion of local government is critical**, as these are the areas where the majority of the citizens are located and are not getting adequately serviced. This is largely due to the lack of a standardised way of recruiting and filling of positions, therefore a way to align the three spheres of government is critical.

5. WAY FORWARD

The NPC supports initiatives towards building a professional public service, and the draft Framework should be taken forward following consultations and taking into consideration the inputs of various stakeholders. Following the approval of the Framework, implementation is strongly encouraged and should be gradually advanced across all spheres of government.