

ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS AND INNOVATION IN ASIA

A Background Paper for the EROPA Seminar
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A Developmental Focus for Public Administration under Rapid So- cial Change.

During the past quarter century, many Asian countries have come through rapid and sweeping change—social, economic and political. In this process some of them have registered considerable degrees of socio-economic development, but many of them are still undergoing violent social and political upheavals.

In this era of rapid change, the discipline and practice of public administration have not been marked by imagination and adaptability. Either it was regarded as a discipline with no bearing on the process of socio-economic development, or it was regarded narrowly as an instrument for the maintenance of the existing system of law and order. Thus public administration has been singularly divorced from the change in the larger

framework within which it operates.

The overwhelming challenge in the environment has given rise to soul-searching among students and practitioners of public administration, in and out of the region. Is the traditional bureaucracy adequate to cope with such changes? Is it geared to national development, the expressed goal of practically all the countries in the region? Should not the focus of students and practitioners of public administration be changed from mere system maintenance to active pursuit of national development?

It was in the spirit of such a soul-searching and the quest for a positive administrative role for development that the Fourth EROPA General Assembly meeting in Tehran in December 1966, chose *Administrative Reforms and Innovations* as the theme of the Fifth General Assembly to be held in Kuala Lumpur. It resolved to look at administrative reforms and innovations in the Asian countries

from the perspective of three functional areas, viz., personnel reform, organization reforms, and institution building. There was considerable merit in this approach because many of the conscious reform efforts that had been carried on in many countries in the region during the past two decades fell more or less under these categories.

After the Tehran Assembly, the Secretary General of EROPA assigned a small team of Asian scholars to prepare for the present seminar. This team mostly from the Development Administration Group, a research group of Asian scholars and administrators on development administration which was created under a resolution adopted at the Fourth General Assembly in Tehran for that purpose. After a series of planning sessions culminating in a research seminar at Bangkok in March, the research group concluded that administrative reforms should be looked at not only in terms of major functional areas such as personnel, budgeting and organization, but also in terms of major program areas of government administration such as education, urban development, community development, industrialization programs. It was on the basis of this conclusion that the three sub-topics adopted in Tehran have been integrated with a view to obtaining a broader and more unified treatment of administrative reforms and innovations.

The focus at this Seminar, therefore, will not be on the technicalities of reorganization or personnel classification. Rather the nature, process, and effect of administrative reform and innovation cutting across all functional and programmatic areas of government administration, will be considered. In this approach, *administrative reform* is considered as a *generic process* permeating in all phases of administration; it is conceived as the crucial capacity required for introducing and sustaining creativity in administrative units, at whatever level, for the conscious pursuit of developmental goals.

II. Rethinking on Earlier Assumptions on Administrative Reforms

In a way, the new trend of thinking has come about as a reflection on and remedy to two earlier trends of thought on the subject in Asian countries.

One assumption related to the adoption by some countries of comprehensive economic development plans since 1950. Often development plans were adopted with little consideration as to the ways in which they could be implemented. The premise was that once plans were made they would somehow be implemented. Any difficulties that might arise in the stage of implementation would be the responsibility of the politicians and the bureaucrats; at least it should not be the concern of the planners. This line of rather naive thinking, quite prevalent in many Asian countries in recent years, has naturally seen many reverses and failures. Therefore, many economic planners have given new emphasis to the implementation and administration of development plans.

Another assumption related to the widespread technical assistance programs in the field of public administration sponsored by the United Nations and some economically advanced countries, especially the United States. The premise here was that, once some of the latest techniques of management such as position classification and performance budgeting could be transplanted in a massive scale to the newly developing countries, remarkable administrative improvements would result. In spite of the good intention of these foreign reformers, the results of the transplantations have seldom been successful. Questions regarding such all-out administrative reform efforts were raised not only by the host-country officials, but also among the experts who were themselves involved in the general process of technical diffusion. Increasingly, the wisdom of copying the methods of advanced countries came to be questioned. Rather, the merit of undertaking

pilot experimentation in new methods and techniques, with full consideration of the indigenous conditions, came to receive more attention. Thus, while the administrative implications of development planning came to receive more emphasis, rethinking on the ways of introducing and sustaining administrative reforms received more attention.

Perhaps such rethinking may reflect a maturing process in terms of administrative thought and practice in Asian countries, for during these same years of relative failures and reverses, some positive signs of change and development, often in some limited areas, have emerged. Evidence of these "islands of development" gave rise to many intriguing questions. Why have some reforms succeeded, while many others have failed? Who were the reformers in those few successful cases? What characteristics distinguished them from others? What other factors were instrumental in their relative success? What were some of the environmental conditions under which those relative successes and failures were registered? Search into the major factors and conditions of administrative reforms was the concern of the first research seminar of the Development Administration Group, and this will be the central concern of the EROPA Seminar in Kuala Lumpur.

I I. Themes for EROPA Seminar at Kuala Lumpur

The scholars of the Development Administration Group, EROPA who met for a one-week research seminar in Bangkok in March, 1968 at the invitation of the EROPA Secretary General addressed themselves to the theme with which the forthcoming EROPA Seminar at Kuala Lumpur will deal, that is, "Administrative Reforms and Innovations in Asia." In fact, this research seminar was arranged so that it could serve as an occasion for obtaining a preliminary review of the papers on administrative reform experiences in various Asian

countries, which selected Asian scholars would be invited to present at the K/L Seminar. The following is the list of the draft papers which the DAG scholars brought to Bangkok for review:

"Thailand Prepares Its Development Administrators" by Dr. Amara Raksataya, Professor and Director, Training Center, National Institute of Development Administration, Bangkok

"Administrative Reforms in India" by Dr. Ajit M. Banerjee, Reader, The Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi; Regional Advisor in Public Administration, ECAFE

"Administrative Reorganization and Reform in the Philippines" by Dr. Abelardo Samonte, Professor and Director of Studies & Research, Philippine Executive Academy, University of the Philippines

"Administrative Reform in Hong Kong" by Dr. S.S. Hsueh, Professor, Chinese University of Hong Kong.

"Organizational Reform in Indonesia Today: Problems and Achievements" by Dr. S.P. Siagian, Director for Research Consultation and Development, National Institute of Administration, Djakarta

"A Comparative Analysis of two Reforms under the Military Regime in Korea 1st 5-year Economic Development Plan and the Planning and Programming System" by Dr. Suk-Choon Cho, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University

"The Role of the Operations Room as a Technique in Administrative Reform" by Mrs. Marvis C. Puthuchear, Chairman, Division of Public Administration, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaysia

"Psychological Interpretation of Administrative Reform and Innovations as an Essential Means for National Development" by Dr. Iraj Ayman, Professor of Management Psychology and Director, Institute of Educational Research and Studies, Tehran

"Patterns of Administrative Reform in Relation to Culture" by I. r. Jose V. Abueva, Professor and Assistant Dean, College of Public Administration, University of the Philippines

"A Study of the Korean Budget Reform 1955-1961: A Reformer's Self-Evaluation" by Dr. Hahn-Been Lee, Dean and Professor, Graduate School of Public Administration, Seoul National University: (Coordinator, DAG Research Seminar)

After further revision by the individual writers, these papers will be presented by the Asian scholars themselves at the ELOPA Seminar in Kuala Lumpur with a view to arousing discussion among all the participants in the Fifth General Assembly. While the papers will be distributed in K/L as conference documents, brief discussion papers based on them will be circulated beforehand to the prospective participants in the Seminar.

In order to facilitate the discussion at the K/L Seminar, the following themes have been chosen by the DAG as follows:

1. Setting for administrative reform
2. Change agent for administrative reform
3. Scope and strategy of administrative reform
4. Process and aid management of reform

A brief exposition of each of these items may be in order.

Setting for administrative reform

Environmental factors have an important bearing on administrative reform. The factors include physical restraints (geography and demography); socio-cultural structure (values, languages, social institutions); political system (democracy, dictatorship, colonial system, etc.); and stage of economic development.

Another crucial factor is the time of reform. Often natural or political crises, catastrophe, wars and revolutions provide the critical impetus required.

Change agents for administrative reform

Environment is not the only determinant of

administrative reform. The administrative system—its nature and role—is also an important factor in determining the kind, and fate, of administrative reform. What kind of bureaucracy exists in a country? Is it sensitive to social change? Are there some "enclaves of innovation" in it? Who are the reform leaders, and their change agents? Do they enjoy adequate protection and support from the political leaders? Who are the reform patrons? Are the internal the structure of the bureaucracy and the political leadership so constituted that reform thrusts can be fostered and sustained? These are some of the key factors bearing on the emergence and development of administrative reform.

Scope and strategy of reform

Even when the setting is propitious for reform and reformers and change agents are present, the kind and scope of the reform, as well as the strategy involved in carrying it out, are important determinants of success. Is a comprehensive reform attempted that cuts across the entire administrative system, or does it involve only a special *ad hoc* type of reform introduced in a particular area or unit of organization?

The choice of the agency spearheading a reform is also important. Is it a central managerial agency, or a program department, where the reform is initiated? Does the reform identify some pilot agencies for experimentation prior to adoption by other agencies?

Process

An administrative reform becomes meaningful only when it is incorporated into an accepted pattern of action. A reform is not accomplished by merely being introduced into an administrative organization. To become a successful reform, *it must be institutionalized and sustained.* Initiation and implementation of a reform, therefore, require a conscious and skillful management. They call for a judicious combination of assessing the signals and restraints in the setting, of marshalling available change agents

and resources, and of employing proper strategy. The leadership managing a reform must also be on the lookout for complementary supports from other reforms, whether antecedent or concurrent.

Papers to be presented at the K/L Seminar will highlight some of the varying combinations of these factors, which have produced varying results, in different countries. «The purpose will be to help the seminar participants to reflect on their own reform experiences, and develop insights into the interrelationship of different factors and conditions in their own situations.

IV. The Objective of K/L Seminar

It may be useful to summarize the above by restating the objective of the EROPA Seminar on Administrative Reforms and Innovations in Asia.

First, Asian administrators and scholars will meet together and look seriously at administrative reform efforts in our countries with a conscious emphasis on their relation to the goal of national development. This is a development-and-action-oriented seminar.

Second, it is hoped that through the seminar a broader view of the developmental process can be obtained. The experiences of our countries in national development, especially in the field of economic and social development, can be reexamined from the vantage-point of administrative reforms and innovation. Has adequate attention been given to the administrative implications of development plans? Have there been conscious efforts to initiate administrative changes and reforms as Asian coun-

tries moved toward long-range economic and social development?

Third, such a reexamination of the overall development effort should lead to more soul-searching among administrators and students of administration. If there have been inadequacies in our administrative thinking and practices and if some of our ostensible reform efforts have not produced expected results, what are the causes for such inadequacies? Are our bureaucracies attuned to change, and geared to development?

Fourth, a genuine reexamination of our administrative experiences would provide reminders of successful reforms. The seminar will give an excellent opportunity for us to find out some of the reasons why and how such islands of development emerged in certain cases. We might be able to discover some clues as to some of the *conditions which make or break administrative reforms*.

Finally, such rethinking should significantly contribute to the strengthening of our institutions related to our national development. A critical reevaluation should inspire our practitioners to draw lessons from them, and to develop new outlook and insights. This would, in turn, help reorient our institutions toward new approaches to training, teaching, and research. In short, the seminar should bring administrators and scholars of the region together in the common search for clues for development, and with a common orientation toward action.