WORKSHOP ON INNOVATIONS IN GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC SERVICE TO ACHIEVE A HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

State and Poverty Alleviation in South Asia and South Pacific: A Comparative Perception Survey of Civil Servants


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ABSTRACT
This paper explores the perceptions of 238 civil servants towards poverty alleviation in three developing countries: Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea. The results show that civil servants in all the three countries supported the idea of decentralized economic planning, E-governance and rural employment programs. Therefore, recommendations include training programmes for better usage of Information Communications Technology (ICTs) in rural areas. Additionally, it is suggested that further research should be undertaken on the viability of promoting export oriented small business enterprises as an alternative to employment generation.

Keywords: State, Civil Servants Perception, Anti-Poverty Strategies, E-Governance.

Introduction
Almost all the countries in the developing world endured reforms and transformations in recent years in different degrees towards the fashion of ‘shared governance’. These reforms, however, have not made a great deal of difference on the level of socio-economic impact, including poverty reduction. Poverty is still an endemic and complex developmental challenge in most of these countries.

Dealing with poverty, both public representatives and civil servants should be outfitted to assume the Herculean task to effect an improvement in poverty scenario. Civil servants, as key policy stakeholders, need developing three interrelated capacities: (a) to be well-informed about the causes, magnitude and impacts of poverty in their individual societies, (b) to be knowledgeable about global and regional best practices and policy experiments in anti-poverty strategies, and (c) to be skilled and trained in managing anti-poverty campaigns and programme interventions.

Conceptualizing Poverty
The issues related with poverty are multidimensional and there is spectrum of opinion on who is ‘poor’ and who is not ‘poor’ so much so that Ahmed satirically labels the so-called ‘affluent people’ as ‘poor’. This is his observation from Bangladesh – one of the poorest countries of the world:

We have been pondering for identifying poor from a wrong direction….. All the time pointing fingers towards unfed, naked, sick and homeless as poor is not giving you right picture. Look for poor in Dhanmondi, Gulsan, Banani and other places like those. If you consider it is too big a place to find them, enter Sheraton or Sonargaon hotels and some other places like those, you can easily catch them. I am sure you will find many of the poor people there. They are eating, drinking, singing and dancing wishing good health of the poor. How can you eliminate, alleviate, eradicate poverty of the country without them? (Ahmed, 2005).

The perception of poverty, its measurement and alleviation require familiarization with the parameters and the varying implications. From a broader perspective, poverty means the forms of economic, social, and psychological deprivation occurring among people lacking sufficient ownership, control or access to resources to maintain or provide individual or collective minimum levels of living (Hye, 1996). This perspective also leads to a complex-multidimensional approach to the understanding of poverty, as opposed to uni-dimensional approach, which narrowly views poverty as a matter of income deprivation or nutritional deprivation.

Poverty is widely measured by the amount of income necessary to purchase food to attain required nutritional level. This income level is used as the cut-off point to differentiate between poor and non-poor (Ravallion, 1990). According to the calorie intake concept, the daily consumption of 2200 calorie provides the basis for poverty line. Those who are taking less than that may be called poor. The broad-based basic needs approach looks at health, education, water,
shelter and food in a composite manner. The UNDP’s ‘Human Poverty Index’ uses this method of measurement of poverty.

On the contrary, the multi-dimensional approach recognizes wide-ranging parameters of poverty. It seeks to identify indigent at not only physiological level but also in economic, social, environmental and institutional arenas. Amartya Sen seeks to view this as a more major problem confronting development. Through his ‘capability approach’ he explains that poverty means not only deprivation in terms of income. It also means deprivation of basic capabilities. Being free from, for example, disease, premature mortality, escapable morbidity, unemployment and illiteracy, allows people to take action and make choices. Absence of such freedoms results in incapability (Sen, 2000: 10-11). Even the World Bank and European Commission go beyond income levels and suggest that poverty also includes powerlessness, voicelessness, vulnerability and fear (World Bank, 2001) as well as lack of access to education, health, natural resources, employment, land and credit, political participation, services and infrastructure (European Commission, 2001).

Mapping Poverty

Evidently, poverty across the globe has been declining as living standards have risen dramatically during the past decades. The proportion of the developing world's population living in extreme economic poverty has fallen from 28 percent in 1990 to 21 percent in 2001. In terms of GDP growth, the present trend for the developing countries also looks promising (Riordan and newfarmer, 2004). The GDP growth has been accompanied by noticeable improvements in social indicators. Infant mortality rates in low- and middle-income countries have fallen from 86 per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 60 in 2002. Life expectancy in these countries has risen from 60 to 65 between 1980 and 2002. Adult literacy has also improved, though serious gender disparities remain. Male adult literacy (% ages 15 and over) rose from 78% to 83% in low-and middle-income countries between 1990 and 2002. Female literacy rates rose from 62% to 70% (World Bank, 2005).

But a comparative mapping of poverty would reveal that wide regional disparities persist. However, while there has been great progress in reducing poverty, it has been far from even, and the global picture masks large regional differences. Table 1 shows a summary of the distribution of poverty by major ‘continental’ groups. Poverty fell in East Asia and South Asia over the past 20 years, but remained almost unchanged in Latin America and rose sharply in Africa. Ward observes that there are a number of reasons as to why income poverty reduction has not been even between the different regions like policies of economic growth, discriminative international trade and (c) inappropriate and misdirected capital investment. (Ward, 2005).

Table 1: Total Number in Absolute Poverty[^2] [billions]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WORLD</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Asia</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
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[^1]: defined as living on less than US$1 per day ($1.08 in 1993 dollars, adjusted to account for differences in purchasing power across countries)

[^2]: below $700 p.a. in 1999 PPP terms
Role of the State: A retrospective look

Poverty alleviation became the primary objective for many of the developing countries once they achieved independence. The notion was that the traditional economy should be modernized and hence the state was accorded the primary role in this modernization process. The agents of modernization would be an enlightened minority, endowed with Western education and committed to transforming their societies along western lines for the benefit of all. The modernizers would welcome economic and technical assistance from the West (Esman, 1991).

Thus, the modernization of the economy through massive state intervention was deemed the only way to remove poverty from the Third World. But, as GNPs increased so did poverty, inequality and unemployment (Griffin, 1981).

As ensuing political and economic tensions necessitated, newer approaches such as ‘redistribution with growth’, ‘basic needs’, ‘target groups’, ‘popular participation’, and ‘decentralization’ received currency in the development literature (Hulme and Turner, 1990). However, these ideas did never get strong supports nationally or internationally. There were some piecemeal efforts but they did not really contribute substantially to augment economic development and poverty alleviation.

The New Public Management Era

In recent years, new perspectives have emerged for reforming the public sector. (United Nations, 2001). This new paradigm mounted criticisms on two aspects: the role and size of the state and the nature of administration. The first criticism focused on major economic problems like big governments involving in too many activities and excessive bureaucracy (Minogue, 1998; Hughes, 1998). Therefore, was to be ‘reinvented’ on the basis of a market economy (Osborne, 1992). The prevailing practice was to be replaced by the free market through different means such as deregulation, privatization, and budget cuts and like and to encourage initiative, competition, and other practices leading to economic growth (Turner and Hulme, 1997).

The second aspect of criticisms relates to the pattern of administration. However, this traditional model of administration is rejected as being infected by a number of limitations. Thus these have paved the way for the emergence of the new model with different incarnations such as ‘New Public Management’ (Hood, 1991), ‘Market-based Public Administration’ (Lan and Rosenbloom), Managerialism (Pollitt, 1999), ‘Reinventing Government’ (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) and ‘Post-bureaucratic’ model (Barzelay, 1992). The new model essentially intends to implant business management principles in the public sector. (Hood, 1991; Hughes, 1998; Common, 1998; Minogue, 1998).

There is a serious concern pertaining to the presence of the market economy in most developing countries, which “tend to have an informal economy with relatively weak specification of property rights and other formal processes to regulate economic activity” (Schick, 1998: 127). Hughes (1998: 219) raises an important issue: “…it is one thing to adopt a market and managerial approach, but yet another to have markets work”. Many developing countries have very little experience in the operations of markets.

The Current Discourse

The impact of market-oriented reforms on poverty situation has not also been encouraging. A number of studies have identified that the poverty situation of pre-reform period has not improved after the reforms. (NZODA, 1997; Knapman and Saldhana, 1999, Cook and Kirkpatrick, 1998: 251-264 and Shepherd 2000).

However, the contemporary evidence gives a promising picture in relation to the role of the state in poverty alleviation. Particularly, the roles that states in East Asian countries have played are quite remarkable. (Khan and Muqteda, 1997). The states in these countries pursued poverty-alleviation strategies as an overall part of broader development policies. A coordinated development of the entire economy is a precondition for the development of the rural economy and the elimination of rural poverty.
In addition, large-scale investment was made in the development of infrastructure, education and public health (Amsden, 1989; Wade, 1990; World Bank, 1993). The East Asian experience states that the state plays a dominant role but does not negate the role of the market forces and the civil society organizations (Khan, 2001).

In order to be effective in its poverty-reducing development mission the state has to fulfil some fundamentals such as establishing a foundation of law, maintaining a non-discriminatory policy environment, investing in basic social services and infrastructure, protecting the vulnerable and protecting the environment (World Bank, 1997).

The civil servants do have their institutional strength to perform this antecedent responsibility. Referring to the context of Africa, Kalebbo sees a lot of advantages using civil servants as forerunners in state management – their knowledge of history, their values and impartiality, skill of implementing laws and invaluable memory (Kalebbo, 2000, 3). In the setting of India, where political decay is branded as a ‘conveyor belt effecting all fields of activity’ Devika Paul highlights the role of civil servants as a vital one and calls them to set examples of the triple virtues: neutrality, integrity and anonymity (Paul, 2000, 132-136).

Study Rationale

The above background discussion gives one a clear understanding that the poor and non-poor dichotomy rests on the multidimensional nature of poverty, i.e. social structure, legal framework, access and participation. Any strategy to alleviate poverty therefore need to consider a range of quality of life variables such as, nutrition, health and sanitation, housing, personal security, access to state distribution system, participation and institutional capacity, and crisis coping capacity. As the state’s key player, the civil service should therefore approach poverty from a broader perspective and thus develop effective policy instruments and strategic programmes. The public bureaucracy can be involved directly in certain public provisions. On the other, it plays a vital role in streamlining the operations of other sectors such as the market and NGOs. Current reform programs aiming at economic development in general and poverty reduction in particular need the proactive role of the public bureaucracy, the most vital state institution.

It is in this context that this study attempts to understand the perception of the members of the public bureaucracy in the developing countries of Fiji, India and PNG about their definition of poverty, the wide ranging anti-poverty measures they can adopt including various other state efforts they may indicate that have important bearing upon poverty alleviation. The intention is to examine how existing approaches to public sector reforms can be made to focus on poverty reduction, as well as on the question of what key additional activities the state needs to take on. To what extent does expanding the notion of government to ‘governance’, with its inclusion of the private sector, NGOs and local democracy, enable the preservation of the objective of creating the minimal state which can still achieve substantial and sustained poverty reduction in developing countries? The growing governance agenda may indicate that the wider institutional frameworks involved and the linkages among them have potential for poverty reduction, which is greater than those of the state alone.

Fiji

Fiji, comprising nearly 300 Islands in the South Pacific Ocean is smaller than New Jersey in size (18,270 sq km) (http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/fj.html). Its population is 868,531 (estimated in July 2003). Fiji began its own scheme of re-invention of public sector in the late 1980s, the key ones comprising financial reform, civil service reform and public enterprise reforms. The 1980s also saw weak economic growth, increasing unemployment and low investment levels. Thus the intentions of these public sector reforms were to enhance profitability, productivity, efficiency and accountability of public organizations. The reforms, albeit slow in pace, have produced some encouraging results in achieving targets. After pull off some positive impact with the privatization programme, Fiji is now implementing a comprehensive civil service reform package to prop up leadership, performance, efficiency and accountability.

Nonetheless the poverty scenario looks rather grim. Fiji’s poverty has also grown by two thirds in the past 25 years. In 1977, a nominal 9% of the population lived in poverty; by 1991, this had risen to 25%; and by
2002 it had risen further to 33% (Naidu and Barr, 2002). Poverty is prevalent in both rural and urban areas, and in all ethnic communities, but particularly amongst Fijians, Indo-Fijians, and other minority groups. Landlessness is a growing problem resulting from the insecurity of land tenure system. Female headed households and children are amongst the worst hit victims of poverty (Ali, 2005, 1-2.). Amelia Kinahoi-Simamomua - United Nations Women’s Funds Pacific Director explained that poverty has a female face in the sense that poverty among women is multidimensional and includes not only a lack of income, but lack of autonomy, dignity and leisure and a lack of security from gender based violence (The Fiji Sun, October 27, 2004).

India

India is the second largest country in the world next to China with a population of 1050 million and is the 11th largest economy in terms of Gross National Income with US$ 500 billion in 2002. India’s economic growth has picked up and increased to 7 percent in 2004.

Despite the spectacular growth, India still has the world’s largest number of poor people in a single country. Of its nearly 1 billion inhabitants, an estimated 250-300 million are below the poverty line. The government has initiated, sustained, and refined many programs since independence to help the poor attain self-sufficiency in food production. Probably the most important initiative has been the supply of basic commodities, particularly food at controlled prices, available throughout the country. Indian government programs in 1980s and early 1990s attempted to provide basic needs at stable, low prices; to increase income through pricing and regulations, such as supplying water from irrigation works, fertilizer, and other inputs; to foster location of industry in backward areas; to increase access to basic social services, such as education, health, and potable water supply; and to help needy groups and deprived areas. Poverty alleviation is expected to make better progress in the next 50 years than in the past, as a trickle-down effect of the growing middle class. Increasing stress on education, reservation of seats in government jobs and the increasing empowerment of women and the economically weaker sections of society, are also expected to contribute to the alleviation of poverty. Eradication of poverty can only be a very long-term goal in India. (http://www.indianchild.com/poverty_in_india.htm)

Papua New Guinea

Papua New Guinea is endowed with a rich natural resource base, including major gold and copper deposits, large oil and natural gas reserves, vast expanses of agricultural land, and extensive forests and maritime fisheries. But 85 percent of the 5.1 million (according to the 2000 census) population derive their livelihood from agriculture, mainly low-productivity labour-intensive farming. Papua New Guinea’s per capita GDP (purchasing power parity) of about $2,200 in 2004 should classify it as a middle-income country. But because the country’s wealth is unevenly distributed, the average per capita income for more than 80 percent of the population is only $350, about one-third of the national average. Thus, for much of the population, the quality of life and social indicators are no better than those in the low-income and poor countries.

The issue of poverty is receiving increased attention in Papua New Guinea. But the existing evidence gives no indication of when poverty might be eliminated and has nothing to say about how economic growth might reduce poverty. Under historical growth rates, it would take an average of 20 years for poor Papua New Guineans to escape from poverty. The fight against rural poverty is likely to take even longer, because the rural poor are further below the poverty line and are likely to face lower economic growth rates. Any poverty reduction strategies have to recognize the long-term nature of the fight against poverty. These strategies also need to recognize the more difficult circumstances of the rural poor, who are both further below the poverty line and experiencing lower growth rates (Achieving A Better Future, 2005).

Research Methodology

Participants

Self-administered questionnaires were used to assess civil servants’ perceptions on anti-poverty strategies in Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea. In all, a total of 238 questions were filled with 100 each
from India and Papua New Guinea and 38 from Fiji. The relative sample sizes were a reflection of the size of civil service in the three countries used in the survey.

Instrument

The questionnaire had a range of questions from the socio-economic profile of participants to their attitudes towards poverty alleviation. Ranking procedure was used to assess the degree of importance attached to the different anti-poverty strategies used for poverty alleviation. As there were many ranks (seven) in the ranking procedure, it was felt that the ranks could be treated as a continuous dependent variable (Vogt, 56). However for meaningful analysis, the ranks were rescaled with 7 representing the most important strategy while 1 representing the least important one.

Analysis

Treating the ranks as continuous dependent variable would allow the use of one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for the differences of mean scores of the Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea. Further support for the use of ANOVA for the analysis of rank (ordinal) data is provided by Monette et al. (354)

Many procedures that are technically appropriate for interval-level data are also used with ordinal variables because they are “robust,” or not readily affected by violation of their theoretical assumptions.

It was found through Levene statistic that in six of the seven variables, the significance value was greater than .05 indicating that homogeneity of variance (homoscedasity) assumption was not violated, thus permitting the use of ANOVA.

ANOVA was preferred to its non parametric counterpart (Kruskal-Wallis) because post-hoc multiple comparisons (Tukey’s HSD test) could effectively be applied to results obtained from ANOVA.. Additionally, the effect of different sample sizes on the overall variance in the seven anti-poverty strategies could be assessed using Eta squared procedure (Cohen, 1988).

Hypotheses

Based on the literature, the following research hypotheses are proposed on the perceptual differences on anti-poverty strategies:

H1: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards decentralized economic planning
H2: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards shared governance and partnership with private sector/NGOs
H3: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards E-governance
H4: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards rural employment program
H5: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards micro credit operation
H6: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards community based self-help programs
H7: There are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and Papua New Guinea towards the provision of health and education for all

RESULTS & DISCUSSION CIVIL SERVANTS
Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the mean values, standard errors and significance of the six anti-poverty strategies discussed here.

**Table 1: Perceptions of Civil Servants towards anti-poverty Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anti-poverty Strategies</th>
<th>Fiji</th>
<th>India</th>
<th>PNG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>S.D.</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralized Economic planning</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared governance and partnership with private sector/ NGOs</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural employment program</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td>4.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro credit operation</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community based self-help program</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>5.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing health and education for all</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S = significant at .05
NS = non significant

**Perceptions towards decentralized economic planning**

There was a significant difference in the perceptions of civil servants from different states. On closer scrutiny of multiple comparisons (Tukey’ test) it was noted that Papua New Guinea (as shown on Table 1) had the highest mean score of 4.2. Fiji and India had mean scores of 3.64 and 3.58 respectively. The ANOVA results show that there was significant difference (at 0.05) in the perceptions of civil servants of the different states, thus supporting the first research hypothesis that there are significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants of different states towards decentralized economic planning.

**Perceptions towards shared governance and partnership with private sector/NGOs**

The results show that there was no significant difference among the civil servants’ perceptions from the different states towards shared governance and partnership with private sector/NGOs. The mean values shown on table 1 ranged from -.210 for India to -.506 for PNG. These results were not significant at .05 levels thus the hypothesis relating to differences observed on civil servants’ perceptions towards shared governance and partnership with private sector and NGOs is rejected.

**Perceptions towards E-governance**

There was however a significant difference by state in the perceptions of civil servants. Tukey’s multiple comparisons show that perceptions of civil servants in India and Fiji towards E-governance were different from the perceptions of civil servants from PNG.

The mean values shown on Table 1 shows that PNG had the highest score (2.93) while Fiji had the lowest (2.06). Thus, the third hypothesis that 'there is a significant difference in the civil servants’ perceptions by state towards E-governance’ is supported.

**Perceptions towards rural employment program**
Significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants towards rural employment programs were noted at .05 levels. Table 1 show that Fiji had the highest mean score of 5.21 while India and PNG had 4.36 and 4.29 respectively. Based on the evidence on Table 1, it might be asserted that the hypothesis ‘there are significant differences in perceptions of civil servants by state towards rural employment programs’ is supported.

*Perceptions towards micro credit operation*

Civil servants’ perceptions towards micro credit operations were found to be not significant. The mean values shown on Table 1 were highest for Fiji (4.05) and lowest for PNG (3.18). Thus the fifth hypothesis that ‘there is a significant difference in the perceptions of civil servants by state towards micro credit operation’ is rejected.

*Perceptions towards community based self-help program*

There was a significant difference of civil servants’ perceptions by states towards community based self-help programs. The highest value noted was for India (5.17) and lowest for PNG (4.52). Fiji recorded a score of 4.68 which was fairly close to the mean score of PNG on this variable. Based on the evidence in Table 1, the sixth hypothesis that ‘there is no significant difference in the perceptions of civil servants towards community based self-help programs’ is supported.

*Perceptions towards health and education for all*

Perceptions of civil servants by state on the provision of health and education for all were found to be insignificant at .05 levels. Table 1 shows that India had the highest mean score (5.01) and, PNG the lowest (4.60). Fiji had a mean score of 4.89. Thus on the basis of evidence on hand the hypothesis that ‘there is a significant difference in the perceptions of civil servants from different states towards the provision of health and education for all’ is rejected.

The ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences overall on the perceptions of civil servants from different states. This test however did not reveal what the critical differences were. In order to identify the critical differences, Tukey’s HSD test was used. Tukey’s test showed that there were significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants from India and PNG on the importance of a number of anti-poverty strategies. It was found that the perceptions of civil servants from the two states differed on the importance of decentralized economic planning, E-Governance and community based self-help programs as an anti-poverty strategy. Similarly, it was found that there were significant differences on the civil servants’ perceptions from India and Fiji on rural employment programs.

Additionally, it was found that there were significant differences in the perceptions of civil servants’ of Fiji and PNG on the important anti-poverty strategies relating to E-Governance, rural employment programs and Microsoft credit operations.

No significant differences on perceptions of civil servants from the three states were observed on matters relating to shared governance, partnership and private sector/NGO. The overall importance of this factor as an anti-poverty strategy was 4.12. Likewise, no significant difference in perceptions was noted on the importance of micro credit operations and on the variable relating to health and education provisions for all. The last two factors had a mean of 4.47 and 4.82 respectively.

Following public sector reforms, there is a feeling among some quarters that civil servants can play a critical role towards poverty alleviation through their design of public policies and provision of services. It has been argued for example, that civil servants in Africa with their knowledge of history, values and skills of law enforcement are potentially forerunners of strategies oriented towards poverty alleviation. It is suggested that civil servants are empowered with the necessary skills, experience, legitimacy and institutional continuity to enhance public sector reforms that are being introduced in many developing countries.
Examples of successful new public management (NPM) reforms however have been cited from countries in East Asia. The two often cited examples are Korea and Taiwan. In these situations, poverty alleviation strategies are supplemented with broad development policies, coordinated for the development of the entire economy. Here issues of inequality and assistance to the poor and vulnerable were considered as ‘antecedent responsibility’ of the state.

One of the reasons for the current public sector reforms in developing countries is that the size of government and the pattern of administration were considered to be rather large. It was felt that the governments should be lean with increased sensitivity towards customer satisfaction. Thus in the public sector reforms, good governance was to be promoted through improved efficiency, transparency, accountability and leadership. In the so called ‘re-invented’ state, poverty reduction was to be undertaken through ‘shared governance’ with NGOs and the private sector.

Unfortunately, it has been argued in some circles, that the creation of a lean (minimal) state is at odds with poverty alleviation. The argument here is that cutting the size and scope of government would be counter to poverty reduction strategies of the state. Additionally, decreasing the size and scope of government would adversely affect such services as primary health care and education, and increasing lack of public facilities such as lack of piped water and electricity which the poor need most. It has also been argued that policies oriented towards deregulation, privatization and budget cuts that would accompany the creation of new public management systems (as part of the restructure exercise) would lead to unemployment, lower levels of salary, marginalize small farmers, informal payment systems and other types of corruption. Furthermore, the new public management has led to new problems with increasing polarization between rich and poor.

While the perception scores of civil servants were relatively moderate to high on six anti-poverty strategies, a serious question arises as to the degree of correspondence between the perceptions and transformation of those perceptions into reality. Despite limitations, civil servants’ awareness of the poverty alleviation strategies could result in the design of policies aimed at poverty reduction.

A survey of the perceptions towards anti-poverty strategies in different states produced some interesting results. It was found that Fiji, a small island state in the Pacific had the highest mean (5.21) on rural employment programs. Of the six anti-poverty strategies, India, had the highest score (5.17) on community based self-help programs. Papua New Guinea, the third country used in the survey of perceptions of civil servants showed that provisions for health and education for all had the highest mean of 4.60.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This was an empirical study aimed at exploring the perceptions of civil servants towards poverty alleviation strategies. It is based on the assumption that civil servants can play a critical role in poverty reduction in the ‘re-invented’ state with new public sector reforms. Of the six strategies examined in this research, it was found that there was no significant difference in the perceptions of civil servants from Fiji, India and PNG towards shared governance and partnership with private sector/NGOs, micro credit operations and provisions for health and education for all as poverty reduction strategies. However, significant differences in perceptions were observed towards decentralized economic planning, E-Governance and rural employment programs as poverty alleviation strategies. A limitation of this research lies in assessing the association between perceptions of poverty alleviation strategies and efforts of civil servants in designing effective policies directed towards poverty reduction. Future research could thus address issues related to perceptions of civil servants’ and their poverty reduction efforts at different levels.

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