



REENGINEERING THE BUREAUCRACY: Issues and Problems

Reorganizing the bureaucracy has been in the agenda of every administration since the 1940s. While it has been called by various names—streamlining, reorganization or reengineering, the overarching reason for the reform is to reduce the wage bill, which has crowded out resources for vital social services. However, data show that these past attempts failed as personnel services continue to consume a huge chunk of the budget pie. Likewise, the number of personnel has grown while the delivery of government services remain dismal as shown by a recent survey¹ indicating dissatisfaction with government performance.

Last year, amidst the talk of a looming fiscal crisis, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, issued Executive Order (EO) No. 366 to rationalize the government bureaucracy. EO No. 366 provides the strategic review of operations and organizations under the Executive branch, and options and incentives for affected government employees.

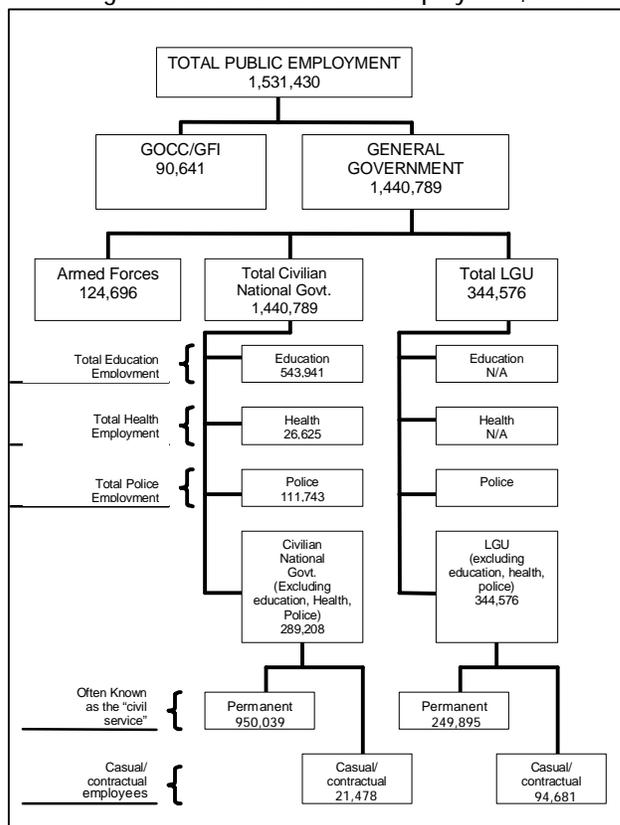
This article brings to light issues and concerns that pertain to this present attempt to overhaul the country's century-old bureaucracy.

The Case for Reengineering the Bureaucracy

Does Size Matter?

As of 2001, the number of public sector employees reached 1.53 million (Figure 1). This comprises about 20 percent of the total number of employed for that year, making one out of five Filipinos in the labor force a government employee. This makes the public sector the single biggest

Figure 1. Structure of Public Employment, 2001



¹Pulse Asia's October-November 2004 Ulat ng Bayan National Survey on Filipinos' Views on the Fiscal Crisis

Source: Philippines: Improving Government Performance: Discipline, Efficiency and Equity in Managing Public Resources (A Joint Document of the Government of the Philippines, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, 2003)

employer in the country. Notably, the education sector comprises 56 percent of total civilian national government employees. In the last four years, the number of teachers increased by 19,421² as a response to the exponential growth of enrolment in basic education, according to the Civil Service Commission (CSC).

Of those employed in the general government category (total public sector employment minus Government Owned and Controlled Corporations or GOCCs), 67 percent are employed by the national government while only about 24 percent are at the local government level. The Armed Forces of the Philippines comprises nine percent.

In terms of growth, the Philippine bureaucracy expanded faster than the population. From 1960-1997, the population increased by 160 percent while government personnel more than doubled in size from only 360,000 in 1960 to 1.37 million in 1997 (282%). Moreover, over a 30-year period, the ratio of government personnel to population has considerably increased from one civil servant for every 90 Filipinos in 1970 to one government employee for every 50 people in 2001 (Table 1).

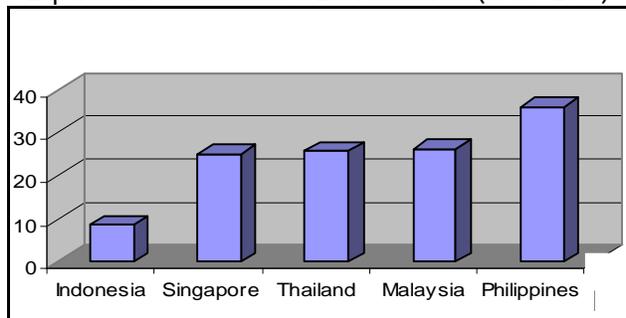
Table 1. Government Personnel to Population Ratio (30-year period)

Year	Ratio
1970	1:90
1980	1:52
2001	1:50

Source: Civil Service Commission

The growth in government employment has created pressure on the wage bill. For several years, personnel services continue to account for more than 30 percent of the budget. Compared to four ASEAN countries, the Philippines has the highest wage bill as a percentage of total expenditure (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Average Wage Bill as a Percentage of Total Expenditure in Selected ASEAN Countries (1996 - 2000)



Source: Facts in Figures, Congressional Planning and Budget Office (CPBO)

While the figures confirm that indeed public employment in the country is comparatively high, there are other reasons why the government should reengineer the bureaucracy. Size alone and its impact on the wage bill will not determine whether the bureaucracy succeeds in its role in fostering good governance and implementing national development goals. The following section discusses other factors that must be taken into consideration.

Efficiency Concerns

Reengineering the bureaucracy should not solely be driven by the reduction of workforce as it has always come to be understood in the Philippine experience. A study on government employment around the world argued that an efficient bureaucracy is one whose size, structure and skill mix is able to deliver quality service to the public and contribute to the nation's socioeconomic and political objectives. Accordingly, the size of public employment is not the only issue involved in evaluating the efficiency of the public workforce. A relatively large work force can be undersized if its size and skills are not commensurate to the responsibilities assigned to it by the population. On the other hand, even a very small civil service can serve a big population if its quality, skill mix and accountability mechanisms are good (Schiavo-Campo et al. 1997: 35).

²2004 Philippine Statistical Yearbook

For instance, in terms of the number of civil servants as a percentage of the population, government employment in the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia is comparable despite the huge variations in population (Table 2). Conversely, an industrialized country, such as the United Kingdom, has fewer public employees relative to its population at 1.3 percent. However, Schiavo et al. contend that these numbers do not tell which civil service is more efficient unless four things are known: (a) functions assigned to government in the country, (b) degree of centralization, (c) the civil service's skill profile, and (d) the legal framework that pertains to the civil service, particularly on regulations and constraints to mobility.

The Bigger Picture

Analyzing the bureaucracy using these four perspectives provides a clearer and bigger picture of its condition and thus, the case for reengineering. To begin with, the Philippine administrative structure shows poor distribution of human resources as well as shortage of key professionals needed by the populace. It also assumes functions that are no longer compatible with the state's role as more of a policymaker/regulator rather than the sole provider of services.

Table 2. Number of Civil Servants as a Percentage of the Population in Selected ASEAN Countries (2003)

Country	Number of Civil Servants ¹	Population (in millions) ²	Number of Civil Servants as a Percentage of Population ³
Cambodia	166,381	13.4	1.2
Indonesia	4,573,546	214.7	2.1
Laos	70,354	5.7	1.2
Philippines	1,445,498	81.5	1.8
Singapore	60,000	4.3	1.4
Thailand	1,296,688	62.0	2.0

¹ Source of Figures on the Number of Civil Servants: *Compendium of Information on Selected ASEAN Civil Service Systems. (2004)*

² *World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2005*

³ *Author's own computation*

For instance, the bureaucracy is still highly centralized despite the more than a decade-old devolution of powers of some national government functions. Six out of 10 public employees work at the national level while only about three serve in local government units.

Likewise, frontline employees such as public health doctors and police fall short of international standards of civil servant to population ratio. Using 1999 data, the CSC pegged the ratio of the police to population ratio at 1:682 when the ideal ratio is 1:500. Similarly, there is only one public doctor for every 26,700 Filipinos³ when the World Health Organization standard is 1:2000. The disparity across regions is even worse. The National Capital Region, has only one public doctor that serves 14,000 people. However, in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao, the ratio is dismal at 1:30,000.

In the education sector, the figures tell a different story. Though the 1:36 teacher/student ratio is close to what the Department of Education (Deped)⁴ classifies as “generous” teacher provision, there are schools with teachers handling as many as 165 students in a class. This problem is exacerbated by the assignment of some teachers to administrative and clerical tasks (ADB 1999).

Furthermore, the Philippine bureaucracy does not reflect a more deregulated environment brought about by past policy reforms. A recent study by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation argues that the government is still very much involved in areas that should have been otherwise left to the private sector such as management training, media production, home financing, railway development and food processing (Carlos 2004). Moreover, structural reviews of the Philippine

³ *This ratio is based on the 76.5 million population (Census of Population 2000) and the total number of public health doctors as of 2000 as indicated in the 2004 Philippine Statistical Yearbook.*

⁴ *The Basic Education Information System classifies 1:30-34.99 ratio as “generous teacher provision.*

bureaucracy show that a major source of inefficiency is the wanton creation of agencies that have unclear delineation of functions. This resulted in a dysfunctional bureaucracy that has become an impediment rather than a catalyst for growth.⁵ For instance, in the Office of the President and the main Executive departments, 400 to 500 agencies, commissions and councils have functions that overlap (World Bank 2003). These offices can be found in agriculture, law enforcement, health, research and development, among others. Consequently, this set-up results in a bureaucracy that is inefficient and ineffective. It is not surprising that most government institutions have negative public images as reported in various surveys.

In terms of skill profile, the low salary and the poor public image of the government has made it difficult to attract much needed professionals and technical people such as doctors and information technology experts in the civil service. As such, more than the size, quality is an important factor in assessing bureaucratic capability.

Finally, legal constraints also hamper the efficient distribution and mobility of civil servants. For instance, the lack of a meaningful financial decentralization has hampered the efficient devolution of civil servants in the local level. Local government units are saddled with more functions without the corresponding increase in sources of funds (ADB 1999). In the same vein, Republic Act 4760 or the Magna Carta for Public School Teachers, disallows local education authorities to transfer public school teachers to other areas where they are needed unless there is an expressed consent from the latter. Thus, a persistent problem in the basic education system is the imbalance in the deployment of public school teachers.

⁵*This view is echoed by two reviews on the Philippine bureaucracy: 2003 Governance Assessment of the Philippines by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the 2000 Philippine Social and Structural Review.*

Simply put, any effort to reorganize must consider the aforementioned realities of the Philippine bureaucracy.

A New Framework for Reengineering

Given the above discussion, an overall approach is necessary in the design and implementation of reorganization plans. The reform should not be limited to personnel retrenchment and wage bill reduction but should embrace the general context of public administration and governance practices. In the end, Schiavo-Campo et al. (1997) argue that the reengineering program should produce a civil service with the size, structure, skill mix and accountability indispensable to the delivery of public service, as well as to the design and implementation of government policies. Thus, they propose an overall approach for an effective reengineering program, consisting of three measures: (a) diagnostic, (b) cost containment, and (c) structural reforms.

Diagnostic Measures

According to Schiavo-Campo et al., the first step is to know the problem before any solution is formulated. Diagnostic measures help the government identify key areas for reform, and inform the stakeholders and the general public of the need for change and the benefits that will be gained from the reform. Information dissemination helps increase public expectations on the quality of and access to public services, which is necessary to improve civil service efficiency. Similarly, the World Bank proposed diagnostic measures, which include civil service censuses, functional reviews, institutional assessments and improvements in personnel information systems.

Cost Containment Measures

Cost containment is probably the most visible and contentious issue of the whole civil service reform process as observed by Schiavo-Campo

et al. This is because, according to the authors, civil service reform is at times misunderstood as limited to the two major aspects of cost containment: personnel retrenchment and wage containment. On the other hand, it should also be seen within the broader context of improving public administration and governance practice. Retrenchment should aim to achieve, not necessarily a small bureaucracy, but a bureaucracy with a size suitable to its needs.

It is also understandable that the pressure to cut on personnel services is greater in the face of fiscal problems. However, reducing the wage bill is not practicable when real public wages are low relative to private sector wages. Thus, it is argued that government's wage policy should be driven not only by the size of the wage bill, but more importantly, by the determination of a civil service compensation package that effectively links pay with performance (Schiavo-Campo et al. 1997:34).

Structural Reforms

The right size and proper incentive framework will only be achieved through the rationalization of the functions of each agency. Overlapping, fragmentation and unclear functions abound in the government structure. Likewise, cumbersome procedures have caused inefficiency and opportunities for corruption in the civil service. It is then important that rationalization of functions come hand in hand with improvement in accountability.

To carry out structural reforms, diagnostic measures are useful in determining the proper allocation of functions among different agencies and designing a civil service that is simple, client-oriented and accountable. Mandates, responsibilities and accountabilities should be clearly allocated, grouping the same activities while avoiding ambiguity, duplication and overlap.

The Arroyo Reorganization Plan

Executive Order No. 366

President Arroyo issued EO No. 366⁶, reviewing the operations and organizations of the Executive Branch, and providing options for government employees who may be affected by the rationalization plan. Interestingly, EO No. 366 covers Schiavo et.al's three basic measures of an overall civil service reform program. For the diagnostic measures, EO No. 366 directs all agencies under the Executive Branch to prepare a strategic review of operations of organizations and attached agencies. A rationalization plan will then be drafted based on the operations review. The rationalization plan tackles structural reforms aimed to, among others, address shifts in policy directions of the agency, redundant or outdated functions, functions that have been devolved to LGUs, and functions that compete with the private sector.

The cost containment measures focus mainly on reducing personnel size. However, EO No. 366 applies a different design from past reorganization efforts - - -the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS)⁷. Under this scheme, agencies with redundant functions or those incurring revenue losses for the government are first identified. The employees of these agencies are offered a severance or retirement

⁶ *The Arroyo administration is pursuing a two-track approach, the administrative and the legislative tracks. In 2003, the administration has already allocated P15 billion for early retirement. However, Congress failed to pass a reengineering law. As such, Pres. Arroyo has started her own rationalization plan upon assumption into office in 2001. To date, the current administration has abolished 102 agencies under the Office of the President (OP) and has transferred 23 other OP agencies to other departments. Because the President's power to reorganize the bureaucracy is limited to those under the OP and agencies that have no legislated charters, a legislated plan is still needed for the Arroyo plan to have a maximum fiscal impact.*

⁷ *The Voluntary Retirement Scheme, as opposed to involuntary retrenchment, has gained popularity among developing nations such as Sri-Lanka and Nepal, and partner multilateral organizations as a tool to reduce public sector employment. It is meant to overcome union opposition to involuntary retrenchment, which has stymied downsizing efforts (Rama, 1999).*

package, which they can avail of if they opt to leave the government. The early retirement package will give an average retirement benefit of close to PhP1 million per beneficiary and will be funded by the national government (PhP15 billion) through a US\$300-million World Bank loan. According to the Department of Budget and Management, the government will save some PhP7.7 billion yearly from the reduction in the wage bill thus recouping the PhP15 billion loan in two years. The projected savings is anchored on the assumption that 30,000 employees will avail of the separation/retirement plan. It is interesting to note that the savings is a mere 2.6 percent of the annual allocation for personnel expenditure. Hence, the fiscal impact is small and may not really address the inefficiency concerns of the bureaucracy.

Nevertheless, the success of the Arroyo reorganization plan can be a first step towards a long process of a complete public sector reform. The CSC will place those who do not opt to retire in a manpower pool to be matched to the skill needs of other agencies. As additional measures, the VRS prohibits hiring/rehiring during the plan preparation, as well as rehiring of retired personnel within a period of five years except in educational institutions.

Issues on the Voluntary Retirement Scheme

The VRS is not without its problems. Among others, three issues must be addressed to mitigate some of its negative consequences:

Adverse Selection

Studies of VRS implemented in developing countries revealed that the system inadvertently leads good, productive and highly-skilled government people to leave the public sector, otherwise known as adverse selection (Rama 1999). The same scenario may take place under the Arroyo government's reorganization plan. This is because the procedure outlined in EO No. 366 merely considers the years in service

and the unit where the worker belongs as a means of targeting those who may avail of the VRS. If the skill profile of the agency is not known, it is difficult to prevent adverse selection. As such, there is a need for a human resource audit that will yield a profile of the educational attainment and experience of each personnel in the agency. Once this is known, then it is easy to implement mechanisms that prevent adverse selection.

For instance, even if the office is declared redundant, not all employees should be made to avail of the severance pay. People whose graduate degrees were obtained using government funds, especially if they are still under contract with the government, may be excluded. Those personnel hired with specific technical skills that may be relevant to other government agencies in dire need of these skills may also be retained. With these measures, the quality of personnel who will remain in the bureaucracy is ensured.

The Revolving Door Syndrome

Another problematic issue in VRS is the 'revolving door' syndrome. This is a term for the usual practice of rehiring people that have already availed of the severance pay. The Arroyo plan hopes to minimize this by disallowing the rehiring of retirees within a period of five years except for hospitals and educational institutions. In the Philippines, the constraint to a successful implementation of a freeze on rehiring is the lack of transparent, coordinated and systematic information database of government employees. The DBM, the GSIS, and the CSC have their own list but the number and information they contain differ. It is therefore important that a human resource information and control systems be established to ensure that overstaffing will not recur.

The Politics of Reengineering

While VRS seems to be more acceptable to the different stakeholders, particularly the unions and the general public, it still carries political baggage when there is huge unemployment problem. Moreover, reengineering efforts in the Philippine context have always been seen as a purge, even if it is well-meaning, because of past experiences. However, there are plus factors in the current reorganization. Firstly, the much-publicized budget deficit and the fiscal crisis have made the public aware of the overarching reason for reforms. Secondly, the excesses of some GOCCs have turned the public off, which may lead them to support efforts to reform the public sector.

The literature recommends that a successful communication plan for the stakeholders of the whole process be drafted as part of any reengineering program. A transparent, fair, open and clear process of streamlining is the best way to gain public acceptance of the program. As for the union perspective, it may be worthwhile to look into the mechanisms (Box 1) to overcome union opposition, particularly when a multilateral institution helps fund the reengineering.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Undoubtedly, the need to reorganize the Philippine bureaucracy can never be overemphasized. While the fiscal impact may be slim at the outset, existing literature showed that the long-term effect of having a civil service with the size, skills, incentives and accountability is one which provides the biggest gain for the economy. A case in point is the development of the Japanese civil service. After years of successfully pursuing reforms that combine rightsizing, professionalization, budget limits and the improvement of the public pension system, the Japanese civil service has evolved as one of the most efficient in the world. In fact, this has become a model for many civil service

systems in Asia. The World Bank states that a wide body of literature links Japan's civil service with its economic development. As such, it is imperative that efforts to reengineer must not merely be an effort to reduce the wage bill but also develop, in the long run, an efficient bureaucracy.

The success of EO No. 366 remains to be seen as it is a mere blueprint that rationalizes executive agencies. The commitment of each department is very much needed to realize the intent and principles of the rationalization plan. This is where the work of the legislature comes in. Pending bills on reorganization must be prioritized as this will greatly contribute in ensuring that a government-wide reorganization plan is put in place and finally implemented. Notably, some departments have legislated charters that need legislation to be reorganized.

Clearly, a reorganization plan alone is insufficient to achieve a civil service with the right size, skill mix and incentives. To complete a public sector reform agenda, the following are some of the needed reforms:

Amendments to the Civil Service Code. Merit and fitness should be the foundation of a strong bureaucracy. As the bureaucracy's human resource agency, the CSC is hard put to implement this as it is continually hampered by antiquated issuances and political influence. As such, CSC must consolidate and update its legal framework to strengthen its mandate and enhance accountability and transparency. Moreover, this measure seeks to depoliticize the bureaucracy by empowering the CSC to oversee the appointment and discipline of public employees that have ranks below undersecretary.

Review of the Public Sector Compensation Scheme. According to the World Bank, the salaries of senior civil servants are 20 percent lower than the private sector equivalents.

Box 1. Seven Perennial Design Challenges—A Union Perspective
A Summary

1. Be sure to let union leaders know, at the outset, that the World Bank welcomes their input.
2. Begin consultative process at earliest opportunity.
3. Encourage “bottom up” involvement by unions representing affected employees.
4. Ensure client governments understand that union involvement will be part of the process.
5. Anticipate and accept that there will be resistance to retrenchment by unions.
6. Be, at all times, open to their input and let them know that if they have a better idea, you will work for its acceptance.
7. Be sure that unions receive positive reinforcement for constructive contributions to the overall program.

By John Fryer: Prepared for a World Bank Seminar on Public Administration: Challenges and Options: May 4, 2004

Meanwhile, senior officials of public enterprises who managed to be exempted from the Salary Standardization Law (SSL) receive remunerations that are many times higher than their counterparts in line agencies, causing distortion in the public sector compensation system. As such, a review of the SSL must make public sector salary more competitive and performance-based. Though a more competitive pay does not automatically reduce corruption, it encourages people to play by the rules and attracts the so-called best and the brightest in the public sector.

Strengthen the oversight function of Congress. The oversight function of Congress must be strengthened to ensure that laws are effectively implemented by the Executive Branch. This will better equip legislators with the tools to prevent corruption and inefficiency that can hamper the provision of basic services.

Installing a Common Personnel Information System between the CSC and DBM. This will help monitor and control employment growth in the public sector. The purpose is for every government employee to be linked to a corresponding authorized position in each agency.

Major stakeholders should be aware that a reengineering plan is a mere part or a first step towards a public sector reform agenda. To achieve an efficient and effective government is a long process and will involve not only rightsizing the bureaucracy but a host of other measures such as a change in the system, culture and mindset of how government should achieve its goals. It is important that government have clear goals and the right framework and commitment to pursue reforms.

Box 2. PAST REORGANIZATION PLANS AND HOW THEY PERFORMED

There were five reorganization plans implemented from 1946 to 1986.

Source of Initiative and Government Branch In-Charge of Five Post-Independence Reorganization Efforts: 1946-1986

Reorganization Year	Source of Initiative	Government Branch in-Charge of Reorganization
1946 (Roxas)	Executive	Executive
1950 (Quirino)	Executive	Executive
1954 (Magsaysay)	Executive	Executive-Legislative
1968 (Marcos)	Executive	Executive-Legislative
1986 (Executive)	Executive	Executive

Source: Cola 1993: 384

A study on past government reorganizations showed that the 1946, 1948 and 1951 reorganization managed to generate savings in the cost of government operations. The 1957 plan, on the other hand, was not implemented effectively. Of the 25 EOs which would implement the plan, only 12 were issued, and some of those issued were even revoked for various reasons. The plan was also weakened by a series of legislations exempting several agencies from the plan's coverage and amending some of the plan's provisions. The 1968 reorganization plan was revised to serve the political design of former president Marcos such that the end of Martial Law left a system that has encroached into local governments and the private sector, and a civil service that is inefficient, ineffective and with a weak sense of public accountability. (Cola,1993:407-408).

For its part, the Aquino administration wanted to rid the government of the vestiges of the Marcos regime. The enormous power granted to President Aquino by the Provisional Constitution of 1986 left her with the leeway to completely overhaul the post-Marcos bureaucracy. However, the reform effort likewise failed as new positions were created for Aquino's political appointees. At the end of her term, the bureaucracy even grew bigger and more fragmented as more agencies and personnel were added. (ADB, 2003:34). The Senate Committee on Civil Service and Government Reorganization of the 8th Congress observed that the number of positions increased from 605,123 during the Marcos regime to 614,256 during the Aquino administration. In the education department, an increase of 2,181 positions was noted (Carlos, 2004:81). Likewise, under the 1986 reorganization plan, 22 agencies were reorganized and 10 were abolished. The number of regular departments increased from 17 in 1986 to 20 in 1987, while the number of GOCCs decreased from 327 in 1986 to 301 in 1989 (Cola,1993: 407-408).

The Ramos administration, with its liberalization programs under the

mantra of Philippines 2000, pursued reengineering. During this time, reorganization was seen in an international context. More than ever, it was argued that a lean and mean bureaucracy is needed for the country to compete in a new globalized economy. However, Ramos was only able to implement incremental reforms such as the attrition law, privatization and support to decentralization because the opposition by government unions scuttled his streamlining agenda in the legislative branch.

This brief account of past reorganizations clearly shows that for every attempt, the government has become the cause of the mess it sought to fix. Nevertheless, it provides valuable lessons in implementing a reengineering plan. Past reform efforts failed because of the "lack of (a) acceptance, not only by the political authorities but also by the different affected entities that there is a need for reform and a commitment to make things happen, (b) appreciation and agreement among stakeholders that administrative reform is a long, strategic, and continuous process; (c) reform objectives that are specific, measurable, realistic and time-bound; (d) presence of good reform implementation strategies and resources to carry them out; (e) a central agency established for formulating, coordinating and monitoring reforms and providing corrective measures; (f) reform procedures and regulations that are fairly and consistently applied; (g) stakeholders who participate meaningfully in the entire process of reform; (h) strong and sustained support of the political leaders; (i) a system of accountabilities established and strictly enforced; and (j) safety nets for groups and individuals who may be disenfranchised by the interventions." (ADB 2005:26).

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