Review of Functions in Government Agencies in Afghanistan

Introduction

For the past 15 years, the Afghan government, along with its international counterparts and donors, has struggled with efforts of state building and commencing the process of development and rehabilitation. Certainly, a precondition for this included the establishment of a sound administration, particularly within the civil service sector. Major challenges for government and, in particular, for the civil service in Afghanistan have been with low capacity of human resources, ambiguity in roles and functions of civil service ministries/agencies, complex service delivery and business processes.

Over the past four decades, the civil service evolved through different systems ranging from Soviet copied ones to the current semi-positions based Civil Service System. This overlapping of varying administrative cultures logically led to systemic inefficiencies and problems in administrative management. One of the major challenges with regard to civil service functions and structure is ambiguity in policies and legal framework to determine government institutions' functions and mandates. Despite the implementation of reform programmes that aimed to eliminate structural duplications across government, it is still a major challenge in the Afghan civil service.

This policy note summarises key findings and recommendations of the study by referring to the instrument of a Functional Review (FR). A more substantive elaboration of the analysis can be found in the AREU Discussion Paper, which will be published along this policy note.

FRs aims to create transparency and accountability in big organisations, ensure proper administrative management and implement their mandates in proper structures and without waste of resources—with the final goal of serving citizens and businesses in the most effective and efficient way.

Accordingly, this document addresses three main topics:

1. Methodology: What is behind FR and how can it be implemented?

2. Analysis: From the viewpoint of FR, how can the present situation of administration management be assessed and with which main bottlenecks?

3. Recommendations: Which approaches might lead to a better management of the administration?

An important premise is that pure analysis will not lead to improvements. From the very beginning, FR has to be linked with organisational development and the implementation of adequate management tools; for example, in the area of human resources management. FR should not just lead to a report (so-called "shelfware"), but to instruments that are used on a daily basis including post descriptions, staffing patterns, administrative regulations, quality management tools and so on.

Methodology

This study is the result of: (1) available documents and data from desk review; (2) key informant interviews with high-level staff of key ministries and institutions: Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health and an overview of mandates and structures for some other ministries (Finance, Economy, Agriculture); and (3) inputs received from discussions during a dialogue event held at AREU on the subject.

General Aspects of Methodology

The ultimate rationale for the execution of FR is to create better, cheaper, faster services for citizens and businesses. The first step is the creation of transparency, which is missing today due to unclear task structures, high vertical integration of units and a lack of non-ministerial functions in top-level institutions. Only after transparency has been reached can staff be made accountable for their actions. Accountability is a basic requirement for manageability. Again, this attribute again is the basis for a

continuous increase in effectiveness and efficiency in the administration.

From a technical point of view, the review of functions undertakes to:

1. **explore** the context of the institution/s that have to undergo the exercise and identify main actors and stakeholders;

2. provide a **comprehensive inventory of the relevant data**, which includes internal data on actually implemented functions as well as information on functions that might be redistributed to/from other institutions;

3. do **a comprehensive analysis of functions** to identify optimal clusters;

4. draw **conclusions** for optimal design of institutions;

5. draft **a final detailed concept** for structures and instruments—such as an organisational sheet (organogram), staffing patterns, detailed formulation of functions on sub-unit level.

FR considers the **horizontal optimisation of** function clusters between units of the same level and/or the **vertical optimisation of** clustering of functions in hierarchical structures with one or more subordinate layers. The analysis of the vertical func¬tions distribution (and vertical processes) is of particular relevance for the decision on decentrali¬sa¬tion or deconcentration of functions. The parallel analysis of horizontal and vertical functions leads to the "T"-approach for FR.

This small project, unfortunately, cannot provide a full FR of the Afghan government, nor even of a single ministry. As a consequence, it has to limit itself to two topics:

- A methodological overview, basic principles of optimisation of function structures and related organisational structures.

- A brief analysis of issues related to functions and organisational structures of the government and proposals for optimisation.
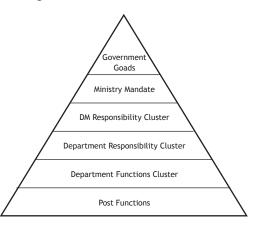
To do so, the project uses (1) available documents and data from desk research and (2) key informant interviews with high-level staff of key ministries and institutions: Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG), Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Health and an overview of mandates and structures for some other ministries (Finance, Economy, Agriculture); (3) as well as inputs received during discussion events.

Pyramid model of government

Ideally, government administration should be understood as a whole and the individual substructures as a **pyramid of goals, responsibilities, functions and processes**. There is a top-level goal system, which leads to overall responsibilities of the state. The overall state responsibilities are split into responsibility clusters—like defense, internal security, education, health and others. The responsibilities' clusters form the mandates of the top-level institutions, e.g. the ministries or independent offices. On the next level, the mandates are split into more specific responsibilities; for example, to design clusters of deputy ministers. This might then continue to lower levels: splitting and concretising the clusters for the directorate-general, directorate and so on.

While responsibilities do not yet specify certain actions, functions do. They are assigned to the lowest, operative organisational level. Each responsibility includes at least one function, which determines how the responsibility will be implemented. They are linked to concrete business processes, resources utilisation and outputs (or "administrative products"). Every function should be linked with a clear process and resources need to be assigned to it. There is a tangible product at the end. Finally, there should also be a user or beneficiary.

Responsibilities and functions have to be properly clustered to create effective and efficient organisational structures. The clustering might follow different principles (e.g. having similar customers, outputs or processes; needing similar resources; complementing each other; being in the same process chain and so on).

Government Goads
Ministry Mandate
DM Responsibility Cluster
Department Responsibility Cluster
Department Functions Cluster
Post Functions

Specific levels of government should match with specific types of functions. Ministries and other top-level institutions are predominantly responsible for policymaking, lawmaking and controlling of subordinate structures. Subordinate administrative structures are strongly involved in regulation, regulation

enforcement and the controlling of service provision. A third category of units is mainly responsible for the provision of services. All levels additionally have functions in (self-) administration.

Key Findings

The analysis revealed the following key findings:

- **Ministry structures are, in general, very large.** Ministries are overloaded with organisational structures, which provide services and support functions and should not be located at ministerial levels. Moreover, units with "ministerial" functions, at the same time, partly take over hidden administrative and service functions.

- **There is a high number of top-level institutions.** The last count of ministry level institutions in early 2017 identified 49 top-level institutions comprising 25 ministries, 13 independent offices, five commissions and six general directorates, plus embassies and banks at the same level. In various cases, the name indicates that two or more units are involved in similar activities. **Lack of a coordination entity** to synchronise and supervise functions of government ministries and agencies is another major problem for the organisational functions and structure issues in the civil service.

- **Ambiguities and duplications in functions and structures of government agencies** is causing several impediments in way of efficient and effective public administration management and its capacity for service delivery. This, on one hand, slows down government performance to respond to service delivery demands and, on the other hand, with 70 percent of government ordinary budget unutilised for wages/salary (e.g. in 2015/1394), creates unnecessary fiscal pressures on government budget doing double payment for same task as wage bill to more than one institution.

- **Imbalance between central and subnational institutions.** A table provided by the statistical office in 2015-16 listed 400,812 civil employees in 57 institutions with central and subnational units. The list inter alia includes about 110,000 employees belonging to the central level and about 290,000 belonging to the subnational level. The quantitative distribution of employees of about 1:3 (central to subnational level) needs further investigation.

- **Regulation of government structure and functions still under way.** A "law on governmental structure and responsibilities" has not been passed for years. This leads to a very unclear situation of responsibilities and functions and generates overlaps and conflicts. It temporarily paralyses government work until the responsibilities are defined. It also leads to a waste of resources, as more than one unit deals with the same issues.

- **Influence of the legislative branch on internal decisions of the executive branch.** The decision on the responsibilities and functions of ministries lies in the hand of the legislative branch. As a consequence, it is almost impossible to implement a flexible management of the internal structures of the government and a proper, legal binding assignment of the functions of individual ministries.

- **The heterogeneous quality of mandates.** As there is no standardisation of mandates, an overall strategic management of the government is almost impossible. The formulation of mandates is rather unclear, and they are, to a high degree, in the hands of the respective institutions.

- **Mandates typically represent responsibilities and not functions.** As far as the mandates have been provided and could be analysed, they represent mainly responsibilities and not functions. During the analytical process, the authors could not go into detail, but did not find clearly defined functions and respective outputs/administrative products.

- **Overlaps and conflicts due to the missing knowledge of the legal and regulatory base, missing standards, different formats and missing transparency of the data presentation.** A central management becomes almost impossible as organisational charts and staffing lists have no common and integrated format. Besides, organisational sheets and other administrative documents are published only to a limited extent and are not available for externals (or even other governmental units) without efforts.

- **Data-silos with limited access for outsiders.** The missing standardisation also leads to data silos– not even necessarily by bad will, but by the comfort of the data producers. All necessary data or a high percentage are available. However, they are available only on request, follow different standards and need explanation by the respective data generators in the ministries.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It can be concluded that the central government suffers from massive management deficits among other challenges. The key problem lies in a missing legal base for mandates, responsibilities, and functions of government ministries. This results in unclear assignments of responsibilities and functions, responsibility conflicts and reduced efficiency of administrative work. The second issue is with the missing transparency of responsibilities, functions, administrative products and the processes behind and the utilisation of resources. However, if the key problem is solved, the solution of the other problems is, to a high degree, only technical.

The following recommendations are based on findings as well as discussions during a multi-stakeholder dialogue in Kabul on the subject:

1. **Make FR a permanent and universal management approach**. FR should not be a one-time exercise done by consultants, but become a regular activity of each government unit on central and provincial levels. Organisations are living organisms. Priorities, workload and processes change all the time. This has to be reflected in mandates, functions and resources needs. All managerial staff should be acquainted with the concept of FR. This might be integrated with the annual update of the "Tashkeel."

2. **Create a champion unit and ensure responsibilities on the ground.** Each individual government institution should have FR as a function and endow it with substantial capacity. A central unit should be established, coordinating and standardising the FR efforts and caring for the easy availability of data government-wide. This might be located within the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC), the Administrative Office of the President or, for the subnational level, within the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG).

3. **Enact a regulation on government responsibilities.** Regulation on government responsibilities distribution should be passed and regularly updated when responsibilities/functions change.

4. **Care for clear institutional structure**. Clearly differentiate core ministries, subordinate administration and service delivery units.

   - The core ministry (institution) includes the central apparatus with functions mainly in the area of policymaking, legal drafting and supervision of the subordinate level. These institutions act as the head of the "ministry holding." Usually, they should have no element of enforcing regulations and, in no cases, deliver direct services to citizens and businesses.

   - Subordinate administrative institutions or offices will be responsible mainly for implementing and enforcing regulations and also giving administrative support to service institutions. This includes, in particular, functions like issuing permits, licenses and documents, controlling compliance, issuing orders, collecting fees, fining of perpetrators, doing statistical data collection, supervising service institutions and the like.

   - Service institutions have the function of mainly delivering services to citizens and businesses. This might be on central as well as at sub-national levels.

5. **Institutionalise a uniform organisational manual for all government institutions.** This might lead to government-wide structural transparency and help the political management, the staff of the institutions and the users to understand the respective roles and functions and to address the right units and sub-units for requests. Key elements of the manuals should be published on the respective websites of the government in a regularly updated form. For each institution and in a standardised format. It should include: legal base and mandate, vision and mission of the institution, organisational sheet, functions for all sub-structures, post descriptions for all posts and administration regulations.

6. **Quantify the functions system and define human resources needs.** For all functions, the products/outputs, the customers and the resource needs have to be identified. A regular functional analysis should use a universal system for this. All capacity demands and supplies are measured in FTPE = Full-Time Post Equivalents, representing the capacity of one full-time worker in a time unit. In the course of this activity, the business processes behind the functions and administrative products might be analysed and optimised.

7. **Establish functions oriented post-descriptions.** Non-managerial posts have to be based on the assigned functions portfolio of an organisational unit. Managerial posts have to be based on the duties of the respective level plus technical functions following the functions portfolio of the respective unit. There should be a basic generic post-description for a deputy minister, a director general, a director and managers of different levels. For all posts, the necessary minimum qualification and competencies have to be defined. A government-wide standard for post descriptions has to be in force, based on a template provided by the Civil Service Commission.

8. **Establish a common methodology and standards.** A common, standardised methodology for quantified FR in government units should be established.

9. **Standardise core administration functions across the government;** for example, in finance, human resources, procurement, IT, corporate services, etc.

10. **Create and implement administrative regulations**. All functions and related administrative products should be concretised in administrative regulations. Administrative regulations will inter alia describe the type of service, the requirements to applicants including needed documents, fees, the work process behind the function/product, the maximum time to deliver the result, complaints procedures and indemnification of aggrieved parties.

About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice by conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and by promoting a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policy makers, civil society, researchers, and students to promote their use of AREU's research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection, and debate.

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