

The MNRE model for institutional strengthening in the public sector

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Introduction

The Department of Lands and Survey was traditionally responsible for surveying and land services until 1989 when environment was introduced and it became the Department of Lands, Survey and Environment. Since mid-1999 the department had undergone a number of significant institutional changes including the approval of a new organisational structure, establishment of a new institutional policy, formulation of a new corporate plan and the development of a new service charter. During the later part of 2000, a review of the department's reforms was conducted. The findings of that study (Yeoman Ward International, 2000) as well as the recommendations of the Public Service Commission Institutional Strengthening Project formed the basis for institutional strengthening discussed below. In July 2003 the Department of Lands, Survey and Environment became the Ministry of Natural Resources an Environment (MNRE).

This paper explores a model for institutional strengthening as developed during the continuation of MNRE's public sector reforms during 2003. It describes the logic of the approach taken and the processes that were followed; and highlights some strengths and weaknesses encountered during implementation.

Background

The Minister was the overall head of MNRE with the Chief Executive Officer charged with its day-to-day administration and management. At the start of 2003, it comprised of six divisions – Land Management, Environment and Conservation, Technical Services, Planning and Urban Management, Corporate Services and Legal Services – each controlled by an Assistant Chief Executive Officer except for Legal Services. As shown in Figure 1 the divisions are structured into sections, each supervised by a Principal Officer and staffed with Senior Officers, Officers, Assistants and casual workers. The Public Service Commission is responsible for all matters related to public service employees.

Figure 1: MNRE Structure, 2003

Divisions	Sections
Land Management	(1) Land Registration, (2) Land Administration, (3) Land Development
Environment and Conservation	(1) Terrestrial Resources Conservation, (2) Marine Resources Conservation, (3) National Parks & Reserves, (4) Water Resources
Technical Services	(1) Surveying, (2) Draughting & Plan Examination, (3) Land Valuation, (4) National Maps
Planning & Urban Management	(1) Strategic Planning, (2) Sustainable Development, (3) Urban Management, (4) Disaster Management
Corporate Services	(1) Administration, (2) Finance, (3) Capacity Building & Human Resources Development
Legal Services	(1) Legal Services

By early 2000 it became abundantly clear that MNRE had a much wider role dealing with natural resources generally. It was already responsible for lands, biodiversity, parks and

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reserves, and water and worked closely with others agencies on the management of other resources such as forestry and fisheries. It was also evident that there were a range of services to support resource management, some of these - surveying, valuation, mapping, plan examination, planning, urban management and legal - were also already delivered by MNRE. Figure 2 shows the MNRE functions and responsibilities, all of which were support by relevant legislation. By the end of 2003, Samoa had ratified seventeen international environmental Conventions and Protocols.

Figure 2: MNRE Functions and Responsibilities

Functions	Responsibilities
Land Management	•Administration of government lands under the Land Board, •Land registration. •Management of land-based natural resources, •Alienation of lands, •Taking of lands for public purposes, •Secretariat for the Land Commission, •Secretariat for Land Board
Environment and Conservation	•Conservation of terrestrial biological diversity, •Conservation of marine biological diversity, •Management of national parks & reserves, •Management of water resources
Technical Services	•Surveying, •Draughting & plan examination, •Land valuation, •National maps
Planning Services	•Urban and rural planning, •Development approval, •Management of waste, •Pollution control, •Management of chemicals, Disaster management, •Secretariat for the Planning Board
Urban Management Services	•Operation of public markets, •Landfill operation, •Solid waste collection, •Septic tank sludge disposal, •Urban ground maintenance, •Public toilets operation, •Public cemeteries maintenance
Environmental Conventions	•Implementation of international convention

Logic of the model

The MNRE model provides an integrated approach for institutional strengthening, taking into account all the relevant institutional components. For this exercise, the focus was the achievement of the goal – sustainable development of Samoa's natural and environmental resources. As an environmental agency MNRE promotes a balance in resources conservation and development through the efficient provision of its services.

Seven components were identified – core functions, staffing, programmes, funding, capabilities, services and legislation – which were considered to strongly influence the achievement of the above goal, represented as operational objectives and leading to functional outcomes as shown in Figure 3. While each outcome addressed the respective objective, it was the interlinking of all that defined the model logic.

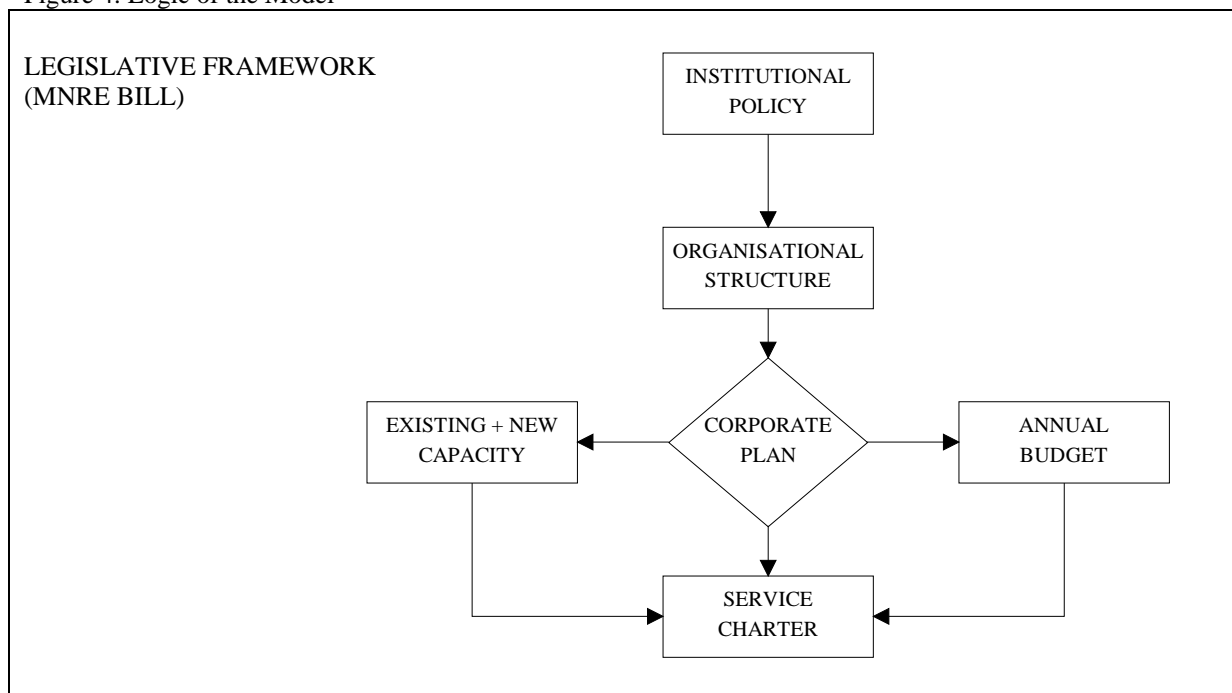
Figure 3: Model Objectives and Outcomes

Institutional Components	Objectives	Outcomes
Core functions	Relevant functions and responsibilities	Institutional Policy
Staffing	Suitable levels of human resources	Organisational Structure
Programmes	Relevant programme of action	2003-2005 Corporate Plan
Funding	Sufficient financial resources	2003/2004 Budget
Capabilities	Adequate staff capacity	Capacity Building Plan
Services	Appropriate level of service delivery	Service Charter
Legislation	Enabling legislative framework	MNRE Bill 2003

It was considered that the interaction of outcomes facilitated the strengthening of MNRE's institutional capabilities to fulfill its mandate. As shown in Figure 4 the Institutional Policy which set out MNRE's core functions and responsibilities determined the Organisational Structure establishing the minimum staffing levels for effective implementation. Both the

policy and structure defined the Corporate Plan providing the Programme of Actions to effect MNRE's agreed responsibilities. The Corporate Plan was the centre of management tasks leading to the Annual Budget to fund activities, Capacity Building to improve staff skills and the Service Charter to control service delivery to the public. All these outcomes operated within the context of the MNRE Bill providing the enabling environment for MNRE operations.

Figure 4: Logic of the Model



Methodology

The process for institutional strengthening was driven by MNRE staff through a participatory approach that involved all stakeholders with work plans designed, organised, implemented and the final outputs decided by MNRE staff themselves. This was considered to be only way to ensure maximum staff participation and claim ownership of the final outputs. This as well as the involvement of external stakeholders was also considered to promote transparency and accountability.

Overseeing this process was the MNRE management of the Chief Executive Officer and the Assistant Chief Executive Officers, it defined scope, set targets, issued directives and reviewed progress to adjust action strategies. These were reviewed by divisions and debated among staff. Staff in a series of workshops developed details and determine priorities for the various outcomes. Inputs from each division were presented at a series of staff workshops and the results compiled into the draft reports. An external consultant was engaged to draft the MNRE Bill while a staff drafting committee compiled the other reports which were circulated to stakeholders for comments and final approval decided by MNRE staff.

It was decided from the outset to adopt a staff-driven approach designed to ensure both a top-down and bottom-up setting to achieve the required outcomes. The process involved wide consultations within MNRE from the officer level and up. These consultations were very important - they provided opportunities for staff to participate directly in the development of ideas as well served educational activities. They also helped to expand the learning experience of staff beyond routine knowledge and increased the levels of awareness and

understanding of the key institutional factors affecting their jobs and the work of MNRE. Four of the six outcomes - Institutional Policy, Corporate Plan, Service Charter and MNRE Bill - also involved consultations with key external stakeholders because of public interest in these areas.

Institutional Policy

The new institutional policy (MNRE, 2003a) set out the MNRE functions and responsibilities based on a review of the existing policy. Some existing responsibilities for Land Valuation, National Maps, and other Land-based Resources were formalised while new responsibilities for Urban and Rural Planning, Water Resources and Disaster Management were introduced. For efficiency, the aim was to bring together natural resources and environment functions under the new MNRE. A framework for partnership with the private sector was also highlighted, with a schedule for the transfer of some responsibilities from MNRE to the private sector. It was considered that private firms could provide more cost-effective implementation of these services. This was promoted strongly in the Strategies for the Development of Samoa with the private sector to undertake operational activities and MNRE to deal with regulatory and mandatory functions.

Already many of the urban services had been contracted-out including urban maintenance, Solid waste collection, Public toilet operations, Cemetery upkeep and Landfill earthworks while the Public market management were yet to be privatised. In land surveying and valuation MNRE only dealt with its own needs while private firms were to meet all other demands. But with limited capacity in the private sector it would be some time before many of the MNRE's technical operational activities could be fully undertaken by the private sector. The long-term aim was for the MNRE to become a regulatory authority within the natural resources and the environment sectors. This included responsibility for the increased number of environmental conventions that Samoa was party to.

Organisational Structure

The new organisational structure (MNRE, 2003b) showed a significant growth in the level of recommended staff – from 114 in 199 to 200 positions. This reflects the staff level required by MNRE to execute its functions and responsibilities. The increase was due mainly to the expansion of existing activities within MNRE, transfer of functions from other ministries, and the formalisation of existing responsibilities. But with the limited funds available in the budget to finance new positions it was expected that the implementation of the new structure would be restricted to the filling of selected priority positions.

To facilitate the development of the new structure a set of guidelines was identified, taking into account the budgetary constraints. These were: (i) Total of six divisions being Land Management, Environment and Conservation, Technical Services, Planning and Urban Management, Corporate Services and Legal Services; (ii) Sections to highlight the specific functions of each division and their names to reflect their respective responsibilities; (iii) Structures to follow the Public Service Commission policies; and (iv) Clear career paths provided within divisions. The last item promoted the establishment of small sections with specific responsibilities allowing for accelerated advancement within or across sections.

Corporate Plan 2003-2005

The new corporate plan (MNRE, 2003c) outlined MNRE's work programme for the period 2003-2005. It was built on experience learned from the implementation of the first plan and reflected both the MNRE and national goals for development. A Vision statement set out the

overarching and long-term direction of the MNRE; Mission statement identified the key components for the achievement of the Vision; Goals represented the cross-cutting themes that linked all functions and responsibilities; Objectives were aligned with divisional functions; Outcomes based on the responsibilities of divisional sections; and Outputs being the target section activities to achieve success. Other features of the corporate plan included the MNRE Mandate, Values and Operating Environment.

For consistency and to avoid confusion the corporate plan and the annual budget were closely aligned to ensure that funds allocated in the budget correlated directly with plan targets. The main feature of the corporate plan which reflected the requirements of both the institutional policy and organisational structure. However there was some confusion with in the use of terms between the corporate plan and budget with plan objectives representing divisional functions matched against the outputs of the budget, plan outcomes dealing with sectional responsibilities corresponded to budget sub-outputs; and plan outputs translated to budget activities.

2003/2004 Budget

Annual budget preparation, largely carried out by senior MNRE and Ministry of Finance staff, was made one of the institutional outcomes because it was a key component of institutional development and implementation. It was also done in order to mainstream the budget process among MNRE staff and demonstrate the principles of performance budgeting. It was considered that improved financial management by staff was strongly dependent on better appreciation of the budget rationale particularly its underlying constraints. It was also important for staff to understand the connections between the budget and other institutional components. The aim therefore was to familiarise staff with budget planning, execution and monitoring so they could better appreciate the budgetary implications on the other institutional outcomes generally and the divisional activities in particular.

The main budget strategy was to maintain a surplus between current revenue and expenditure based on a more stringent approach to reduce expenditure and control spending while improving revenue collection. All ministries were asked to prioritise activities, demonstrate clear linkage between outputs and strategic outcomes of government, allocate resources to priority outputs, provide cost effective service delivery. Budget proposals were also to be supported by current corporate plans. The MNRE annual budget (MNRE, 2003d) was therefore largely dependent on the above conditions and not necessarily reflective of the scope of its work or level of responsibilities. It was \$6,008,418 in 2001/2002, \$6,684,132 in 2002/2003 and \$6,029,769 in 2003/2004. In spite of MNRE's expanded role with new functions and responsibilities, its current budget had hardly changed in three years. A successful final budget was therefore not in the total amount but in the details of the individual items.

Capacity Building

It was considered that capacity building was the most critical success factor in achieving institutional success. With the contracting-out of MNRE's operational responsibilities already in place future capacity needs would be focused more on management and less on implementation skills. The assessment of capacity building needs was strongly influenced by the other institutional outcomes. As discussed above MNRE functions and responsibilities were set out in the institutional policy. To undertake its functions and responsibilities it required the level of human resources as proposed in the new organisational structure and based on the work programme as outlined in the corporate plan. This required sufficient

funding from the budget and adequate staff capacity, all leading to effective service provision as set out in the service charter.

The MNRE capacity building priorities (MNRE, 2003e) were derived from the particular needs of each division. They were generally gaps in current capacity that would apply to the majority of staff and mainly involved the strengthening and/or upgrading of existing skills. Priority was placed on developing basic skills and providing benefits to the maximum number of staff. No specialised skills were included as those were covered under the government-sponsored long-term training programme.

Service Charter

The provisions of the new charter (MNRE, 2003g) were directly related to the MNRE services derived from its functions and responsibilities. The process involved first, the MNRE management reviewed the old charter and established the changes due to internal realignment and the incorporation of new functions. Second each division reassessed their particular requirements and procedures for services as well as set delivery standards. Third the draft details were worked and compiled by the drafting committee. Fourth the draft details were presented at a stakeholder workshop after which a final draft was prepared. And fifth at a second workshop of MNRE management and staff the details of the final report were adopted.

Generally a service charter provided a framework for setting out the service delivery targets. It established the standards of service that customers would expect and allowed the public to judge the performance of the particular agency. A successful service charter was therefore strongly dependent on customers having the confidence that their complaints would be followed through and resolved. Procedures for complaint resolution were developed setting out the mechanisms to follow if a customer was unsatisfied with any MNRE service or response. Starting with the officer involved, then the supervisor, Chief Executive Officer and finally the complaints committee. The aim was to tackle customer concerns by identifying weaknesses in the system and ensuring that weaknesses were addressed to avoid future repetition.

MNRE Bill 2003

The proposed legislation provides the enabling environment for MNRE to implement its functions and responsibilities. Compared to its existing Lands, Survey and Environment Act which combined both enabling provisions and details for lands and environment management, the new MNRE Bill (MNRE, 2003f) focuses only on the overall MNRE mandate. The intention was to create a hierarchy of legislation with the principal act at the top followed by specific legislation for different subject matters and Regulations and Orders at the bottom. Where divisional responsibilities overlapped with those of other agencies the concept of 'combined responsibility' was introduced with each agency following its own legislation but in partnership with others.

Programme Evaluation

An integral part of the model was the evaluation (Solofa, 2003) of the achievement in the short-term of the institutional objectives, largely supported by the consultant's. This was an independent task with the consultant proposing own methodology, to ensure on-going self-assessment and application of the lessons learned from institutional change. Many of the consultant's comments, however, would apply to a long-term evaluation of the MNRE goal, to be conducted at the next institutional review in five years time.

Conclusion

Driven by the MNRE staff, all aspects of the institutional strengthening were planned, agreed upon and implemented internally. This was the first strength of the model where all concepts, ideas and details were developed by management and staff in a participatory approach. While this was at times quite difficult to coordinate due to normal work commitment and limited project time it was still an extremely worthwhile exercise with staff being directly involved in the planning of tasks and the development of details leading to the final reports. As suggested in the evaluation report, designating a focal point could ease the coordination of activities.

There was a real sense of ownership among MNRE staff who were closely engaged in consultations, presentations and reporting. Interactions at all levels promoted skills transfer with senior members sharing their experience with others. The involvement of external stakeholders also highlighted the importance of customer services particularly the partnership between the public and private sectors.

A second strength was the integrated consideration of the main institutional components at the same time which allowed staff to understand how they interlinked. MNRE functions and responsibilities were set out in the institutional policy while the required human resources for implementation were identified in the organisational structure based on the work programme in the corporate plan. But any implementation would depend of financial resources in the budget and the capacity within the MNRE to undertake the required tasks. These were all linked to the delivery of services in the service charter.

Finally while the model was developed specifically for MNRE institutional strengthening, it would equally apply to other public sector ministries or state-owned corporations with mandates for public or customer services. Institutional components are similar with the enabling legislative environment largely driven by government policies. An apparent model weakness, however, relates to the adequacy or otherwise of financial resources to support institutional change. With government budgetary allocation based on funding availability, budget priority is therefore on effective utilisation rather than the financial adequacy.

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