[Foqia Sadiq Khan](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/foqia-sadiq-khan)

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**Civil service reforms**

There is a need to undertake a deep analysis of the reform culture in Pakistan. Reforms are in perpetual process in various sectors in the country and yet we see only a few tangible changes. Why do reforms not work as they ought to work is a question we would explore another time. In this article today, we are focusing on civil service reforms on the basis of PIDE’s Policy and Research 2021 (Vol II, Issue II).

PIDE’s P&R Guide has both carried a write-up by Dr Ishrat Hussain as well as his interview along with some other contributions. According to Dr Hussain, the constitution under Article 240 has stipulated three types of categories: the All-Pakistan civil service, federal civil service, and provincial civil service.

The provincial civil service is four times bigger than the federal civil service. More than 1700 posts have been allocated to the Pakistan Administrative Services (PAS) under the All Pakistan civil service and out of these 650 PAS seats have been allocated to the provincial civil service. Provincial civil servants can also be inducted into the PAS through the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC). Thus, the hegemony of All Pakistan civil service and PAS would be ‘diluted’ after the civil service reforms are implemented.

In terms of objectives, an effort would be made to separate the policymaking function of the civil service from its regulatory and operational functions. Similarly, a goal has been set to decrease the number of layers in the decision-making process of the civil service and reduce the layers to no more than three in every ministry and provincial department. To simplify and streamline the rules and audit functions is another objective. Introduction of e-government has been recommended and the interaction between civil servants and citizens is to be minimized with transparent and accountable e-government taking roots to replace the presented outdated processes.

Another issue that the PIDE publication highlights is that the present setup of civil service reforms is dominated by the DMG groups whose new name is the Pakistan Administrative Service (PAS). Sequencing of reforms is also an issue. The National Commission for Government Reforms (NCGR) has not been able to sequence the civil service reforms properly. Therefore, at present only the federal civil service is going to be reformed and it has been left to the provinces to carry out reforms at the provincial level.

The Taskforce on Restructuring the Federal Government and Austerity has divided the 441 federal Organizational Entities (OEs) into six categories: autonomous, executive departments, to be transferred to the provinces, to be privatized, to be liquidated, and to be merged. This effort has reduced OEs from 441 to 324.

There is a dire need to have district civil service groups. Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are going to have local governments where the elected local government representatives at the tehsil level would be more empowered than the civil servants. However, it is not clear how Sindh and Balochistan will deal with the local government and civil service balance.

A new National Executive Service (NES) will also be set up. After grade 19, both the generalists and specialists from the federal as well as the provincial service would be able to apply for it and they would be judged on the basis of a test and interview administered by the FPSC. The NES would induct the civil servants into four specialized groups: economic group, social development group, technical group, and general management group. Officers who are inducted in each specific group would serve only in designated and relevant ministries matching their expertise and get promotions within those parameters as well. This would introduce the much-needed specialization in our civil service.

The purpose of civil service reforms is to carry out changes both in the recruitment as well as in promotions and training of civil servants. A new performance-based promotions system is being set up instead of seniority where the relevant ministers would sign an agreement with the prime minister on the basis of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and this system will be rolled down the ladder. Only 20 percent of civil servants would be placed in the outstanding category with double the increments, others would be in the fully satisfactory and lesser categories. Those with “below average performance reports” would not be eligible for any increments. Similarly, Pay and Pensions are also being streamlined. Those civil servants who do not perform well will be given the chance to retire early.

The federal cabinet, just like previous governments, did not agree with the NCGR’s proposal to introduce the security of tenure. The federal cabinet has adopted a policy whereby a committee consisting of ministers and secretaries will recommend the names of three candidates for each secretary’s post to the prime minister who would make the final decision.

The civil servants wanted security of tenure. However, ministers are of the view that if they have to be judged for the performance of their ministry then they should have a say in choosing the bureaucrats for it so that they can deliver and it would minimize the frictions afterwards. There is a clear divergence of view here between the civil servants and politicians who are running the government.

The bottom line is that we need to analyse why reforms programmes do not work too well in Pakistan. Previous governments have also tried to reform the civil service with no tangible results. One hopes that the present efforts succeed. There is a need to institutionalize the long-term governance reforms programme, so that every new government in office owns the previous efforts and builds on them rather than undoing them. Only inculcating the long-term view of governance and politics would make reforms work – whether of the civil service or some other entity.

The writer is an Islamabad-based social scientist.

Email: fskcolumns@gmail.com