

On the Compatibility of Bureaucracy and Development Administration

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Bureaucracy has been defined in various ways, mostly from the point of view of western scholars. But the nature of bureaucracy and administrative activities are markedly different in developing countries, and often, there seem to be several contradictions between the concepts of bureaucracy and development administration. There is, no doubt, a need to redefine bureaucracy on the basis of the experience of developing countries and to decide on the groups that may be included in this category. While bureaucracy is not entirely incompatible with development administration, some of its features need modifications to suit the circumstances prevailing in developing countries. But the most important requirement is a set of parallel political institutions which will provide the crucial balance in the system to make bureaucracy an effective tool in the process of development administration.

The barrage of articles that came out in the 1960s following the shift of emphasis to the "New Public Administration" and efforts by the western scholars to understand administration in developing countries, did not continue in an equal volume in the late 1970s. There have been progressively fewer publications on the topic, and at present, development administration has apparently ceased to attract the interest of the researchers in the field of public administration. At the same time, there have been several changes in the nature and performance of the bureaucracy, the instrument that executes the task of development administration in the third world. In the literature on public administration, definitions of bureaucracy seem to have been constructed entirely from the perspectives of the developed world. Is bureaucracy, as defined in the west, incompatible with the concept of development administration? This paper attempts to reevaluate some of the definitions of bureaucracy developed in the west, and assess the compatibility of such institutions with the concept of development administration.

The idea of development administration gained prominence with the development efforts of many newly independent states. The role of the

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bureaucracy in these efforts has been the subject of many scholarly attempts to understand development administration. The reasons are not difficult to comprehend. In the new states, there are no alternative institutions to provide the services the bureaucracy performs. The bureaucracy not only attracts capable personnel who add to its efficiency to continue domination, but is also firmly entrenched in unassailable positions in the developing societies. The institution is indispensable to execute all development programs and exercises considerable influence.

Although "bureaucracy" is the focal point of several administrative studies, consensus is yet to be reached on its definition. After the term developed from the root "bureau," referring to a cloth covering the desks of French government officials in the eighteenth century, it was mainly used in a pejorative sense emphasizing the strict and mechanical procedures, narrow outlook and authoritative manner of autocratic government officials. Thus, one way of defining bureaucracy has been to equate it with large organizations that fail to allocate responsibility clearly, follow formalized rigid rules and routines that are applied with little consideration of the specific cases, and are operated by blundering officials who are slowed down due to conflicting directives resulting in duplication of efforts. Parkinson derided bureaucracy by pointing out its waste of resources and inertia by implying that official staffs expand in inverse proportion to the work to be done.¹

The concept of bureaucracy is occasionally used as an antithesis to administrative vitality and managerial activity, and defined as "the composite institutional manifestations which tend towards inflexibility and depersonalization."² Strauss described bureaucracy as "the many imperfections in the structure and functioning of big organizations."³ Michel Crozier's description of bureaucracy as "an organization that cannot correct its behavior by learning from its errors,"⁴ highlighted the importance of flexibility and adaptability which appear to be incompatible with bureaucracy.

However, the popular usage can easily be distinguished from "bureaucracy" used in a technical sense. In attempts to conceptualize this modern variant of rational administrative organization, bureaucracy has been defined in various ways by the scholars in developed countries. The first systematic study of bureaucracy as a distinct entity originated with Max Weber's efforts to depict it as the link between legally instituted authorities and their subordinate officials. It is characterized by defined rights and duties, prescribed in written regulations; authority relations between positions, which are ordered systematically; appointment and promotion based on contractual agreements, and regulated accordingly; technical training or experience as a formal condition of employment; fixed monetary salaries; a strict separation of office and incumbent in the sense that the official does

not own the "means of administration" and cannot appropriate the position; and, administrative work as a full-time occupation.⁵ It must be remembered, however, that these features are not exactly matched in all bureaucracies either in the developing or developed world. Written rules are sometimes irrelevant to the conditions to which they refer, and there are ample possibilities for different interpretations of the same rules by different officials.

Structures approximating Weber's description of bureaucracy may be found in many countries around the world, but no actual government administration is bureaucratic in the strict sense of his description. Different bureaucracies may lack one or many of the characteristic features or possess them in varying degrees. From this have resulted a number of definitions of bureaucracy which are now discussed.

The problem of synthesizing "rationality" and the characteristics attributed by Weber to bureaucracy caught the attention of Peter Blau.⁶ In an earlier publication, Blau looked at bureaucracy as an "organization that maximizes efficiency in administration."⁷ Bureaucracy as a social mechanism that maximizes efficiency also appealed to Peter Leonard. "It simply refers to the rational and clearly defined arrangement of activities which are directed towards fulfilling the purposes of the organization."⁸ Opinions seem to be divided on the issue of defining bureaucracy as "rational organization" and as "organization when men apply criteria of rationality to their action." Blau had proposed to revise the concept of rational administration and advocated certain practices which will ensure "the stable attainment of organizational objectives."

Talcott Parsons viewed the prominence of "relatively large-scale organizations with specialized functions, what rather loosely tend to be called bureaucracies,"⁹ as a salient feature of modern society. Some other authors took bureaucracy to be an appropriate synonym for large-scale organizations. From these observations, it is difficult to draw the boundaries of organizations and specifically decide where organization ends and society begins. Hierarchy, rules, division of labor, and other similar elements have pervaded modern society and are not found in separate organizations only.

Another way of defining bureaucracy has been to consider it as administration by appointed officials. This concept is very popular in European studies and possibly follows from the nature of administration in the continent as well as the writings of Weber. There have been attempts to draw up lists of characteristics of administration in large and complex organizations. But such characteristics are no longer confined to the administra-

tion in government only. Carl Friedrich and Taylor Cole pointed out a long time ago that bureaucracy could be found outside as much as inside government.¹⁰ The structural and behavioral elements which, according to these scholars, make up bureaucracy are found in a variety of organizations.

Most of the studies, however, place a major emphasis on the group performing the functions. In other words, the associational aspect of bureaucracy is the focal point, and not the functions performed by the group. This is particularly significant in discussing administration in developing countries where the bureaucracy is a prominent participant in the exercise of power. A wide variety of tasks are undertaken by public employees in the social system, and these differ across societies. Bureaucracy is increasingly being identified with public administration and some people have shown a tendency to concentrate on bureaucracy as a pressure group and "a formative influence on social values than upon processes of administration."¹¹ Bureaucracy has been called an instrument engaged in meeting the systemic goals of the society.¹² In *The Political Systems of Empires*, Eisenstadt treated bureaucracy as a body of administrative officials, and after the ruling elite, "the first group participating in the political struggle."¹³ Bureaucracy has also been considered as "the 'public' or civic governmental administrative components of political systems."¹⁴ Joseph La Palombara admitted that while on some occasions it may be seen as encompassing all the public servants, at other times, it includes only those at the higher levels.

The confusion that might follow from the above definitions of bureaucracy developed in the western countries may be avoided by keeping in mind the purpose of the study. In public administration, the role of bureaucracy emerges as the executor of public policy. Theoretically, policies are formulated by the political executives with inputs from several sectors, including the bureaucracy. The policies are then implemented through public organizations. In general terms, therefore, the type of organization designed to accomplish large-scale administrative tasks for the government by systematically coordinating the work of many individuals is called a bureaucracy. It consists of a body of more or less permanently appointed, highly skilled personnel whose remunerations are paid out of the public fund.

A number of features can be noticed in these definitions, and Weber's analysis is very useful in this respect. Bureaucracy establishes a relation between legally instituted authorities and their subordinate officials. Weber is apparently referring to the higher levels of the civil services as the bureaucracy. The organization is run on the basis of fixed rules and procedures, and it is extremely difficult to adjust to new circumstances or deal with new types of problems as these involve a departure from set procedures. Tasks are hierarchically organized and clearly defined with the intention of maximiz-

ing efficiency. Robert Merton warned against the possible dysfunctions of bureaucracy. Bureaucrats striving for overconformity, strict devotion to regulations and other elements which were designed for efficiency, result in the "means" becoming the "end."¹⁵

Public officials are recruited, in most bureaucracies, through open competition on the basis of merit. Bureaucrats advance in their services following set career patterns and retire with pensions for their services. The remunerations of public officials are paid out of the public funds according to the contracts made at the time of appointment. The list of features is not exhaustive, but includes those most relevant to the discussion of bureaucratic features in development administration.

The term "development administration" has been coined with the intention of describing some aspects of administration in developing countries. But different scholars have placed emphasis on different aspects. R.S. Milne correctly observed that definitions and usage vary widely. In some instances, development administration is used to mean administration in developing countries, but in others, "there is a strong accent on change."¹⁶ John Montgomery defined development administration as carrying out planned change in the economy (in agriculture or industry, or the capital infrastructure supporting either one of these) and, to a lesser extent, in the social services of the state (especially education and public health).¹⁷ Harry Friedman's definition of development administration include two elements: "(1) the implementation of programs designed to bring about modernity and (2) the changes within an administrative system which increase its capacity to implement such programs."¹⁸ In the same volume, Inayatullah defined development administration as: "the complex of organizational arrangements for the achievement of action through public authority in pursuance of (1) socio-economic goals and (2) nation-building. It presupposes policies, plans and programs with a distinct developmental bias as well as a bureaucracy which consciously and continuously seeks to modernize itself to meet the demands of planned change."¹⁹ One of the foremost authority on the topic, Fred Riggs, viewed development administration as a process leading to "an increasing ability to make collective decisions, especially decisions that involve long-term environmental changes."²⁰

Riggs included both "the administration of development programs, to the methods used by large-scale organizations, notably governments, to implement policies and plans designed to meet their developmental objectives" and "the strengthening of administrative capabilities" within the range of development administration.²¹ Thus, development administration involves a number of additional activities and problems along with the administrative practices followed in the developed countries. The above defini-

tions/descriptions indicate that the administrative activities in developing countries are not concerned merely with the maintenance of law and order and the execution of policies, but also with modernization, economic development and the extension of social services. These functions are, no doubt, performed in developed countries, too. But they are of overwhelming importance in developing countries. In some cases, the tasks are more comprehensive and cover nation-building, socio-economic progress and growth. Moreover, constant efforts must be made at "increasing effectiveness in the utilization of available means to achieve prescribed goals."²²

The developing countries are now faced with a wide range of problems and several goals are to be achieved simultaneously. They have embarked on the road to development with the bureaucracy as the principal vehicle. The structures of bureaucracy in developing countries have been based on those in the developed ones. Questions may be raised as to the appropriateness of such structures in developing countries where the administrative environments are quite different from the developed countries. The tasks to be accomplished are also different and an attempt should be made to find out whether the features of the bureaucracy as found in developed countries are compatible with those of the bureaucracy required to administer developing countries.

The role of the bureaucracy is much larger than it initially appears to be in developing countries and is very significant. The circumstances under which administration is carried on accentuate the distinction between developed and developing countries. The structures and patterns of activities of the bureaucracies which operate under the conditions prevailing in developing countries differ greatly from those of "classical" bureaucratic organizations.²³ It has been argued that in such societies, the functions of the government change "largely from the law and order, revenue collecting, and regulatory type to those of socio-economic and political development," and the role of administration is transformed from an "executive" to a "managerial" one.²⁴ It has also been argued that only a substantial development of the bureaucracy can lead to constitutionalism,²⁵ and provide checks on those who exercise administrative authority. The debate on the methods of making bureaucracy responsible is still unresolved. Riggs added that extra-bureaucratic political institutions in developing countries are extremely weak in comparison to their bureaucratic counterparts.²⁶ The expansion of administrative agencies and the proliferation of their functions have outpaced the development and strengthening of parliamentary bodies and other political institutions. Riggs pointed out that in the absence of formal political institutions, "bureaucrats themselves have often had to play a crucial part in determining what would, or perhaps *would not*, be done," and referred to the "formal hierarchy of government officials" as the bureaucracy.²⁷

It seems appropriate that the bureaucracy in developing countries are in control of more power than other institutional groups. Riggs is in favor of considering the armed forces as part of the bureaucracy.²⁸ The alliance between the military and the bureaucracy in many states enable them to perform functions which are far more diverse and difficult than those of the bureaucracy in the west. But this view is debatable. Developing countries have several features which are not conducive to efficient administration through bureaucracy, even if it is relatively efficient and powerful. Low levels of development, inadequate resources and information make it almost impossible to allocate resources and execute policies in a "rational" manner.²⁹ Some of the features of bureaucracy as understood in the developed countries can be helpful in achieving the goals of the governments in developing countries, but others are not.

The appointment of public officials based on their intellectual ability to perform a job and past accomplishments in academic studies is a common practice in both developed and developing countries. The need for efficient personnel to man the public service is great in developing countries where they perform a number of essential functions. Although the merit principle is not foolproof, and despite the fact that corruption and personal relationship may result in improper appointments, recruitment of public officials on the basis of merit is compatible with development administration and still the most "rational" known method. The expenses for the bureaucracy are met by the public funds. Since the bureaucracy is an essential instrument and must be maintained, even developing countries with limited resources have tended to spend considerable sums of money on the bureaucracy.

Milne has discussed the problem of hierarchy in developing societies, and found hierarchy to be "in some degree unavoidable and also as having certain positive values."³⁰ In spite of the various advantages derived from it, hierarchy leads to the building up of elitist volume. Milne suggested several steps to modify hierarchy including change in recruitment, training, pay scales, decentralization, and the use of "task forces or project schemes." He also advocated the creation of additional hierarchies to bring decision-making "nearer to the point of contact with the client." There is no guarantee that hierarchy or its undesired effects can be totally eliminated by such steps. One can only hope that the bureaucrats will gradually become less and less elitist. However, hierarchy and division of work are essential in any group activity, and must be retained in both developed and developing societies. They can be made compatible with development administration through modifications on the lines suggested by Milne.

Milne also considered the use of rules in bureaucracy in the developing societies. Strict pursuance of procedures often kill the prospect of efficiency as rules are applied without considering the context. One of the common criticisms of bureaucracy has been its inflexibility and failure to adapt to changing circumstances. It has been suggested that rules should be formulated in such a way as to retain provisions for alterations and modifications to suit the needs of individual cases. But such methods are certain to result in delays and complexities, and may encourage corruption. In developing societies, rules are used for promoting the self-interest of the bureaucrats and there is a big gap between what is intended and what is effected.³¹ So the focus of discussions should be on how rules are applied by bureaucrats in developing countries. As Milne pointed out, exceptions to rules are made, but they are made to suit the "expediency interests of officials or politicians" and not to meet "particular human situations."³² Formal rules are essential for executing administrative practices and ensuring impartiality, but overconformity at the cost of efficiency should be discouraged. From this point of view, rules are compatible with development administration. Caution must, however, be used to prevent structural breakdown resulting from inflexibility, corruption, and the dictates of personal relationships.

The notion of bureaucracy as a career has been accepted in practically all countries. In developing societies, career bureaucracies result in the formation of small coteries of public officials at or near the top level who are far removed from the people. They are almost completely separated from the rest of the society and become insensitive to its problems. The dominant position of bureaucracies in developing societies become perpetuated due to closed career bureaucratic systems. Thus, this feature is incompatible with development administration.

Although the definitions of bureaucracy do not emphasize the relations between bureaucracy and the political executives, the "Friedrich-Finer debate" has led to an increased awareness of the need for controlling bureaucracy. So far, societies have depended upon a balance between external sanctions and internal morale for bureaucracies to function responsibly. The strategy has not succeeded entirely in developing countries. While developed countries are blessed with mature political institutions and other checks on the arbitrary actions of the bureaucracy, this aspect is neglected in developing societies. Riggs revealed that bureaucracies in developing societies act in association with the other ruling elites. Rules are formulated and implemented in the interest of a select group, and the bureaucracy is free from any form of control. Along with the development of administrative capabilities, developing societies need more effective devices to retain control over the bureaucratic apparatus. Moreover, it may also be said that the functions of the political leaders will extend to attempts "to learn how to interact with the

massive and complex bureaucracy — how and when to press and coerce it, reshuffle it, terminate its redundant and obsolete parts, flatter and reward it, teach it, and be taught by it.”³³ Thus, bureaucracy will no longer adhere to mechanical repetition of “rituals” followed in the developed world, and shall be able to rise above its rigid, all-powerful, never-adaptable, stereotyped image prevalent in developing countries.

Definitions of bureaucracy have emphasized different aspects of administration. The features found in the west cannot be expected to be applicable to the developing countries in their entirety. Some of these are crucial to group activities and administration and are compatible with development administration. These include appointment procedures, methods of payment, promotion and retirement, hierarchical structures and a body of rules to guide proceedings. Some features including hierarchies, formal rules and career systems need modifications to suit the circumstances obtaining in developing societies. But the greatest need for development administration remain the strengthening of parallel political institutions and authorities for balancing the undesirable concentration of powers and functions in the bureaucracy and making it responsive.

Endnotes

¹C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law and Other Studies in Administration* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957). See Chapter 1.

²Marshall Dimock, “Bureaucracy Self-examined,” *Public Administration Review*, Vol. IV (1944), p. 198.

³E. Strauss, *The Ruling Servants* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961), p. 41.

⁴Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 187.

⁵Max Weber, “Bureaucracy,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 196-244..

⁶Peter Blau, *The Dynamics of Bureaucracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

⁷Blau, *Sociology in Social Work* (New York: Random House, 1956), p. 60.

⁸Peter Leonard, *Bureaucracy in Modern Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 81.

⁹Talcott Parsons, *Structure and Process in Modern Societies* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), p. 2.

¹⁰See Carl Friedrich and R. Taylor Cole, *Responsible Bureaucracy: A Study of the Swiss Civil Service* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1932).

- ¹¹Martin Albrow, *Bureaucracy* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1970), pp. 95-96.
- ¹²Bert Hoselitz, "Levels of Economic Performance and Bureaucratic Structures," in Joseph LaPalombara, ed., *Bureaucracy and Political Development* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 171.
- ¹³S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Political Systems of Empires* (Illinois: The Free Press, 1963), p. 157.
- ¹⁴J. Dorsey, "The Bureaucracy and Political Development in Vietnam," in Joseph LaPalombara, *op. cit.*, p. 322.
- ¹⁵Robert Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," In Robert Merton, Ailsa Gray, Barbara Hockey and Hanan Selvin, eds., *Reader in Bureaucracy* (New York: The Free Press, 1952), pp. 361-371.
- ¹⁶R.S. Milne, "Bureaucracy and Development Administration," Vol. 51 (1973), p. 411.
- ¹⁷John Montgomery, "A Royal Invitation: Variations on Three Classic Themes," in John Montgomery and William Siffin, eds., *Approaches to Development: Politics, Administration and Change* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 230.
- ¹⁸Harry Friedman, "Administrative Roles in Local Governments," in Edward Weidner, ed., *Development Administration in Asia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1970), p. 254.
- ¹⁹Inayatullah, "Local Administration in a Developing Country: The Pakistan Case," in Weidner, *ibid.*, p. 278.
- ²⁰Fred Riggs, "Bureaucracy and Development Administration," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. XXI, No. 2 (April 1977), p. 107.
- ²¹See Fred Riggs, ed., *Frontiers of Development Administration* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1971).
- ²²Riggs, "Administrative Development: An Elusive Concept," in Montgomery and Siffin, *op. cit.*, p. 230.
- ²³S.N. Eisenstadt, "Problems of Emerging Bureaucracies in Developing Areas and New States," in Nimrod Raphaeli, ed., *Readings in Comparative Administration* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1967), p. 237.
- ²⁴V.A. Pai Panandiker, "Development Administration: An Approach," in Raphaeli, *ibid.*, p. 201.
- ²⁵Friedrich, *Constitutional Government and Democracy*, rev. ed. (Boston: Ginn, 1950), pp. 25-27.
- ²⁶Riggs, "Bureaucrats and Political Development: A Paradoxical View," in LaPalombara, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
- ²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 122.
- ²⁸Riggs, "Bureaucracy and Development Administration," *op. cit.*, p. 118.

²⁹For a discussion of the methods and procedures by which decisions are made in developing countries, see Ahmed Shafiqul Huque, "On Decision-Making Models for Developed and Developing Countries," *Hong Kong Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 4 (June 1982), pp. 51-58.

³⁰Milne, "Bureaucracy and Development Administration," *op. cit.*, p. 415.

³¹Riggs, *Administration in Developing Countries: The Theory of Prismatic Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1964), pp. 15-19.

³²Milne, "Bureaucracy and Development Administration," *op. cit.*, pp. 420-421.

³³Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., "Government and Policy-Making," in Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell, Jr., eds., *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*. Third Ed. (Boston: Little, Brown Company, 1984), p. 112.