

AN ANALYSIS OF BARRIERS TO PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION IN NAMIBIA

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ABSTRACT

This study is about barriers to public sector innovation in Namibia. It is motivated by the fact that while the Government of the Republic of Namibia has adopted a wide range of public policies and programmes, and established institutions to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of its public sector, not much is known as to whether these measures are enhancing innovation in service delivery and public administration. There is a paucity of evidence-based analysis on public sector innovation in Namibia. The study fills the gap and aims to stimulate further academic inquiry into this area. Based on an online survey, face-to-face interviews, and focus group discussions at regional and national workshops, we identified and analysed barriers to public sector innovation in the country. The study recommends a strategic policy framework and whole-of-government institutional configuration to spur on innovation in public service delivery and administration. It suggests further research on the measurement of public sector innovation, and detailed analysis of specific barriers to innovation in public services.

Keywords: Namibia, Public sector, Public service, Innovation, Systemic barriers, Institutions, Service delivery, Policy process, Policy instruments, Policy mixes.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing awareness that for Namibia to become an industrialised inclusive economy and attain its global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, its government needs to make concerted efforts to improve public service delivery and promote innovations that address development challenges faced by citizens. The Government has articulated various measures in many national policy frameworks such as Vision 2030 and the fifth National Development Plan (NDP-5) and subscribed to international as well as African continental conventions on public sector innovation. These efforts are based on the recognition that realising Vision 2030 and the SDGs requires a capable public sector.

At least 50 percent of overall budget is allocated to the public sector, and public services represent 65 percent of total employment

in the country (Republic of Namibia, 2017). Demand on the sector to deliver public services is increasing rapidly in a country that is experiencing slow economic growth, high levels of poverty, rising youth unemployment, and increasing social exclusion. According to NDP5 (Republic of Namibia, 2017), Namibia has high levels of inequality and relatively low rates of poverty reduction. The country's consumption Gini index declined from 64.6 in 1993/94 to 57.6 in 2015 (Republic of Namibia, 2017). Unemployment, particularly among the youth, is increasing. In 2019, the Namibia Statistics Agency (NSA) estimated that unemployment among the youth was 33.4 percent (Republic of Namibia, 2019). Addressing unemployment and poverty are formidable challenges for Namibia. The COVID-19 pandemic has considerably weakened the economy and reduced the development budget. Thus, the sustainability of the public sector is increasingly threatened, and prospects of attaining Vision 2030 and the SDGs undermined.

Innovation is key to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector to develop and deliver services to citizens. Indeed, innovation enables the public sector to develop and deliver new quality services, with less budgetary and human resources. It is in recognition of this truism that the Government of the Republic of Namibia (GRN) has launched several programmatic initiatives to promote public sector innovation (PSI). National policy frameworks, such as those for health, public service and administration, education and vocational training, science and technology, and industrial development contain provisions for innovation. The GRN has also established programmes such as e-Government and

organisations such as the Namibia Institute for Public Administration and Management (NIPMA) to promote public sector innovation. Yet, the country's public sector innovation performance is relatively low. Not much is known about the effectiveness of existing policy initiatives and institutional arrangements for public sector innovation, and how to strengthen them. Indeed, there is a paucity of knowledge and information on ways and means of strengthening current initiatives for public sector innovation in Namibia.

This study is exploratory and aims to fill some of the knowledge gaps and inform policy makers of the barriers that should be lifted to spur innovation in Namibia's public sector.

The next section is an overview of Namibia's national policies and institutional arrangements for public sector innovation. Section three reviews literature so as to lay out a conceptual framework for analysing barriers to public sector innovation, while the fourth section describes our methodological approach. The fifth section presents empirical findings, and the last section suggests strategic recommendations for policy and areas for further academic research.

OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS

The public sector is part of the national economy that is controlled by the state. It is comprised of public service and enterprises administered by the state, particularly by government. Governments are expected to provide public services to citizens directly through public institutions or through financing the provision of such services. They have

constitutional obligations to provide public services such as policing and security, fire brigade, water and sanitation, and health to their citizens. Thus, governments establish policies and agencies for the delivery of public services.

Namibia's public sector is comprised of 23 ministries and 97 state-owned enterprises in a variety of sectors such as defence, security, education, health, infrastructure, telecommunications, energy, mining and agriculture. State-owned enterprises are public sector self-financing commercial entities that provide various private goods and services for sale. The country's public sector has expanded considerably over the past two decades due to growing demand for jobs. In 2000, the public sector accounted for 30 percent of the total workforce in the country. By 2018, the sector had 65 percent of the total jobs in the economy (Republic of Namibia, 2019).

Namibia's public sector spending is estimated to account for 15.5 percent of the country's GDP. Since the mid-2000s, the country's GDP has declined, from appropriately 5 percent in 2010 to less than 2 percent in 2018 (Republic of Namibia, 2019). The country is experiencing fiscal deficits that negatively impinge on public service delivery. Some of the key institutions for public service delivery have had their annual budgetary allocations reduced.

The GRN has adopted policy frameworks for the administration of the public sector and the provision of public services. They include the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (Republic of Namibia, 1990), the Public Service Act (1995), and the National Policy for Public Sector Innovation in Namibia

(2020). The Constitution of the Republic of Namibia (1990) has explicit provisions creating the public sector and obligations for the GRN to provide specific services to citizens. Chapters 3, 11 and 13 of the Constitution contain specific provisions on the public sector and public service. Chapter 3 creates fundamental rights of citizens. Such rights include the rights to health, education, property, security and water. The Constitution requires State organs such as Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary to institute and implement policy and legislative measures for the provision of services aimed at realising the fundamental rights.

Chapter 11 of the Constitution creates obligations and responsibilities for the GRN to promote and provide for the welfare of the people, and Chapter 13 provides for the establishment of the Public Service Commission as the mechanism for ensuring that the country has a competent and efficient public service. To implement Chapter 13, the Public Service Commission Act 2 of 1990 establishes the Public Service Commission (PSC). The PSC, *inter alia*, advises the President and the government on matters pertaining to staffing and programmes of the public service.

Since the establishment of the PSC in 1990, the GRN has launched a wide range of policies and programmes for various aspects of public service. A key policy framework for public service administration is the Public Service Act (Act 13 of 1995) that provides for the establishment and management of the public service, employment regulations, discipline, retirement and discharge of personnel of the public service. It forms the legal basis for the development of the Namibian Public Service Charter in 1995

as the government's ethos to guide public institutions in delivering services to citizens. Each ministry and agency of the GRN is required to develop and adopt a specific service charter guided by the Namibian Public Service Charter. An Efficiency Charter Unit in the Office of the Prime Minister monitors the implementation of the Namibia Public Service Charter in the ministries and government agencies.

In 2011, the Namibian Institute for Public Administration and Management (NIPAM) was established to enhance the capacity and quality of the country's public service through training. The NIPAM's mandate is to conduct training and research and to provide advisory services to improve public sector administration and management in the country. It has developed a programme for training officials from ministries and agencies in various aspects of public service delivery. However, the organisation faces budgetary and human resource constraints that make it difficult to fulfil its remit.

The 2020-2030 National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (NSTIP) aims at improving the policy environment for research and innovation in both public and private sectors. The Policy explicitly recognises the importance of innovation in and by the public sector. Its mission is "[t]o entrench the application of science, technology, and innovation in all sectors of the Namibian economy to achieve the goals of Vision 2030" (Republic of Namibia, 2021:6). The Policy recognises that currently, the public sector is the dominant player in research and innovation activities. However, the country's investments in research and innovation in the public sector are very limited.

According to African Innovation Outlook 2019, Namibia's total annual gross expenditure on research is less than 0.5 percent of the GDP (African Union, 2019).

The Decentralisation Policy for Namibia (Republic of Namibia, 1997) and the Decentralisation Enabling Act 33 of 2000 (Republic of Namibia, 2001) aim at ensuring that citizens in regions and local rural parts of the country participate in decision making and that the GRN reaches out and delivers public services to them. The main objective of the Decentralisation Policy (approved by the National Assembly in 1997 and officially launched in March 1998) is to improve the capacities of regional and local government councils to deliver public services to their constituents. It also aims at enabling citizens to participate in development planning and to hold their elected leaders accountable for service delivery.

The e-Government Strategic Action Plan of the Public Service of Namibia 2014-2018, (Republic of Namibia, 2014) is a policy framework for promoting the introduction and use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in government to induce customer-centric governance. Its specific objectives are to reduce any potential redundancies in the public service, exploit economies of scale and reduce costs in public service delivery, and engage citizens in service delivery and public administration.

The Public Procurement Act 15 of 2015 (Republic of Namibia, 2015) is another policy framework that can be deployed to promote public sector innovation in the country. It aims at promoting the "integrity, accountability, transparency, competitive

supply, effectiveness, efficiency, fair-dealing, responsiveness, informed decision making, consistency, legality and integration in the procurement of assets, works and services" (Republic of Namibia, 2015:6). Some of its provisions can be invoked to spur public sector innovation. For example, Article 2(a)(i) of the Act concerns innovation in public procurement policies and practices, an important aspect of public sector innovation focused on policy innovation. It requires relevant agencies to "harmonise procurement policies, systems and practices that apply to public entities and maximise economy and efficiency in public procurement to obtain best value for public expenditures" (Republic of Namibia, 2015:7). Under Article 7(1)(b-c), the Act requires the Procurement Policy Unit to establish e-procurement guidelines and policies that will enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the procurement of goods and services.

The GRN is the largest buyer of goods and services in Namibia. It can stimulate demand-driven public sector innovation. However, as discussed later in this study, the GRN has not been strategic and configured to engage in and/or support public sector innovation. The GRN has tended to use public regular procurement that focuses on existing or "off-the-shelf" products. Public regular procurement is when "the procuring agency or unit describes the same product as in previous procurements in a routine manner, by means of product procurement" (Borras & Edquist, 2019:109). Such procurement does not stimulate innovation.

Explicit policies to promote public sector innovation are also outlined in Namibia's National Health Policy Framework (Republic

of Namibia, 2010a). The policy framework places emphasis on two forms of public sector innovation, service innovation and organisational innovation. It promotes the decentralisation of health services to regional directorates of the Ministry of Health and Social Services, and contains policy measures for promoting innovation in the delivery of public health services. Such measures include the following:

- The public sector cannot currently adequately respond to the needs for certain referral level specialised services and the MoHSS is cognisant of the accelerated development of new and advanced medical technology. New services and technology will be gradually introduced according to feasibility and without sacrificing a balanced response to priority health problems in the country using the public-private partnership model (Republic of Namibia, 2010a:20).
- Promoting innovation in service organisations and management by being attentive to new initiatives in the public as well as in the private sector. The health system needs renewal to continue to be relevant for the providers and clients alike. (Republic of Namibia, 2010a:21).

The National Human Resources Plan 2010-2025 is another key policy framework for public sector innovation in Namibia (Republic of Namibia, 2012). Its objectives include, *inter alia*, building national capacity for public administration and economic development in general. The plan identifies critical skills that the country needs to make the transition to an industrialised economy by 2030. The country's public sector has

shortages of skills in key fields such as science, technology, engineering, medicine and health services, services in tourism, and public administration. It outlines measures that the GRN will take to address the challenges of building critical skills in the public sector.

In addition to its national policies, Namibia subscribes to the African Union (AU) 'African Charter on Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration' (African Union, 2011). The charter aims at promoting a culture of transparency, efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector in African countries. Specific provisions that focus on public sector innovation are:

- Article 9(2) "Public Service Agents shall demonstrate excellence and innovation in the performance of duties."
- Article 25(1) "State Parties shall institutionalise a transparent and impartial system for recognising outstanding performance, creativity and innovation in Public Service and Administration."
- Article 25(3) "The Commission shall promote innovative experiences and institute a system of awards for innovation in Public Service and Administration."

In 2020, the GRN adopted the Public Sector Innovation Policy. The vision of the Public Sector Innovation Policy is "an innovative public sector that efficiently and effectively delivers social and economic services to build an inclusive, industrialised and sustainable nation" (Republic of Namibia, 2020:12). Its overall objective is "to stimulate, promote and nurture creativity and innovation in

the public sector in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery" (Republic of Namibia, 2020:12). It has five priority areas. These are: (a) enhancing the capacity of public institutions and officials to innovate, (b) prospecting and incubating innovations in the public sector, (c) promotion of knowledge management and research on public sector innovation, (d) establishing awards for and a national summit on innovation in the public sector, and (e) nurturing a culture of innovation within the public sector.

The development of an explicit policy to promote public sector innovation was informed by the view that the existing national policy frameworks are general and inadequate, and that there are major efficiency and effectiveness deficits in the country's public service. National surveys and situational analysis conducted by the Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Namibia show that the government needs an explicit policy and institutional arrangements to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector and service delivery. Because the policy is relatively new, it is not possible for this study to assess its effectiveness or impact. However, it is important to note that the extent to which it will be successful in spurring innovation in the public sector in the country depends on whether its implementation will focus on and remove various barriers to innovation.

The rest of this study identifies barriers to public sector innovation in the country. It aims at informing the GRN's efforts at implementing the 2020 Public Sector Innovation Policy. It is premised on the view that understanding of barriers to public

sector innovation may enable the GRN and various actors to target resources to those initiatives that will unlock the barriers and help to attain the policies' visions and objectives. Indeed, providing policy makers with empirical information on the barriers may enable them to manage public sector innovation activities in a more proactive manner.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Definition of Public Sector Innovation

In this section, we define key concepts, discuss characteristics of public sector innovation, and then develop a typology of barriers to public sector innovation. This lays our conceptual framework for the empirical research and analysis in the rest of the study.

Let us start with definitions of innovation and public sector innovation. Innovation is a commonly used and sometimes abused concept. It is widely used in political, policy, corporate, academic and civic spheres. As Borrás and Edquist (2019:18) have remarked that "there has been an 'inflation' in the use of the innovation concept. Innovation has become a buzz word on the lips of scholars from various disciplines, policy makers, consultants, etc. This tremendous attention has produced a large variation of understandings and meanings of innovation." Very often, innovation is equated to technology, and to scientific research. Sometimes the concept is used interchangeably with entrepreneurship. This confusion tends to mislead public policy and even academic inquiry into the nature and sources of innovation.

Studies such as Rogers (2003) and Borrás and Edquist (2019) provide clarity on what

constitutes innovation. Rogers (2003:12) defines innovation as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption". Some authors (e.g. Borins, 2000), based on Rogers, have defined innovation as the adoption of an existing idea for the first time by a given organisation or entity. Innovation can also be about "new creations of economic or societal importance", generated by private firms and public organisations (Borrás & Edquist, 2019:16). Innovation can be radical or incremental. Radical innovation is about the introduction of a *significantly* new product, process, practice or service while incremental innovation is about minor changes or adjustments to an existing product, process or service. Innovations can be technological (e.g. new or modified projects or processes) or organisational (e.g. new routines or practices).

Having defined innovation, it is appropriate then to explore what public sector innovation (PSI) is all about. The concept of PSI (or innovation in the public sector) is relatively new and there is a paucity of academic literature on it, but it is attracting increasing attention in both academic and policy circles. It is conceptualised differently by different organisations and scholars. Most of the academic literature that defines PSI is in the field of public administration and management. Other fields have tended to focus on private sector-based innovation activities and innovation policies that spur innovation in firms.

Gow (2014) provides a succinct analysis of the origins of studies on PSI, tracing them to Rogers (2003). Drawing on Rogers (2003), Potts and Kastle (2010:124) conceptualise PSI as the introduction and implementation

of innovative public administration that is "tasked with the coordination and delivery of policy mandates, a significant proportion of which are legacy policies". They examine two prevailing conceptual models of PSI: "How to make the public sector to be more like the free market (private sector) innovation machine" and how "the solution lies in identifying and imitating best practice" from the private sector and they conclude with the argument that these models are flawed and simplistic. They suggest that a "better model for public sector innovation may be the scientific experimental method. The challenge should be seen to be the discovery of what mechanisms actually work in achieving innovation goals in the public sector ..." (Potts & Kastle, 2010:122).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012:181) defines PSI as "significant improvements to public administration and/or services" and "the implementation by public-sector organization of new or significantly improved operations or products". The OECD's conceptualisation puts emphasis on improvements in service delivery by governments.

The European Commission (EC) is another influential actor in the conceptualisation and institutionalisation of PSI. The European Commission (2012:32) conceptualises PSI as the generation and implementation of new ideas that manifest in new processes, products, services and methods of delivery in order to improve efficiency, effectiveness or the quality of public services. The EC study (2012:32) focuses on three forms of PSI: (a) innovation in policy, (b) innovation in service provision, and (c) organisational innovation. Innovation in policy is about the introduction

and implementation of "new" practices and processes in the design, monitoring, evaluation and execution of public policies. Innovation in service provision is about the development and provision of new services as well as the introduction of new methods or ways of delivery of services to the public, while organisational innovations involve the introduction of new routines or business models in the operations of organisations.

In Africa, the concept of PSI has yet to gain currency in most countries and there are relatively few African academic studies on PSI. According to Cinar, Trott and Simms (2019), less than 15 percent of studies on PSI focus on or were conducted in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Quick searches on google scholar show that South African institutions and researchers lead in the field of PSI in Africa. The country has the Centre for Public Sector Innovation (CPSI) and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) that have published on PSI. The CPSI defines PSI as "the creation and implementation of new and service delivery solutions (systems, processes, methods, models, products and services) resulting in significant improvements in outcomes, efficiency, effectiveness and quality" (Centre for Public Sector Innovation, 2016:7).

From the above review, PSI involves five forms of innovation:

- Policy innovation (developing and adopting policy measures that support innovative services and modes of service delivery).
- Service innovation (equipping public agencies with technologies that support or promote improved delivery of services

and/or the introduction of a new service or improvements of an existing service).

- Organisational innovation (changes in the organisational structures, practices and routines).
- Systemic innovation (new and/or improved ways of interacting with other organisations).

Overall, there is a convergence of conceptual approaches to PSI. Drawing on the various definitions, we conceptualise PSI as the introduction and implementation of "new" practices, processes and products for improving the delivery of services and public administration mainly by public sector agencies.

Why Public Sector Innovation Matters

Having defined PSI, let us now discuss why countries should invest in it. There are at least three reasons as to why PSI matters and requires significant attention from governments. The first reason emphasised by most studies pertains to growing fiscal deficits and increasing demand on the public sector to improve efficiencies in service delivery. For example, the European Commission (2012), World Bank (2018) and Cinar, Trott and Simms (2021) argue that PSI is critical to enable countries to address challenges of fiscal pressures. Innovation can help governments to reduce development costs by generating new and cheaper services, and increase efficiencies in service delivery, thus doing more with fewer resources.

The second reason is that PSI is critical to address complex public problems such as climate change, health epidemics, food

insecurity and malnutrition, and water and energy insecurities. Innovation in public policy, financing, procurement, logistics and service delivery can help to address many of the problems faced by citizens. Many of these public problems do not attract private sector investments and so require public sector interventions, including creating policy incentives for private sector innovation. Bloch and Bugge (2013), Cinar, Trott and Simms (2021), Stivers (2022) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020) enumerate the role of PSI in addressing social and economic challenges. For example, Stivers (2022) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020) focus on the role of PSI in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic. Stivers (2022) examines the nature and role of the public service in addressing the pandemic in the United States of America (USA), while the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020) focus is on innovation in international development and humanitarian response to the pandemic. Both show that an agile public sector is key to innovating for resilience.

The third reason as to why PSI matters is related to the growing demand for good governance. Governments are under increasing pressure to reform and increase public participation, transparency and accountability in policy making. Open and participatory policy formulation, including citizen participation in budgeting and monitoring and the evaluation of public services are increasingly being embedded in national constitutions. Innovation in public policy is, thus, demanded from governments. There is a relatively rich body of literature on innovation in public policy and why it is a core facet of

PSI. Christiansen and Bunt (2012) provide a succinct analysis of the importance of innovation in policy in addressing global challenges. They argue: "[t]oday's global financial and social crises demand innovation not only in the public services, but within the whole bureaucratic, administrative system of public governance... [T]o respond effectively to a changing context of complexity and uncertainty, governments and other public service organisations need to consider innovating the processes and practices of public policy itself" (Christiansen & Bunt, 2012:3).

The main drivers of PSI can be categorised as political, internal and external. Political drivers include factors such as recognition that a government or a political party gains from improving the performance of the public sector, and votes can be gained by being seen to be performing and delivering services efficiently. Budgetary reductions induced by legislative bodies such as national assemblies can be political triggers for PSI. Agolla and Lill (2013) explore political drivers of PSI. They argue that "[s]trategic change in the public sector frequently require[s] a strong, top down enforcement of political will coupled with the political recognition that change requires the allocation of substantive resources" (Agolla & Lill, 2013:170). Political institutions such as parliaments can influence PSI by controlling budgetary allocations to public sector organisations. For example, parliaments can deny non-performing public agencies funds and direct such funds to innovation activities in better performing agencies. In this way, political actors can use funding to leverage PSI.

Internal drivers of PSI arise within public organisations. They include leadership and

good management that can stimulate innovation by, for example, creating incentives for the organisations' personnel to be innovative. The incentives may include improved working environments, training schemes for public servants, awards for best performing personnel, and less bureaucracy in the operations of the organisations. Wiseman (2014) provides an empirically rich analysis of the role of executive leadership in spurring innovations in public service delivery in USA cities of New York and Chicago. The study identifies factors that influenced the effectiveness of 311 call centres in the two cities. It shows that the success of New York's 311 call centre was largely attributed to the city's mayor, Mayor Bloomberg. Wiseman (2014) notes:

The mayor announced just after taking office that he would create the 311 centre and promised to bring a customer-centric, data-driven approach to government. His passion for using business acumen to reinvent government cannot be understated. The mayor made it [a] priority and put the necessary attention and resources into the project. When difficult decisions had to be made to advance the project ... the DoITT team had the full force of the mayor when exhorting cooperation from the agencies. Without this very strong support, the project could easily have become mired indecision, stonewalling, and procrastination. (Wiseman, 2014:7)

The role of leadership as an internal driver of PSI is also articulated by Agolla and Van Lill (2013). They argue that "[o]rganizations that are innovative always go through radical change to improve their performance, and hence they tend to use strategic leadership to

achieve both innovative direction and innovation potential" (Agolla & Van Lill, 2013:168). Overall, leadership or its absence determines the direction and effectiveness of PSI.

External drivers of PSI relate to the external environment of public organisations. They include international good practice and rankings and national award schemes for best initiatives for PSI, existence and use of policy instruments that stimulate collaboration between public and private sectors to engage in joint initiatives for PSI, and citizens' lobbies that put pressure on public organisations to improve service delivery. Agolla and Van Lill (2013) and Bloch and Bugge (2013) provide good analyses of external drivers of PSI. They emphasise the importance of governments creating an enabling environment that stimulates investments in PSI.

The three drivers of PSI – political, internal and external interact in various ways. In general, the interacting drivers make processes of innovation in the public sector complex. According to Bouckaert (2011), the complexity is associated with the many stakeholders (politicians, citizens, private industry, civil servants, and in some cases donors/funders) in the public sector and their diverse, often shifting interests and demands. The complexity of PSI is also from or a manifestation of multiple and multi-faceted regimes of policies, regulations, legislations and institutional structures that form the public sector.

Overall, PSI occurs in dynamic political economy contexts. Many state and non-state actors interact in various ways, bringing differentiated capabilities and interests to

innovation activities in the public sector. Understanding the roles, capabilities and interests of actors is important for determining the direction (and outcomes) of PSI.

Barriers to PSI

Having defined PSI and outlined its characteristics, let us now provide an overview of barriers or impediments to innovation in the public sector. There is a rich corpus of academic literature on barriers to PSI. Cinar, Trott and Simms (2019) provide a systemic review of barriers to PSI. They identify four broad categories of barriers: organisational, interaction-specific, innovation characteristics-related, and contextual barriers. In each category, there are multiple barriers. Table 1 on the following page provides an overview of the different barriers identified by Cinar, Trott and Simms (2019).

Osborne and Brown (2011) argue that the framing of barriers to innovation in public service needs to be guided by a reconceptualisation of innovation. They challenge dominant conceptual framings that have their roots in industrial manufacturing and treat innovation as the competitiveness of firms. Extending such conceptualisation to PSI in general and innovation in public services tends to mislead public policy and programmes. They suggest that innovation should be conceptualised as a normative good. Osborne and Brown (2011:1339) assert: "[o]ne can argue that 'innovation' as a process is essential for the improvement of public services – but that is not the same as asserting any specific innovation must therefore be positive, simply because it is 'an innovation'."

TABLE 1: Overview of Barriers to PSI

Type of Barrier	Specific Examples of Barriers
Organisational	Top-down management thinking, lack of resources, inappropriate organisational structure and culture, lack of skilled personnel, staff resisting new initiatives due to workload, high staff turnover, inadequate support from end-users
Interaction specific	Lack of shared understanding between collaborators (government, private sector, civil society organisations and NGOs), lack of effective network governance (inadequate communication and knowledge sharing), lack of involvement of essential organisations, lack of trust between government agencies and citizens, and turf fights between government agencies
Innovation characteristics related	Perceived negative attributes of the innovation, incompatibility of the innovation (when an innovation is not consistent with existing values and needs of adopters), and complexity of the innovation
Contextual	Restrictive laws, regulations and policies (e.g. restrictive tendering/public procurement), lack of standardisation, undue political interference, poor/weak infrastructure (e.g. electricity and telecommunications) and weak public demand for improved service delivery and new services

Source: Based on Cinar, Trott and Simms (2019)

METHODOLOGY

Guided by the conceptual mapping of barriers to PSI in the last section, we designed and administered a questionnaire, conducted face-to-face interviews, held focus group discussions at regional and national workshops, and undertook international benchmarking missions to Singapore, South Africa, and Mauritius to identify good practices of PSI design and implementation.

The questionnaire, with a total of 27 questions, was aimed at gauging respondents' awareness of existing PSI policies and programmes, perceptions of the importance or influence of the different barriers, and opinions on interventions to overcome the barriers. The online questionnaire was emailed to 600 persons, mainly senior officials from government departments and local authorities, institutions

of higher learning, state-owned enterprises, selected representatives of private companies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) across the country in 2018. A total of 123 respondents (20.5 percent) completed the online questionnaire. The majority of the respondents (78.7 percent) are holders of university academic degrees and employed in various central and regional government departments. Respondents from government departments (81 percent) dominated the survey, followed by educational institutions (8 percent) and state-owned enterprises (7 percent). The remaining 4 percent comprised of respondents from several organisations including NGOs, private companies, youth organisations and church groups. Regarding the respondents' levels of operation in their respective institutions, 58.2 percent were in managerial, 29.5 percent in executive and 12.3 percent in junior positions.

The face-to-face interviews were conducted with four representatives of NIPMA, the National Commission on Research, Science and Technology (NCRST), the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), and the National Qualifications Agency (NQA). Interviewees were asked specific questions to identify major innovations generated in the public sector, who the key institutional actors are in PSI, how effective existing policy frameworks are, what the main five barriers to PSI are, and interventions to be instituted to overcome the barriers. Issues emerging from the interviews are analysed in Section 5 of this study.

To gather views and opinions from broad-based constituencies, four regional workshops were held in the country. About 125 participants from regional administrations, NGOs and businesses attended the workshops to engage in an open dialogue on factors influencing PSI. Focus group discussions at the workshops focused on the status of PSI, cases of good practice of PSI in Namibia, various barriers to PSI, and recommendations to promote PSI in the country.

To identify international policy lessons on PSI for Namibia, three members of the study visited Singapore and Mauritius, and one member of the team interviewed three officials from the South Africa Centre for Public Sector Innovation (CPSI) and two officials from Kenya's Public Service Commission. These countries' PSI efforts and challenges were identified. Emphasis was placed on how the different countries have unlocked various barriers to PSI and what lessons Namibia should draw from their efforts.

The next section presents survey results followed by issues emerging from face-to-face

interviews and regional workshops as well as core international policy lessons for Namibia.

FINDINGS

Synthesis of Survey Results

As stated above, 123 participants in the study completed the survey questionnaire. Most of the respondents were unaware of the meaning of PSI and what the GRN was doing to promote it. About 63 percent of the 123 respondents stated that they did not know what PSI is and were unaware of existing PSI national policies. Some respondents (37 percent) indicated that they were aware of overarching policy frameworks such as the NDP5, Harembee Prosperity Plan and ministerial plans or strategies that contain statements on innovation and PSI. However, a significant percentage of the respondents were aware of initiatives to promote innovation in their organisations. When asked whether their organisations encourage an innovation culture through specific initiatives, 52.8 percent of the respondents indicated that they are aware of such initiatives.

The second cluster of questions were on organisational category of barriers. Participants were asked to name three to five innovation barriers within public organisations. The most stated organisational barriers were bureaucratic top-down structures and thinking (87 percent), weak innovation culture (86.5 percent), weak intra-organisational coordination or departmental silos (82 percent), inadequate funding and infrastructure (78 percent), limited expertise or skills (73.4 percent), and weak or insufficient support from clients or citizens (53 percent).

The third cluster of questions focused on interaction-specific innovation barriers. Respondents were asked if in their opinion citizens were adequately engaged in setting priorities for PSI, public agencies were collaborating in innovation activities, there were adequate public-private partnerships in developing and delivering public services, and public agencies kept citizens informed of new services. The majority of respondents (93 percent) identified weak inter-institutional linkages within the public sector as one of the main barriers to PSI in general, and according to 86 percent, there was weak or inadequate public-private sector partnership. Some 55 percent of respondents attributed weak public-private sector collaborations to the public sector being risk averse, and not ready to take risks to invest in innovation activities. Interaction between public agencies and citizens is considered low by 80 percent of the respondents. Thirty-three percent of respondents noted that regional and municipalities authorities are not well equipped to engage citizens in PSI.

The fourth cluster of questions were on contextual barriers. Respondents were asked questions about the effectiveness of existing policy frameworks, adequacy of political conditions and leadership, and enabling overall national innovation culture and physical infrastructure. According to 71 percent of respondents, the existing policy frameworks are adequate, but their effectiveness is undermined by weak implementation. According to 83 percent, there was a need to have a new explicit PSI policy framework. As noted earlier, this study was conducted before the 2020 National Public Sector Innovation Policy was adopted.

Other questions on contextual innovation barriers focused on the effectiveness of e-government and e-governance programmes of the GRN, and whether PSI was adequately funded in the country. Most respondents (93 percent) were aware of government's initiatives to promote the application of ICTs to improve public service and administration. Many of them (72 percent) agreed that ICTs were used optimally in the public service, although most of those who said yes (58 percent) also indicated that ICTs are only used sometimes. Only 28 percent of the respondents indicated that ICTs were not being optimally utilised in the public sector.

When asked whether there was adequate dedicated public funding for PSI and if, in their views, relevant research and development (R&D) was being conducted in the country to support PSI, 82 percent of respondents stated that the country does not allocate adequate funding to R&D, and there are no national R&D programmes dedicated to the promotion of PSI.

The respondents were requested to suggest other system-wide factors or barriers that impinge on PSI in Namibia. A weak culture of innovation, particularly poor entrepreneurship mind-set in the public service, was noted to be an impediment to PSI. Many respondents (73.5 percent) observed that public sector organisations do not nurture creativity and innovation in service development and delivery. Some respondents (53 percent) attributed this to a lack of incentives and resources to support innovation. Others stated that many regulations require civil or public service officials to conform to certain values or norms that are inimical to innovation, and that public officials do not

have much institutional space to experiment with new ways of doing things and with new forms of services.

Synthesis of Interview and Workshop Findings

As stated in the methodology section, we interviewed purposefully selected representatives of key public institutions to provide more insight on some of the issues that emerged from the online survey. From the interviews, organisational barriers are the most pronounced impediments to PSI. According to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of one of the public agencies, "public sector organisations in Namibia are not created and supported to be creative and innovative, ... many of them are creations to serve administrative and political goals with no clear focused mandates of service delivery". The same official observed that the public agencies are not "organised to form an innovation ecosystem ... like in [the] private sector".

Three other interviewees emphasised various organisational barriers to PSI. One talked about intra-organisational rigidities and silos in public agencies where departments tend to be structured and operate as autonomous entities. One interviewee declared that there is "weak internal collaboration within public agencies' own departments". He attributed the weak intra-organisational collaboration to different departments in agencies competing for budgetary allocations and weak management capacity.

Another interviewee emphasised the importance of national and organisation leadership in promoting PSI. The interviewee noted

that while there is leadership for PSI from the OPM and the Presidency, it is lacking or insufficient in many public agencies in the country. Many of the leaders and top management of ministries, departments and other state agencies are not well versed in PSI and ways and means of promoting it. The interviewee recommended that PSI leadership capacity building to be established.

Another organisational barrier that the interviewees noted is a lack of adequate financial and human resources for innovation in public agencies. Many of the agencies do not have budgetary allocations for PSI due to fiscal deficits in the economy. Resource constraints were identified as a major organisational barrier by 78 percent of the respondents in the survey. To address this challenge, one interviewee suggested that a national fund for PSI should be established in the OPM to be endowed through levies from mining, tourism and fisheries.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) at the workshops were another invaluable source of empirical information on different barriers to PSI in Namibia. Participants in the FGDs were asked to list at least five main barriers to innovation and then rank them in order of importance. Many of these are in the organisational, contextual and interacting barriers categories. Organisational barriers listed included lack of skills or competencies, weak leadership, limited resources or funds, and weak incentives. The contextual barriers identified included weak implementation of policy and legislation, restrictive regulations and lack of an enabling environment (e.g. weak infrastructure/facilities). The main interacting barriers identified by the FGDs are weak network governance with emphasis

on poor communication between public sector agencies and citizens, and weak links within public agencies and between these agencies and the private sector.

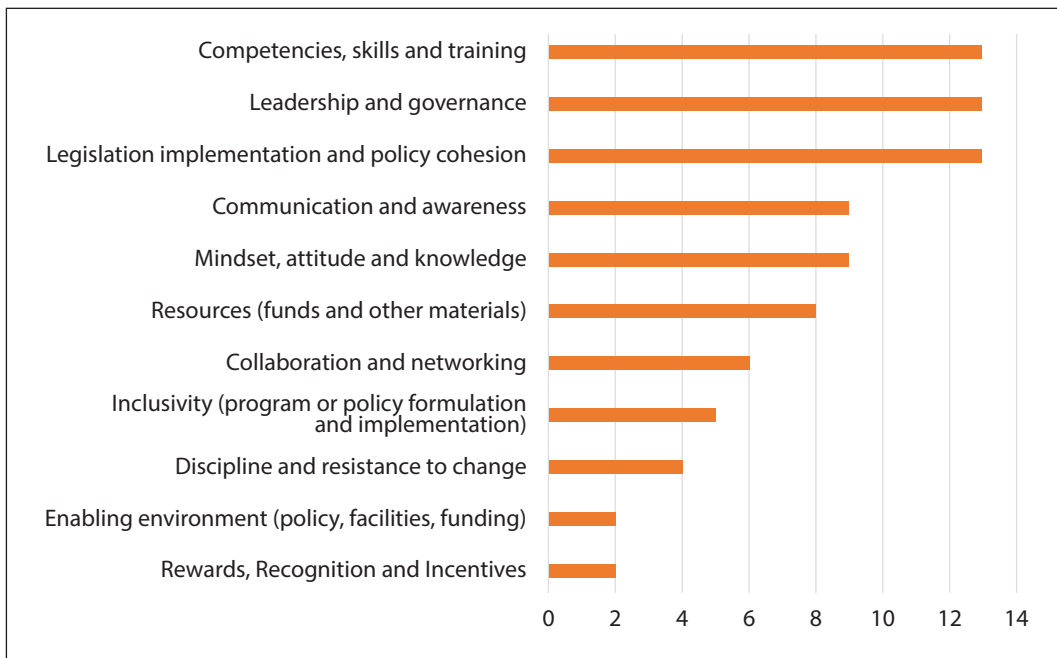
As shown in Figure 1 below, participants in the FGDs emphasised the need to strengthen leadership and governance within the public sector through reskilling of personnel to enable them to be more creative and innovative in policy, service and organisational development. Some participants in the FGDs noted that building a culture of innovation in the public sector should focus on changing mindsets and attitudes of public servants for them to embrace new ways of working and effectively engaging with citizens, with more focus on efficient service delivery.

Three Policy Lessons From International Practices

The international benchmarking missions and interviews in Singapore, South Africa, Kenya and Mauritius, as well as reviews of PSI published in Rwanda are used as sources of policy lessons for Namibia. Below is an overview of three lessons that Namibia can draw from these countries' PSI efforts.

- Political and executive leadership is critical to leveraging and coordinating national agencies to focus on PSI – Singapore, Mauritius and Rwanda have established relatively high-level offices to coordinate PSI. In these countries, PSI initiatives are coordinated in the offices of the prime

FIGURE 1: Opinions From FGDs on Strengthening PSI



Source: Authors

ministers and the presidencies, and there are inter-governmental forums to ensure there is effective exchange of knowledge on and experiences in PSI across public agencies. For example, in Rwanda, the prime minister's office established the Government Action Coordination Unit (GACU) that coordinates all agencies' PSI initiatives. In Singapore, the prime minister's office plays a similar role by chairing PSI meetings on a weekly basis. This helps to build synergies and remove any interacting and contextual barriers to innovation.

- Policy literacy among public servants and citizens is key to effective PSI policy – interviews and discussions from officials in Singapore, Mauritius, South Africa and Kenya show that the extent to which national policies for PSI are effective depends on the public's understanding and ownership of such policies. In Singapore, the design and implementation of PSI policies are participatory, largely bottom-up. This has led to many PSI initiatives being supported by citizens and politicians. The converse obtains in Kenya. Kenya's National Public Service Innovation Strategy and related initiatives such as Huduma programmes have been slow at promoting PSI because of weak public buy-in.
- Dedicated financing and incentive schemes are needed to spur and sustain PSI – experiences of Singapore and Mauritius show that successful PSI depends on the allocation and efficient utilisation of public financing and the creation of incentives for public servants to be innovative. These two countries have a variety of funding

mechanisms and incentive schemes for PSI, and have efficiently deployed these to stimulate innovation across the public sector. They have used funding to address some of the organisational, contextual and interacting barriers to PSI. The converse is true in the cases of Kenya and South Africa where there is uncertainty and discontinuity in funding of PSI. South Africa's CPSI has financial challenges related to declining budgetary allocations affecting its core programmes and the implementation of national policies such as the Public Service Act of 1994; the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service, 1995; the White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service Delivery, 1997; and the Public Service Regulations of 1999. Kenya's National Public Service Innovation Strategy is not being effectively implemented because of a lack of dedicated funds.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This exploratory study has identified factors that influence PSI in Namibia. Using mixed methods, the study identified organisational, contextual and interacting innovation barriers dominant in the country's public sector. The key recommendation of this study is that the GRN should use the 2020 National Public Sector Innovation Policy to design and implement programmatic interventions that help to remove the barriers. Some of the priority interventions include strengthening PSI leadership within the OPM, dedicating resources to the production and use of knowledge on PSI in universities, building a culture of innovation within public agencies through provision training and various incentives, and

strengthening network governance including public-private partnerships and greater engagement with citizens on PSI issues.

The experiences from Singapore, Mauritius, South Africa and Kenya also show that building public literacy and ownership of PSI policy is critical. In this regard, we recommend that the OPM of the GRN should invest in public awareness and socialisation of the 2020 Public Sector Innovation Policy to enhance public literacy and broad-based ownership. This will help lift various contextual barriers to PSI.

There are certainly more knowledge gaps that need to be filled to build a comprehensive

understanding of PSI in the country. Future research should focus on at least two areas or aspects. First, there is a need to conduct case studies on specific sectors and public organisations to build a better understanding of specific barriers. Case studies would illuminate different forms of innovation in the public sector and their specific determinants. Second, the measurement of PSI in Namibia is another area of research that requires attention. While there are some studies on public sector performance in general, there are no studies measurement of the country's PSI performance. Such studies would help Namibia to benchmark its performance against other countries and offer insights into how to accelerate PSI.

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