

Policy, procedures and performance

T. A. Chaturvedi, former CAG, has, in an article entitled 'Administrative performance and accountability', given an illuminating analysis of how administration functions against various pulls and counterpulls. This and other related material were distributed during the Delhi meet as background information. Extracts:

The crucial test of efficiency and effectiveness of administration lies in the accomplishment of the objectives stipulated in policy decisions. Very often we are told that the policy is good but its implementation is poor or bad. In a way this is a contradiction in terms. A policy which fails to take into account the possible constraints of performance cannot be deemed a good policy. Policy is rooted in the experience of the past. It is motivated by the compulsions of the present. Also, policy is anticipatory in nature and is oriented to the perspective of the unfolding future. If a policy is thus three-dimensional, obviously it must take note of the environmental barriers and uncertainties and human inadequacies if it is not to flounder in the process of implementation. A policy which is based on 'ifs' and 'buts' will be a statement of intentions or aspirations, but cannot certainly be a policy in the real sense of the term policy. If it does not lead to performance, it is nothing short of administrative abortion. Policy must effectuate successful programmes and consistently seek, strive for and retrieve the desired goals.

Policy and performance constitute a continuum. It is, however, a wrong assumption that a policy once outlined will automatically fructify into performance. People castigate administration for its lack of result orientation. It is said that administration lacks achievement-mindedness. It is criticized as procedure-ridden, ritualistic or narcissistic, or self-centred in its approach and orientation. It is not the harmony and balance of the administrative system, whether internal or external, that will satisfy the people. Their expectations are on the performance of the system. If it fails in results, if it is slack or lackadaisical in its performance, the natural reaction of the people is that

both the system and the people who man and manage the system are at fault.

Discussing performance, Chaturvedi quotes the observation of Albert Camus: 'Good governments are governments under which nothing happens.' He adds:

All it means is that when the scope and scale of the operation of the Government is limited, the concern about its performance is also limited. But in a situation where Government has an ever-increasing expanding role, the pervasiveness and impact of administration are both getting more extensive and intensive as much as the accomplishing side of the Government.

An administration reluctant or inward-looking cannot meet the demands of such an aggressive environment.

Concerning developmental activities (like scientific research, for example), Chaturvedi remarks:

It is imperative that development-mindedness should be an attitude of mind, a psychological dimension that must express itself in administrative performance whatever the segment of public service be, and must characterize and permeate the entire spectrum of administration.

According to the dictionary, performance is to be understood in terms of accomplishment, attainment, achievement, execution or implementation of goals and tasks.

If one makes a cursory view of the process of planning for development, one will see that the implementational aspects have not received the attention which the formulation aspect has received. As W. H. Lewis (*Principles of Economic Planning*, London, 1963) observes:

One can plan by direction alone, or by inducement alone, but one cannot plan by exhortation alone, when the major result of one's actions is to make the inducements work in the opposite direction. This is not planning, but merely pretending to plan. Planning is a serious business. What makes planning is not the targets, which merely express what we would like to see happen, but the action that is taken to achieve these targets.

Turning to accountability, Chaturvedi observes:

Accountability is the kingpin of democratic administration. But it is not only regulatory and punitive in its purpose and contents. It has a positive orientation and promotional goal, viz. to ensure adequate administrative performance under democratic supervision and guidance.

How exactly does one interpret the word accountability? Chaturvedi provides the answer:

Accountability or responsibility can be interpreted in a narrow sense as answerability to the superior authority for implementation and for achievement. The basic purpose is that the administrative operations are carried out with economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In the context of the rule of law, the procedural proprieties also become a necessary adjunct to the concept of accountability as operationalized. That is why there is always the need to consciously think on the matter and see that, in the name of accountability, performance does not become the prisoner of non-decision and of the rigidities of procedures and regulations. All this requires a more integrated view of the totality of the situation if the developmental tasks have to proceed smoothly and speedily to fulfil the expectation of the people. In a democratic system the pulls and pressures are inevitable and instead of bemoaning them, for the sake of administrative performance, they must be rationalized and contained through a proper approach and understanding of their constraint and their potential.

Chaturvedi quotes from the report of the Royal Commission on Financial Management and Accountability set up in Canada in 1976:

Accountability, like electricity, is difficult to define, but possesses qualities that make its presence in a system immediately detectable. To touch a live wire in a circuit is enough to establish the presence of electricity without further need of definition. The shock of recognition that attends the presence of accountability in a system of government may not be quite as direct, but is nonetheless detectable. . . .

In short, accountability relies on a system of connecting links, a two-way circuit involving a flow of information that is relevant and timely, not only for managers but for those who must scrutinize the decisions and deeds of managers. We gauge its presence when we

observe that a certain discipline has been imposed upon those who are assigned roles and duties in the system. In simple terms, accountability is that quality of a system that obliges the participants to pay attention to their respective assigned and accepted responsibilities, to understand that it does matter. Thus, the likelihood that agreed goals and objectives will be attained is enhanced.

Comforting to scientists would be the following remarks:

Accountability for administrative performance cannot be equated only with the narrow traditional audit. In any case, in the broader context of perfor-

mance this approach should not lead to inordinate administrative cost in delays, dampening of initiative, reduction of discretion and flexibility, as this may become self-defeating. Accountability unfortunately becomes more a function of mistrust than positive in approach.

Accountability can be legal or judicial, financial and audit, legislative and political, administrative and programmatic. There are formal organs of control, apart from the administrative, like the judiciary and the legislature, intended to enforce accountability.

Similarly, there are legislature or parliamentary instruments like the question hour, interpellations committees of the parliament, etc. that have a vital constitutional obligation and role to play in this regard.

The one important point to note is that the formal controls should not be such as to inhibit initiative for action, or for decision-making. It is easy to be wise after the event, but hindsight is not necessarily foresight when compelling circumstances call for action.

What science audit should be

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No one will deny today that science has, in our times, come to be intricately interwoven into the fabric of our very existence and has become a major factor in determining socioeconomic and other policies; this new role of science is perhaps one of the most significant changes that have occurred in the twentieth century scenario in comparison to the situation that obtained towards the end of the last century. It is therefore understandable that, today, the involvement of the State in the affairs of science all over the world is substantial—so much so that, in most countries, science and technology policies are determined largely by the State. State-run scientific research institutions today account for a substantial proportion of the world's scientific output. In fact, whether a scientific research institution is owned and run by the State or by another organization—charitable or otherwise—the fact is that, directly or indirectly, it is public money that is used to finance it. The times of Newton and Darwin, when one could do science in one's parlour, are now all of the past; the process of doing science has become so complex that all science, requiring experimental and instrumental inputs, is done only in institutions.

It is this institutionalization of science and the intimate and extensive involvement of the State in the conduct of

scientific research all over the world that has generated the need for audit of scientific institutions. (The term audit generally means *financial* audit though, as we shall see later, financial audit without concurrent scientific audit may, at most, serve a very limited objective.)

I therefore begin with the assumption that no one would disagree with the view that scientists and scientific agencies, departments and institutions, must not only be *held* accountable but must also *feel* accountable. This accountability would have three distinct components: scientific, financial and social. Financial audit is obviously best done by appropriately trained auditors, scientific audit by the scientific community, and social audit by the society through an appropriate machinery. Perhaps the most important point to recognize in this context is that any of these audits by itself is of little value. Therefore, financial audit must be accompanied by an audit of the scientific performance as well as a social audit—that is, determination of the extent to which the social needs that were postulated to be met by the scientific research conducted and the effort put in have been met. The social needs may include the society's or the country's need for intellectual leadership, or just satisfaction of the desire to be creative that is built into our genes. I believe that the ideal situation would be

where only one audit-cum-performance report is produced when one is assessing a scientific research institution or organization—a report that would incorporate and collate all three types of audit.

The problems

The above is easier said than done. Let me list some of the problems that one is likely to encounter when laying down the policy for such an audit.

- (i) It is difficult to put the management of science into a rigid compartment or a slot, for such management is both science and art that keep on evolving continuously. In our country we have not realized how intimately the evolutionary aspect of science is related to science audit. Those who manage or audit science may be well-meaning and humane, but to them all science and technology is the same. It is therefore easy to see why they make so many mistakes in assessing the financial and/or scientific performance of an individual or an institution or organization.
- (ii) In science, the only rule that holds good for good management, at both macro and micro levels, is that there is no invariant set of rules for good management.
- (iii) Our science managers and auditors