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Research Committee (RC) 4 Newsletter

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Public Bureaucracies in Developing Societies

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Dr. Khator New President of UH!

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On November 5, 2007, RC 4's Chair, Dr. Renu Khator was confirmed as the new President of the University of Houston and Chancellor of the University of Houston system! Please see the full news story at http://www.uh.edu/news-events/newsrelease.php?releaseid_int=76.

Due to her new responsibilities, she will no longer be able to serve as Chair of RC 4 but would like to remain an active member. We are working on finding an RC 4 interim Chair. We are very sad to see her leave, but she still hopes to attend future RC 4 meetings and the XXI World Congress in Santiago, Chile in 2009.

Please join us in congratulating her on this wonderful news!



*We hope to see you at
the XXI World Congress
in Santiago, Chile in July,
2009!*

Congratulations!

What's Next for RC 4?

We are still exploring the idea of holding a mid-term regional meeting in Germany, India, or Argentina. Please also plan on trying to attend the IPSA XXI World Congress in Santiago, Chile from July 12-15, 2009. IPSA has not yet announced a conference theme, but we will keep you posted!

RC 4 Members' News

Jean-Claude Garcia-Zamor has published a lead article in the September 2007 issue of the refereed journal *International Journal of Restorative Justice*, published in Canada. The title of the article is "Attempts at Restorative Justice for Crimes Committed in the Former German Democratic Republic." The full text of the article may be available in the journal's website: www.crjcs.org. Please join us in congratulating him!

"The options range from doing away with provincial government altogether... to a fully developed federal system where provinces would enjoy greater policy and fiscal autonomy than they presently do."

Reflections

By Vinothan Naidoo, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Cape Town
Chief Researcher, Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa

The future of South Africa's provincial governments from a public bureaucracy perspective

A governance issue that is currently attracting considerable attention in South Africa is the future of the country's provincial level of government, which came into being as a result of South Africa's transition to a non-racial democracy in 1994. That transition resulted in four pre-1994 provincial administrations being increased to the present nine, through the amalgamation of existing provinces with other regional administrations designed to house South Africa's black African population under the apartheid policy. The crux of the present debate revolves around whether the nine new provincial administrations have functioned effectively in carrying out what is admittedly a more developmental service delivery mandate assumed since 1994. Before describing the substance of the debate, it is necessary to note that South Africa has three levels of government (national, provincial, and local/municipal). The provincial level is not fully-federalised in the sense that its policy discretion is more constrained by national policy guidelines intended primarily to reduce socio-economic inequalities that emerged under apartheid. Provinces are also highly reliant on national transfers for their revenues.



South Africa's Parliament.

The content of the present debate, taking place at the highest levels of government, pivots around what the country should do about its provincial level of government. The options range from doing away with provincial government altogether, and transferring its functions to national and local governments, to the more politically unlikely option, from the perspective of the ruling African National Congress party, of moving towards a fully developed federal system where provinces would enjoy greater policy and fiscal autonomy than they presently do. In recent addresses to Parliament, senior Ministers even suggested that a third-way was possible, which could entail a reduction in the number of provincial administrative entities (i.e. departments) or even whole provinces, where this could ease problems that the country is currently

Reflections (Cont'd)

experiencing in its human resource capacity to staff government institutions.

The outward features of the present debate have sparked vigorous political exchanges about the governing party's motives for suggesting that the place and role of provincial government be formally debated. The official opposition in Parliament has for example criticized the government for what it regards as its disingenuous stance on the issue, arguing that it is not provincial government per se that is fault for poor service delivery, but the extent of national government's control over and interference in the functioning of these entities. It added that the governing party might also be motivated to do away with provinces because in two of these nine regions opposition parties stood good chances of taking control in the next election, scheduled for 2009. Other parties with strong regional bases have similarly argued for provinces to assume greater autonomy in a fully-constituted federal system.

Beyond the political and related ideological features of the present debate, the future of South Africa's provincial government has also spurred research enquiries into the performance of the provinces as public organisational/bureaucratic entities with large developmental mandates. The remainder of this excerpt provides the writer's view on the current debate from an administrative perspective. Firstly I would agree that there is sufficient empirical evidence to support concerns about the optimal functioning of provincial bureaucracies. Having said this, I would submit that contemplating a reduction in the number of these provincial bodies or even whole provincial administrations should not be considered the only nor necessarily the most desirable course of action, where this may satisfy the more immediate concerns and interests of national government, given its relative policy and fiscal powers, rather than the longer-term objective and current need to stabilise and strengthen provincial administration as a whole in South Africa. Moreover, I would specifically argue that there is evidence to support a need to strengthen the management of human resources in both provincial and national bureaucracies before seriously contemplating major structural changes to any one of these levels.

The evidence to support these arguments should firstly take account of the trend that has emerged since 1994 of requiring the provinces to assume greater functional discretion over their allocated revenues and related expenditure planning; notwithstanding the influence that national government continues to have over policy development and revenue generation. The point is that provincial bureaucracies, reporting to their corresponding political executives, have taken on increasing responsibility for the day-to-day management of policy in their jurisdictions. Given this, proposals running counter to this trend, such as reducing the discretion of the provinces or removing them altogether, would have to reasonably demonstrate that sufficient steps have been taken to strengthen and consolidate provincial government bureaucracies, or, that the provinces are unique in exhibiting service delivery deficiencies.



National flag.

“I would specifically argue that there is evidence to support a need to strengthen the management of human resources in both provincial and national bureaucracies before seriously contemplating major structural changes to any one of these levels.”

The problem is that neither of these conditions appears to be supported by convincing evidence.

Firstly, the national government's 10 year review of government programmes (1994-2004) observed that there was a "General lack of technically-skilled personnel at all levels...", where the problem was particularly acute in provinces and local government. Analysis of public service personnel data (2006) revealed the acuteness of the problem, where there was a significant difference in the ratio of senior civil servants (i.e., managers) to subordinates in national versus provincial bureaucracies. The figure for national departments was 1: 53.8 and that for provincial departments was 1: 179.2. The problem is that provincial bureaucracies, which exist alongside their national counterparts under a single public service and public finance legislative regime, have been delegated a complementary and much heavier responsibility for policy implementation than national departments, whose role is largely confined to policy development and regulation. Moreover, in cases where the insufficient HR capacity of the provinces resulted in under-expenditure, research by the writer (2007) found that where managerial and technical capacity was improved, so too did spending. These observations raise questions about whether sufficient steps have been taken to adequately resource provincial bureaucracies to perform their heavier implementation role.

Secondly, it is not evident that provincial bureaucracies in South Africa are unique in exhibiting service delivery deficiencies, where this should motivate questions about their future existence. Research by the writer on vacancy rates in the public service revealed that a lack of senior management capacity is also being sustained by national bureaucracies. Through an analysis of vacancy rates published by individual national departments on the basis of filled post establishments, the writer calculated an average vacancy rate of 22.3% in 2004/5, rising to 25.3% in 2005/6. These calculations moreover controlled for the change in post establishments, where it was found that the latter did not significantly affect vacancy rates. The writer also found that both national and provincial bureaucracies have experienced considerable movement or mobility of senior civil servants within and outside the public service. According to South Africa's Public Service Commission, this was calculated at 32% at national level and 38% at provincial level between 2000-2002. Finally, recent research by the writer (2007) on fraud prevention in national and provincial bureaucracies indicated that both levels of government experienced capacity constraints related to the exercising of this important financial management function, as well as insufficient diffusion of line management responsibility for fraud prevention.

South Africa's national and provincial bureaucracies have gone through considerable organisational restructuring since the end of apartheid in 1994. This excerpt has argued that contemplating a new round of post-apartheid restructuring cannot be convincingly based on either sufficient steps having been taken to strengthen and consolidate provincial bureaucracies, or that the provinces are unique in the service delivery deficiencies that they have exhibited. ♦

We would like to thank Vinothan Naidoo for such an insightful Reflections piece!

If you are interested in contributing to the Reflections piece, please inform Dr. Kissi at ekissi@cas.usf.edu. Please be sure to adhere to RC 4's theme of Public Bureaucracies in Developing Societies and please be sure your piece is no more than 1500 words long (about two-and-a-half single spaced typed pages).

